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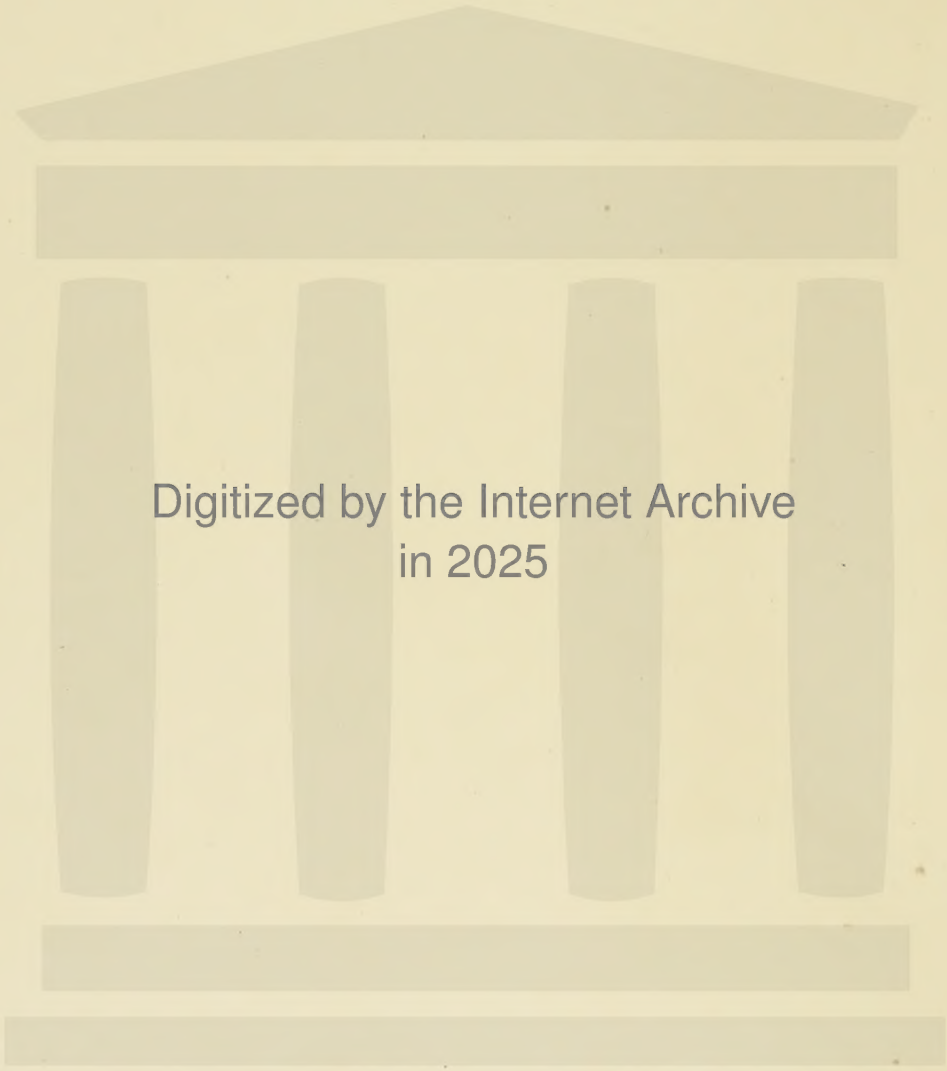

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THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

"Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!"—1 Chronicles iv. 10.

WE know very little about Jabez, except that he was more honourable than his brethren, and that he was called Jabez because his mother bare him with sorrow. It will sometimes happen that where there is the most sorrow in the antecedents, there will be the most pleasure in the sequel. As the furious storm gives place to the clear sunshine, so the night of weeping precedes the morning of joy. Sorrow the harbinger; gladness the prince it ushers in. Cowper says:—

> "The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown."

To a great extent we find that we must sow in tears before we can reap in joy. Many of our works for Christ have cost us tears. Difficulties and disappointments have wrung our soul with anguish. Yet those projects that have cost us more than ordinary sorrow, have often turned out to be the most honourable of our undertakings. While our grief called the offspring of desire "Benoni," the son of my sorrow, our faith has been afterwards able to give it a name of delight, "Benjamin," the son of my right hand. You may expect a blessing in serving God if you are enabled to persevere under many discouragements. The ship is often long coming home, because detained on the road by excess of cargo. Expect her freight to be the better when she reaches the port. More honourable than his brethren was the child whom his mother bore with sorrow. As for this Jabez, whose aim was so well pointed, his fame so far sounded, his name so lastingly embalmed—he was a man of prayer. The honour he enjoyed would not have been worth having if it had not been vigorously contested and equitably won. His devotion was the key to his promotion. Those are the best honours that come from God, the award of grace with the acknowledgment of service. When Jacob was surnamed Israel, he received his princedom after a memorable night of prayer. Surely it was far more honourable to him than if it had been bestowed upon him as a flattering distinction by some earthly emperor. The best honour is that which a man gains in communion with the Most High. Jabez, we are told, was more honourable than his brethren, and his prayer is forthwith recorded, as if to intimate that he was also more prayerful than his brethren. We are told of what petitions his prayer consisted. All through it was very significant and instructive. We have only time to take one clause of it—indeed, that one clause may be said to comprehend the rest: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" I commend it as a prayer for yourselves, dear brethren and sisters; one which will be available at all seasons; a prayer to begin Christian life with, a prayer to end it with, a prayer which would never be unseasonable in your joys or in your sorrows.

Oh that Thou, the God of Israel, the covenant God, would bless me indeed! The very pith of the prayer seems to lie in that word, "indeed." There are many varieties of blessing. Some are blessings only in name: they gratify our wishes for a moment, but permanently disappoint our expectations. They charm the eye, but pall on the taste. Others are mere temporary blessings: they perish with the using. Though for awhile they regale the senses, they cannot satisfy the higher cravings of the soul. But, "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed!" I wot whom God blesseth shall be blessed. The thing good in itself is bestowed with the good-will of the Giver, and shall be productive of so much good fortune to the recipient that it may well be esteemed as a blessing "indeed," for there is nothing comparable to it. Let the grace of God prompt it, let the choice of God appoint it, let the bounty of God confer it, and then the endowment shall be something godlike indeed; something worthy of the lips that pronounce the benediction, and verily to be craved by every one who seeks honour that is substantial and enduring. "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed!" Think it over, and you will see that there is a depth of meaning in the expression.

We may set this in contrast with human blessings: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" It is very delightful to be blessed by our parents, and those venerable friends whose benedictions come from their hearts, and are backed up by their prayers. Many a poor man has had no other legacy to leave his children except his blessing, but the blessing of an honest, holy, Christian father is a rich treasure to his son. One might well feel it were a thing to be deplored through life if we had lost a parent's blessing. We like to have it. The blessing of our spiritual parents is consolatory. Though we believe in no priestcraft, we like to live in the affections of those who were the means of bringing us to Christ, and from whose lips we were instructed in the things of God. And how very precious is the blessing of the poor! I do not wonder that Job treasured that up as a sweet thing. "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me." If you have relieved the widow and the fatherless, and their thanks are returned to you in benediction, it is no mean reward. But, dear friends, after all—all that parents, relatives, saints, and grateful persons can do in the way of blessing, falls very far short of what we desire to have. O Lord, we would have the blessings of our fellow-creatures, the blessings that come from their hearts; but, "Oh that *Thou* wouldest bless me indeed!" for Thou canst bless with authority. Their blessings may be but words, but Thine are effectual. They may often wish what they cannot do, and desire to give what they have not at their own disposal, but Thy will is omnipotent. Thou didst create the world with but a word. Oh that such omnipotence would now bespeak me Thy blessing! Other blessings may bring us some tiny cheer, but in Thy favour is life. Other blessings are mere tittles in comparison with Thy blessing; for Thy blessing is the title "to an inheritance incorruptible" and unfading, to "a kingdom which cannot be moved." Well therefore might David pray in another place, "With Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever." Perhaps in this place, Jabez may have put the blessing of God in contrast with the blessings of men. Men will bless thee when thou doest well for

thyself. They will praise the man who is successful in business. Nothing succeeds like success. Nothing has so much the approval of the general public as a man's prosperity. Alas! they do not weigh men's actions in the balances of the sanctuary, but in quite other scales. You will find those about you who will commend you if you are prosperous; or like Job's comforters, condemn you if you suffer adversity. Perhaps there may be some feature about their blessings that may please you, because you feel you deserve them. They commend you for your patriotism: you have been a patriot. They commend you for your generosity: you know you have been self-sacrificing. Well, but after all, what is there in the verdict of man? At a trial, the verdict of the policeman who stands in the court, or of the spectators who sit in the court-house, amounts to just nothing. The man who is being tried feels that the only thing that is of importance at all will be the verdict of the jury, and the sentence of the judge. So it will little avail us whatever we may do, how others commend or censure. Their blessings are not of any great value. But, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me," that Thou wouldest say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Commend Thou the feeble service that through Thy grace my heart has rendered. That will be to bless me indeed.

Men are sometimes blessed in a very fulsome sense by flattery. There are always those who, like the fox in the fable, hope to gain the cheese by praising the crow. They never saw such plumage, and no voice could be so sweet as yours. The whole of their mind is set, not on you, but on what they are to gain by you. The race of flatterers is never extinct, though the flattered usually flatter themselves it is so. They may conceive that men flatter others, but all is so palpable and transparent when heaped upon themselves, that they accept it with a great deal of self-complacency, as being perhaps a little exaggerated, but after all exceedingly near the truth. We are not very apt to take a large discount off the praises that others offer us; yet, were we wise, we should press to our bosom those who censure us; and we should always keep at arm's length those who praise us, for those who censure us to our face cannot possibly be making a market of us; but with regard to those who extol us, rising early, and using loud sentences of praise, we may suspect, and we shall very seldom be unjust in the suspicion, that there is some other motive in the praise which they render to us than that which appears on the surface. Young man, art thou placed in a position where God honours thee? Beware of flatterers. Or hast thou come into a large estate? Hast thou abundance? There are always flies where there is honey. Beware of flattery. Young woman, art thou fair to look upon? There will be those about thee that will have their designs, perhaps their evil designs, in lauding thy beauty. Beware of flatterers. Turn thou aside from all these who have honey on their tongue, because of the poison of asps that is under it. Bethink thee of Solomon's caution, "Meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips." Cry to God, "Deliver Thou me from all this vain adulation, which nauseates my soul." So shalt thou pray to Him the more fervently, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" Let me have Thy benediction, which never says more than it means; which never gives less than it promises. If you take then the prayer of Jabez as being put in contrast with the benedictions which come from men, you see much force in it.

But we may put it in another light, and compare the blessing Jabez craved with those blessings that are temporal and transient. There are many bounties given to us mercifully by God for which we are bound to be very grateful; but we must not set too much store by them. We may accept them with gratitude, but we must not make them our idols. When we have them we have great need to cry, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and make these inferior blessings real blessings"; and if we have them not, we should with greater vehemence cry, "Oh that we may be rich in faith, and if not blessed with these external favours, may we be blessed spiritually, and then we shall be blessed indeed."

Let us review some of these mercies, and just say a word or two about them.

One of the first cravings of men's hearts is wealth. So universal the desire to gain it, that we might almost say it is a natural instinct. How many have thought if they once possessed it they should be blessed indeed! but there are ten thousand proofs that happiness consists not in the abundance which a man possesseth. So many instances are well known to you all, that I need not quote any to show that riches are not a blessing indeed. They are rather apparently than really so. Hence, it has been well said, that when we see how much a man has we envy him; but could we see how little he enjoys we should pity him. Some that have had the most easy circumstances have had the most uneasy minds. Those who have acquired all they could wish, had their wishes been at all sane, have been led by the possession of what they had to be discontented because they had not more.

> "Thus the base miser starves amidst his store,
> Broods o'er his gold, and griping still at more,
> Sits sadly pining, and believes he's poor."

Nothing is more clear to any one who chooses to observe it, than that riches are not the chief good at whose advent sorrow flies, and in whose presence joy perennial springs. Full often wealth cozens the owner. Dainties are spread on his table, but his appetite fails; minstrels wait his bidding, but his ears are deaf to all the strains of music; holidays he may have as many as he pleases, but for him recreation has lost all its charms: or he is young, fortune has come to him by inheritance, and he makes pleasure his pursuit till sport becomes more irksome than work, and dissipation worse than drudgery. Ye know how riches make themselves wings; like the bird that roosted on the tree, they fly away. In sickness and despondency these ample means that once seemed to whisper, "Soul, take thine ease," prove themselves to be poor comforters. In death they even tend to make the pang of separation more acute, because there is the more to leave, the more to lose. We may well say, if we have wealth, "My God, put me not off with these husks; let me never make a god of the silver and the gold, the goods and the chattels, the estates and investments, which in Thy providence Thou hast given me. I beseech Thee, bless me indeed. As for these worldly possessions, they will be my bane unless I have Thy grace with them." And if you have not wealth, and perhaps the most of you will never have it, say, "My Father, Thou hast denied me this outward and seeming good,

enrich me with Thy love, give me the gold of Thy favour, bless me indeed ; then allot to others whatever Thou wilt, Thou shalt divide my portion, my soul shall wait Thy daily will ; do Thou bless me indeed, and I shall be content."

Another transient blessing which our poor humanity fondly covets and eagerly pursues is fame. In this respect we would fain be more honourable than our brethren, and outstrip all our competitors. It seems natural to us all to wish to make a name, and gain some note in the circle we move in at any rate, and we wish to make that circle wider if we can. But here, as of riches, it is indisputable that the greatest fame does not bring with it any equal measure of gratification. Men, in seeking after notoriety or honour, have a degree of pleasure in the search which they do not always possess when they have gained their object. Some of the most famous men have also been the most wretched of the human race. If thou hast honour and fame, accept it ; but let this prayer go up, " My God, bless Thou me indeed, for what profit were it, if my name were in a thousand mouths, if Thou shouldest spue it out of Thy mouth ? What matter, though my name were written on marble, if it were not written in the Lamb's Book of Life ? These blessings are only apparently blessings, windy blessings, blessings that mock me. Give me Thy blessing : then the honour which comes of Thee will make me blessed indeed." If you happen to have lived in obscurity, and have never entered the lists for honours among your fellow-men, be content to run well your own course and fulfil truly your own vocation. To lack fame is not the most grievous of ills ; it is worse to have it like the snow, that whitens the ground in the morning, and disappears in the heat of the day. What matter it to a dead man that men are talking of him ? Get thou the blessing indeed.

There is another temporal blessing which wise men desire, and legitimately may wish for rather than the other two—*the blessing of health.* Can we ever prize it sufficiently ? To trifle with such a boon is the madness of folly. The highest eulogiums that can be passed on health would not be extravagant. He that has a healthy body is infinitely more blessed than he who is sickly, whatever his estates may be. Yet if I have health, my bones well set, and my muscles well strung, if I scarcely know an ache or pain, but can rise in the morning, and with elastic step go forth to labour, and cast myself upon my couch at night, and sleep the sleep of the happy, yet, oh let me not glory in my strength ! In a moment it may fail me. A few short weeks may reduce the strong man to a skeleton. Consumption may set in, the cheek may pale with the shadow of death. Let not the strong man glory in his strength. The Lord " delighteth not in the strength of the horse : He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man." And let us not make our boast concerning these things. Say, thou that are in good health, " My God, bless me indeed. Give me the healthy soul. Heal me of my spiritual diseases. Jehovah Rophi come, and purge out the leprosy that is in my heart by nature : make me healthy in the heavenly sense, that I may not be put aside among the unclean, but allowed to stand amongst the congregation of Thy saints. Bless my bodily health to me that I may use it rightly, spending the strength I have in Thy service and to Thy glory ; otherwise, though blessed with health, I may not be blessed indeed." Some of you, dear friends, do not possess the great treasure of health. Wearisome days and nights are appointed you. Your bones are become an almanac, in which you note the changes of the weather. There is much about you that is fitted to excite pity. But I pray that you may have the blessing indeed, and I know what that is. I can heartily sympathise with a sister that said to me the other day, " I had such nearness to God when I was sick, such full assurance, and such joy in the Lord, and I regret to say I have lost it now ; that I could almost wish to be ill again, if thereby I might have a renewal of communion with God." I have oftentimes looked gratefully back to my sick chamber. I am certain that I never did grow in grace one half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain. It ought not to be so. Our joyous mercies ought to be great fertilizers to our spirit ; but not unfrequently our griefs are more salutary than our joys. The pruning knife is best for some of us. Well, after all, whatever you have to suffer, of weakness, of debility, of pain, and anguish, may it be so attended with the divine Presence, that this light affliction may work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and so you may be blessed indeed.

I will only dwell upon one more temporal mercy, which is very precious—I mean *the blessing of home.* I do not think any one can ever prize it too highly, or speak too well of it. What a blessing it is to have the fireside, and the dear relationships that gather round the word " Home," wife, children, father, brother, sister ! Why, there are no songs in any language that are more full of music than those dedicated to " Mother." We hear a great deal about the German " Fatherland "—we like the sound. But the word, " Father," is the whole of it. The " land " is nothing : the " Father " is key to the music. There are many of us, I hope, blessed with a great many of these relationships. Do not let us be content to solace our souls with ties that must ere long be sundered. Let us ask that over and above them may come the blessing indeed. I thank Thee, my God, for my earthly father ; but oh, be Thou my Father, then am I blessed indeed. I thank Thee, my God, for a mother's love ; but comfort Thou my soul as one whom a mother comforteth, then am I blessed indeed. I thank Thee, Saviour, for the marriage bond ; but be Thou the bridegroom of my soul. I thank Thee for the tie of brotherhood ; but be Thou my brother born for adversity, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. The home Thou hast given me I prize, and thank Thee for it ; but I would dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, and be a child that never wanders, wherever my feet may travel, from my Father's house with its many mansions. You can thus be blessed indeed. If not domiciled under the paternal care of the Almighty, even the blessing of home, with all its sweet familiar comforts, does not reach to the benediction which Jabez desired for himself. But do I speak to any here that are separated from kith and kin ? I know some of you have left behind you in the bivouac of life graves where parts of your heart are buried, and that which remains is bleeding with just so many wounds. Ah, well ! the Lord bless you indeed ! Widow, thy Maker is thy husband. Fatherless one, He hath said, " I will not leave you comfortless : I will come to you." Oh, to find all your relationships made up in Him, then you will be blessed indeed ! I have perhaps taken too long a time in mentioning these temporary blessings, so let me set the text

in another light. I trust we have had human blessings and temporary blessings, to fill our hearts with gladness, but not to foul our hearts with worldliness, or to distract our attention from the things that belong to our everlasting welfare.

Let us proceed, thirdly, to speak of *imaginary blessings*. There are such in the world. From them may God deliver us. "Oh, that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" Take the Pharisee. He stood in the Lord's house, and he thought he had the Lord's blessing, and it made him very bold, and he spoke with unctuous self-complacency, "God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are," and so on. He had the blessing, and well indeed he supposed himself to have merited it. He had fasted twice in the week, paid tithes of all that he possessed, even to the odd farthing on the mint, and the extra halfpenny on the cummin he had used. He felt he had done everything. His the blessing of a quiet or a quiescent conscience; good, easy man. He was a pattern to the parish. It was a pity everybody did not live as he did; if they had, they would not have wanted any police. Pilate might have dismissed his guards, and Herod his soldiers. He was just one of the most excellent persons that ever breathed. He adored the city of which he was a burgess! Aye; but he was not blessed indeed. This was all his own overweening conceit. He was a mere wind-bag, nothing more, and the blessing which he fancied had fallen upon him, had never come. The poor publican whom he thought accursed, went to his home justified rather than he. The blessing had not fallen on the man who thought he had it. Oh, let every one of us here feel the sting of this rebuke, and pray: "Great God, save us from imputing to ourselves a righteousness which we do not possess. Save us from wrapping ourselves up in our own rags, and fancying we have put on the wedding garments. Bless me indeed. Let me have the true righteousness. Let me have the true worthiness which Thou canst accept, even that which is of faith in Jesus Christ."

Another form of this imaginary blessing is found in persons who would scorn to be thought self-righteous. Their delusion, however, is near akin. I hear them singing—

> "I do believe, I will believe,
> That Jesus died for me;
> And on His cross He shed His blood,
> From sin to set me free."

You believe it, you say. Well, but how do you know? Upon what authority do you make so sure? Who told you? "Oh, I believe it." Yes, but we must mind what we believe. Have you any clear evidence of a special interest in the blood of Jesus? Can you give any spiritual reasons for believing that Christ has set you free from sin? I am afraid that some have got a hope that has not got any ground, like an anchor without any fluke—nothing to grasp, nothing to lay hold upon. They say they are saved, and they stick to it they are, and think it wicked to doubt it; but yet they have no reason to warrant their confidence. When the sons of Kohath carried the ark, and touched it with their hands, they did rightly; but when Uzzah touched it he died. There are those who are ready to be fully assured; there are others to whom it will be death to talk of it. There is a great difference between presumption and full assurance. Full assurance is reasonable: it is based on solid ground. Presumption takes for granted, and with brazen face pronounces that to be its own to which it has no right whatever. Beware, I pray thee, of presuming that thou art saved; but if thou merely sayest, "I trust in Jesus," it doth not save thee, of presuming that thou art saved. If with thy heart thou dost trust in Jesus, then art thou saved; but if thou merely sayest, "I trust in Jesus," it doth not save thee. If thy heart be renewed, if thou shalt hate the things that thou didst once love, and love the things that thou didst once hate; if thou hast really repented; if there be a through change of mind in thee; if thou be born again, then hast thou reason to rejoice: but if there be no vital change, no inward godliness; if there be no love to God, no prayer, no work of the Holy Spirit, then thy saying, "I am saved," is but thine own assertion, and it may delude, but it will not deliver thee. Our prayer ought to be, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, with real faith, with real salvation, with the trust in Jesus that is the essential of faith; not with the conceit that begets credulity." God preserve us from imaginary blessings! I have met with persons who said, "I believe I am saved, because I dreamt it." Or, "Because I had a text of Scripture that applied to my own case. Such and such a good man said so and so in his sermon." Or, "Because I took to weeping and was excited, and felt as I never felt before." Ah! but nothing will stand the trial but this, "Dost thou abjure all confidence in everything but the finished work of Jesus, and dost thou come to Christ to be reconciled in Him to God?" If thou dost not, thy dreams, and visions, and fancies, are but dreams, and visions, and fancies, and will not serve thy turn when most thou needest them. Pray the Lord to bless thee indeed, for of that sterling verity in all thy walk and talk there is a great scarcity.

Too much I am afraid, that even those who are saved—saved for time and eternity—need this caution, and have good cause to pray this prayer that they may learn to make a distinction between some things which they think to be spiritual blessings, and others which are blessings indeed. Let me show you what I mean. Is it certainly a blessing to get an answer to your prayer after your own mind? I always like to qualify my most earnest prayer with, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Not only ought I to do it, but I would like to do it, because otherwise I might ask for something which it would be dangerous for me to receive. God might give it me in anger, and I might find little sweetness in the grant, but much soreness in the grief it caused me. You remember how Israel of old asked for flesh, and God gave them quails; but while the meat was yet in their mouths the wrath of God came upon them. Ask for the meat, if you like, but always put in this: "Lord, if this is not a real blessing, do not give it me." "Bless me indeed." I hardly like to repeat the old story of the good woman whose son was ill—a little child near death's door—and she begged the minister, a Puritan, to pray for its life. He did pray very earnestly, but he put in, "If it be Thy will, save this child." The woman said, "I cannot bear that: I must have you pray that the child shall live. Do not put in any *ifs* or *buts*." "Woman," said the minister, "it may be you will live to rue the day that ever you wished to set your will up against God's will." Twenty years afterwards, she was carried away in a fainting fit from under Tyburn gallows-tree, where that son was put to death as a

felon. Although she had lived to see her child grow up to be a man, it would have been infinitely better for her had the child died, and infinitely wiser had she left it to God's will. Do not be quite so sure that what you think an answer to prayer is any proof of divine love. It may leave much room for thee to seek unto the Lord, saying, "Oh that Thou wouldest blessed me indeed!" So sometimes great exhilaration of spirit, liveliness of heart, even though it be religious joy, may not always be a blessing. We delight in it, and oh, sometimes when we have had gatherings for prayer here, the fire has burned, and our souls have glowed! We felt at the time how we could sing—

"My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss."

So far that was a blessing we are thankful for it; but I should not like to set such seasons up as if my enjoyments were the main token of God's favour; or as if they were the chief signs of His blessing. Perhaps it would be a greater blessing to me to be broken in spirit, and laid low before the Lord at the present time. When you ask for the highest joy, and pray to be on the mountain with Christ, remember it may be as much a blessing; yea, a blessing indeed to be brought into the Valley of Humiliation, to be laid very low, and constrained to cry out in anguish, "Lord, save, or I perish!"

"If to-day He deigns to bless us
With a sense of pardon'd sin,
He to-morrow may distress us,
Make us feel the plague within,
All to make us
Sick of self, and fond of Him."

These variable experiences of ours may be blessings indeed to us, when, had we been always rejoicing, we might have been like Moab, settled on our lees, and not emptied from vessel to vessel. It fares ill with those who have no changes; they fear not God. Have we not, dear friends, sometimes envied those persons that are always calm and unruffled, and are never perturbed in mind? Well, there are Christians. whose evenness of temper deserves to be emulated And as for that calm repose, that unwavering assurance which comes from the Spirit of God, it is a very delightful attainment; but I am not sure that we ought to envy anybody's lot because it is more tranquil or less exposed to storm and tempest than our own. There is a danger of saying, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace, and there is a calmness which arises from callousness. Dupes there are who deceive their own souls. "They have no doubts," they say, but it is because they have little heart searching. They have no anxieties, because they have not much enterprise or many pursuits to stir them up. Or it may be they have no pains, because they have no life. Better go to heaven, halt and maimed, than go marching on in confidence down to hell. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" My God, I will envy no one of his gifts or his graces, much less of his inward mood or his outward circumstances, if only Thou wilt "bless me indeed." I would not be comforted unless Thou comfortest me, nor have any peace but Christ my peace, nor any rest but the rest which cometh from the sweet savour of the sacrifice of Christ. Christ shall be all in all, and none shall be anything to me save Himself. Oh that we might always feel that we are not to judge as to the manner of the blessing, but must leave it with God to give us what we would have, not the imaginary blessing, the superficial and apparent blessing, but the blessing indeed!

Equally too with regard to our work and service, I think our prayer should always be, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" It is lamentable to see the work of some good men, though it is not ours to judge them, how very pretentious, but how very unreal it is. It is really shocking to think how some men pretend to build up a church in the course of two or three evenings. They will report, in the corner of the newspapers, that there were forty-three persons convinced of sin, and forty-six justified, and sometimes thirty-eight sanctified; I do not know what besides of wonderful statistics they give as to all that is accomplished. I have observed congregations that have been speedily gathered together, and great additions have been made to the church all of a sudden. And what has become of them? Where are those churches at the present moment? The dreariest deserts in Christendom are those places that were fertilised by the patent manures of certain revivalists. The whole church seemed to have spent its strength in one rush and effort after something, and it ended in nothing at all. They built their wooden house, and piled up the hay, and made a stubble spire that seemed to reach the heavens, and there fell one spark, and all went away in smoke; and he that came to labour next time—the successor of the great builder—had to get the ashes swept away before he could do any good. The prayer of every one that serves God should be, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." Plod on, plod on. If I only build one piece of masonry in my life, and nothing more, if it be gold, silver, or precious stones, it is a good deal for a man to do; of such precious stuff as that, to build even one little corner which will not show, is a worthy service. It will not be much talked of, but it will last. There is the point: it will last. "Establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it." If we are not builders in an established church, it is of little use to try at all. What God establishes will stand, but what men build without His establishment will certainly come to nought. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" Sunday-school teacher, be this your prayer. Tract distributer, local preacher, whatever you may be, dear brother or sister, whatever your form of service, do ask the Lord that you may not be one of those plaster builders using sham compo that only requires a certain amount of frost and weather to make it crumble to pieces. Be it yours, if you cannot build a cathedral, to build at least one part of the marvellous temple that God is piling for eternity, which will outlast the stars.

I have one thing more to mention before I bring this sermon to a close. The blessings of God's grace are *blessings indeed*, which in right earnest we ought to seek after. By these marks ye know them. Blessings indeed, are such blessings as come from the pierced hand; blessings that come from Calvary's bloody tree, streaming from the Saviour's wounded side—thy pardon, thine acceptance, thy spiritual life: the bread that is meat indeed, the blood that is drink indeed—thy oneness to Christ, and all that comes of it—these are blessings indeed. Any blessing that comes as the result of the Spirit's work in thy soul is a blessing indeed; though it humble thee, though it strip thee, though it kill thee, it is a blessing

indeed. Though the harrow go over and over thy soul, and the deep plough cut into thy very heart; though thou be maimed and wounded, and left for dead, yet if the Spirit of God do it, it is a blessing indeed. If He convinceth thee of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, even though thou hast not hitherto been brought to Christ, it is a blessing indeed. Anything that He does, accept it; do not be dubious of it; but pray that He may continue His blessed operations in thy soul. Whatsoever leads thee to God is in like manner a blessing indeed. Riches may not do it. There may be a golden wall between thee and God. Health will not do it: even the strength and marrow of thy bones may keep thee at a distance from thy God. But anything that draws thee nearer to Him is a blessing indeed. What though it be a cross that raiseth thee? yet if it raise thee to God it shall be a blessing indeed. Anything that reaches into eternity, with a preparation for the world to come, anything that we can carry across the river, the holy joy that is to blossom in those fields beyond the swelling flood, the pure cloudless love of the brotherhood which is to be the atmosphere of truth for ever—anything of this kind that has the eternal broad arrow on it—the immutable mark—is a blessing indeed. And anything which helps me to glorify God is a blessing indeed. If I be sick, and that helps me to praise Him, it is a blessing indeed. If I be poor, and I can serve Him better in poverty than in wealth, it is a blessing indeed. If I be in contempt, I will rejoice in that day and leap for joy, if it be for Christ's sake—it is a blessing indeed. Yea, my faith shakes off the disguise, snatches the vizor from the fair forehead of the blessing, and counts it all joy to fall into divers trials for the sake of Jesus and the recompense of reward that He has promised. "Oh that we may be blessed indeed!"

Now, I send you away with these three words: "Search." See whether the blessings are blessings indeed, and be not satisfied unless you know that they are of God, tokens of His grace, and earnests of His saving purpose. "Weigh"—that shall be the next word. Whatever thou hast weigh it in the scale, and ascertain if it be a blessing indeed, conferring such grace upon you as causeth you to abound in love, and to abound in every good word and work. And lastly, "Pray." So pray that this prayer may mingle with all thy prayers, that whatsoever God grants or whatever He withholds thou mayest be blessed indeed. Is it a joy-time with thee? Oh that Christ may mellow thy joy, and prevent the intoxication of earthly blessedness from leading thee aside from close walking with Him! In the night of sorrow, pray that He will bless thee indeed, lest the wormwood also intoxicate thee and make thee drunk, lest thy afflictions should make thee think hardly of Him. Pray for the blessing, which having, thou art rich to all the intents of bliss, or which lacking, thou art poor and destitute, though plenty fill thy store. "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. But "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!"

WITH THE KING FOR HIS WORK!

"These were the potters, and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work." 1 Chronicles iv. 23.

ALL labour is honourable. No man ever needs to be ashamed of an honest calling. Whether a potter or a gardener, or whatever else his occupation may be, the workman need never blush at the craft or toil by which he earns his honest wage. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," belongs to us all. The sluggard may well be ashamed of his sloth, not the diligent man of his industry. It is quite certain that the word of God does not disparage the humblest calling. I suppose that there is scarcely a trade or occupation which is not mentioned in sacred Scripture. The rough hand and the rugged face of the peasant are to be preferred before the dainty finger and the sleek form of the Pharisee. And the election of grace has comprised men of all sorts—herdsman and fisherman, brickmaker and tent maker; those who ploughed the soil, and those who ploughed the sea. From all ranks and classes and conditions of men God has been pleased to call forth His own; and He has loved them none the less because they have had to soil their hands with the potter's clay, or bend their backs to till the field. Wretched is the clown who sits in the shade while his comrades work in the sun.

There is an honour then, and a dignity, too, in humble honest toil. The Bible itself does not disdain to record the humble craftsman's name. To serve a king always was and still is deemed a thing to be desired. Those who do such duties claim some deference from their fellows. Work done well, however common, is accounted worthy of its wage, but work done for royalty generally has some special attraction to commend it. Such a man is privileged by appointment to be purveyor of this or that to her Majesty the Queen; and he takes good care to let us know it. It is published in his shop window. It is painted over his door. It is printed on his cards. It is pointed out on his billheads. He is "By appointment to the Queen." Royalty seems to dignify him. But, beloved, there is a King whom it is real honour to serve—an honour which angels appreciate—which archangels delight in. That King is the King of kings, and of Him we shall have to speak to-night, and of His service.

Earthly kings have many servants, and so has the King Eternal. I trust that many of us count it to be the very joy of our life that we call Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, and that to us it is the highest pleasure to serve Him—to render to Him all that our strength can possibly yield because we feel that we are debtors to Him, and are bound, henceforth, in bonds of love to His divine service for ever and for evermore.

Looking at my text, I see three or four observations springing from it.

I. The first is this. Since we have mention here of potters and those that dwelt among the plants and hedges with the king for his work, we infer that OUR KING HAS MANY KINDS OF SERVANTS. Other kings have servants of different sorts, and it would

be the extreme of folly if one royal servant should say to another, "You are a nobody. You are of no use, because you cannot perform the offices which I am called to discharge." No brother must exult over his neighbour. He that is appointed to one office must fill it, and he ought to sympathise with the friend who fulfils any other office, but he should never exalt himself above him. The King has many kinds of servants.

Look at any one of our kings, and you find that they have *soldiers*. Until the halcyon days of peace shall arrive—may God speedily send them—I suppose there will always be standing armies and regiments of soldiers. Certainly, our great King, the King of kings, has many soldiers. It is their duty to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. They have to put on the panoply of God, and to contend, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places. Full often they have to draw the sharp sword of controversy against doctrinal errors, which might come in to destroy the city of our God. Do not find fault with the Christian because he has soldierly qualities. There hath been no time since Christ went to heaven in which soldiers of Christ were not required. Until the last enemy shall have laid down his weapons, and infidelity and superstition shall be chased out of the world, we shall want these fighting men, who, with sword and shield, go forth to the conflict. They are your Master's servants. Pray for them.

But the King has His *watchmen*, too, who go not forth to fight, but stay at home and move about the city, especially by night. And do you know, I think the Lord's watchmen are mostly found amongst the sick. During the day, I suppose, there is little fear lest the incense of prayer should cease to rise up to the throne of heaven. But were we all in good health we might be all asleep, and no prayer might be ascending. From this island at a certain hour of the night, if all were locked in slumber, there would be no petitions going up; but it seems to me to be a part of heavenly ordinance that every hour shall be sanctified by prayer, as well the dead of night as the blaze of noon; and so He keeps some of His watchmen awake. They must pray. Their pains, their sleeplessness keep them devout. They lift up their hearts to the Most High. And so with a blessed cordon of prayer the night watches are surrounded, and the Lord does keep His flock safe from the wolf. I like to think of those who cannot come out to the assembly, and cannot take part in any of the active exercises of evangelization, who, nevertheless, can on their beds keep watch for the Lord. "Ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give Him no rest until He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." These are His remembrancers—these consumptives, these sick folk, who in the gloomy hours of night keep awake and pour out their heart like water before the Lord. Now, let not the soldier despise her that tarries at home, for she divideth the spoil. Let not Barak exult over feeble Jael who keepeth the tent, for it may be that her prayer shall drive the nail through the adversary's brow; and it shall not fall to Barak to be honoured, but unto the humble stay-at-home. Oh, watch, ye watchers. Plead much, ye intercessors. Ye are the Lord's servants. Active and passive duties are alike valuable, and God accepts them; let not one, therefore, exalt himself against the other.

There are some of my Master's servants that are His *heralds*. You know that great kings have their trumpeters to go and proclaim for them. This is an honourable office, and one to which I trust many a young man here will aspire—to be a herald of the cross to publish salvation. Get ye up to the high mountains and lift up your voice. Lift it up. Lift it up with strength. Say unto the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

But in every court there are *scribes* as well as heralds, the king's registrars that have to keep the chronicles and the records. So our great King has His scribes—the men of Issachar that can handle the pen, they whose heart indite the good matter, for they speak of the things which they have made touching the king as the pen moves across the page. Well, whether it be by the spoken utterance of the tongue, or by the silent but vigorous expression of facts, thoughts, and feelings, we must be equally grateful for every opportunity to do anything for Jesus. And instead of beginning to question, "Which is the more valuable?" let each one seek to make his own department of the Master's service as complete and efficient as he can.

Our King, too, has His *musicians*, as other monarchs have, who play before them to make a goodly sound upon an instrument. And I do delight in those of my Master's servants who can dedicate musical talents to Him, and give us, first of all, the sweet poetry with which we adore Him in psalm and song; and after that the sweet tunes which help us with united voice to magnify the Lord. Then there are sweet voices which help us of gruffer note in some way to keep harmony, and so together to praise God. God be thanked for the brother who has the voice of melody. Let him consecrate it to his Lord, and train it, and use it always with discretion, not perhaps too loudly, and yet sometimes not too softly either.

Still in a king's house they do not all sing. They cannot. There are some that make no melody. Servants are there in the royal palace that make no music except it be with the brush and the broom; or whose music consists of the motion of their willing feet as they wait at the table, or as they go from chamber to chamber upon the royal errand. Now, let not those who can sing His praises exalt themselves above those who can perform the lowliest service for the Lord. And let not those who are performing the real service of life think that there is something about their labour that is more acceptable than the singing of Jehovah's praise, for it is not so. Each one in his own order, all acting with the right motive, all helping to take their part in the right spirit, and all shall be equally acceptable with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here is a great variety of servants. I cannot stop to go through them all, but you see the text mentions some of them called *potters*. I do not know but they may supply a very good emblem of Sunday-school teachers. Let them not be ashamed of the metaphor, for I cheerfully put myself with them, as I hope the minister may have some claim to be classed among the King's potters. What do the potters do but take the clay while it is yet plastic and soft to put it on the wheel and make the wheel revolve, and then with thumb and finger fashion the clay as it revolves before them, to make a vessel

fit for the royal use? Well, dear Sunday-school teachers, if ever at any time the human mind is plastic it is while a child is young. We should any of us find it hard to learn who never had studious habits till we reached the age of thirty years or upward. Many a man is willing enough to be a student, but he has not the faculty for it. His skull-case has become set and hard and tight, and he cannot make his brain work as he could have done if he had begun earlier; but with the young folk—oh what an opportunity there is to do a world with them! We cannot fashion them unless the hand of the Lord be with our hand—unless God makes their hearts soft—unless He puts them on the wheel for us, but if He does that, oh how a mother's hand can mould her boy! How a teacher's heart can mould the boy or girl committed to him or her, and how throughout life the men and women of the future will bear about them the marks of the teachers of to-day. You are the King's potters. May He help you to do the work aright.

And then there is another class of workers mentioned, and those, I think, are like Sunday-school teachers too—those that dwell among plants and hedges. These were the king's *gardeners*. They dwelt in sheltered places—in enclosures that were protected by hedges to keep off the wind and so retain the heat. They lived in pleasant retreats where rare plants could grow. Now this is just what the Sunday-school teacher should be. He tries to get the plants out from the wild waste and bring them into the

> "garden walled around,
> Chosen and made peculiar ground;
> The little spot enclosed by grace,
> Out of the world's wide wilderness."

He knows the Church is the garden of the Lord and he longs to plant many little slips in it. And I bless God that there are some teachers that my eye rests upon who have planted many little slips that have been growing well. I thanked God when I saw them first take root: I blest the Lord when it was my business to water them as it is mine now, and that of their teachers still; and I hope it will be the business of the teacher, and the pastor too, to gather much fruit from these little plants that we dwell among, that we plant, and that we water, and that we tend. Dear friends, if you are engaged in this service, it is a right honourable one. The first man was a gardener, and the second man—the Lord from heaven—was supposed to be a gardener, and the supposition was not untrue, for never was there such a garden as He planted. It is He who makes the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Because of His own excellency, and because of the plants that He has nurtured, the Church is a garden of unparalleled renown.

Thus there are many servants of our great Master; and I will only say this much more concerning them: how blessed it is to be included in the number. Oh, one does not mind what department he takes so long as he may but serve Christ. I have often prayed by myself a prayer like this: "Lord make me the door-mat of the church. Let everybody wipe his boots upon me. Let me bear the mud and the mire so long as my Master's temple may be kept clean by me." And I think any Christian man will wish to take the lowest and most menial place so that he may be accounted of by our Lord as among "His servants who serve Him." The scullions in Christ's kitchen are more honourable than the counsellors of an imperial court. They that have to do the worst and blackest work, if such there be to be done for the great Master, have a higher esteem in the judgment of perfect spirits than those that rule empires, conduct armies, but know not the fear of God.

II. I proceed to our second observation: ALL WHO LIVE WITH OUR KING MUST WORK. Read the text. "There were the potters and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work." They did not live on the king's bounty and dwell on the king's country estates to do nothing, but they dwelt there for his work. I do not know whether all that call my Master "Lord" have caught this idea. I have thought that some of our church members imagine that the cause of Christ was a coach, and that they were to ride on it, and that they would prefer the box seat, or else a very comfortable seat in the middle of the coach. Nor do they wish to be incommoded by too many fellow travellers: they do not like to be pressed for room even in the pews: they would rather sit at ease, solace themselves with their own dignity, and ride to heaven in a quiet, respectable, comfortable sort of way. In fact, it would appear to me as if some of our friends imagined that when a man becomes a believer he may repose on a silken couch and be carried to glory in a palanquin, never needing to do anything afterwards, but simply to dream himself into everlasting felicity. They get a nice creed that drugs their conscience; they settle down in some snug corner where they defy anybody to disturb their security; they select a sound minister who runs on one line that he never leaves; they listen sometimes, not often too earnestly, to the plan and promises of the gospel; and when they have listened they say they are fed. And if they ask about a minister, the question is, "Are you fed?" When it has got as far as the feeding their interest is exhausted. With the work of faith and the labour of love they never meddle. But let me assure you as a matter of fact that they that live with our King must work. They do not work that they may live with Him, but they work because they live with Him. Because His grace has admitted them into His courts, therefore from that time they begin to work with all diligence. And why is this? What motive prompts them?

Well, first, *because He works*. Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The most wonderful worker in the universe is God Himself; and His dear Son, when He was here, never had an idle hour. "He went about doing good." He began life as a carpenter, and, I do not doubt, worked hard at it. Then as a Saviour He surveyed on the outset His great charge "to fulfil all righteousness." With untiring zeal He pursued His arduous mission to the end, and He finished His work. Until He said, "It is finished," He did not relax His ardour or lay down His toil. Brethren, we cannot dwell with the great working God and yet be sluggards. He will not put up with it. He will not have communion with us unless we are agreed with Him. "How can two walk together unless they be agreed?" Are you an active-minded person, and have you had a servant that you could not stir or hasten or make her move with agility? Or have you had a workman who took one step to-day and another to-morrow? Why, it gives you the fidgets. It makes your flesh

creep. You do not know what to do. You cannot bear it. You take hold of the broom, or whatever else he is pretending to handle, and turn to; for you would sooner do the work yourself. Your patience is exhausted. Now, a glorious and active-minded God will not walk with sluggards. He cannot endure them. If you are to dwell with God you must be His servant, you must have something to do in His name; in whatever occupation it may be, to lay yourself out for His glory is essential and imperative.

The next reason why those that dwell with Him must work, is that *His company always inspires us with the desire to do something for Him.* You never spent a happy hour alone in private prayer holding privileged communion with God when you did not feel constrained to say, "Lord, show me what Thou wouldest have me to do." You never enjoyed full assurance of faith without the question coming to you, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?" You cannot look at Him on the cross bleeding, pouring out His soul unto death for us, without feeling that the couch of inglorious ease would ill befit a faithful disciple's favoured fellowship with Him. You crave that your hand should find something to do, and that your tongue should have something to say. You yearn for some opportunity of sounding forth His dear praises. You may go where you will if you want to be idle, but you cannot go to the cross and come away a sluggard. The nails of it do prick us into sacred industry. They are the spurs of Christian duty. The agonies of our self-sacrificing Lord inspire us with such ardour, that we feel we must serve Him, and take it as a favour, not as a tax. It is a delight rather than a duty to lay ourselves out for Him.

When you get into Christ's courts, there is so much to do that *you cannot help doing something.* If you are a member of an active church you find yourself called upon this way and that way to spend and to be spent for Christ. In such a hive drones are despicable. If you live where there are young converts, where there are tried believers, where there are backsliders, where there are hopeful penitents;—as these come under your notice you perceive that your Master's house is full of service, and you cannot refrain from taking some share in it, and taking it eagerly, anxiously, and cheerfully.

Nay, a true Christian cannot stroll outside His Master's house without feeling calls to service. Can you walk these streets and have your ears assailed, as I grieve to say you must, with the filthiest language from working men,—who seem, to my mind, to have become more coarse in their talk the last ten years than they used to be,—can you go down a street and have your blood curdle at the frequent oath without feeling that you must be up and doing? Can you see these streets swarming with children and not come forward to help the Sunday-school? Can you watch the multitudes of boys and girls streaming out of the Board Schools and not say to yourself, "What is done with these on the Lord's day? Others must be hard at work with them, why am I not doing something?" Everywhere, on all hands, work is suggested, and especially by the activity of our adversaries. See how they compass sea and land to make one proselyte! See how the devil incessantly goes about seeking whom he may devour! He appears to have lost his eyelids. He never sleeps. He is intent continually upon devouring the souls of men; and all the incidents and accidents we meet with say to us, "Are you Christians? Then bestir yourselves. Are you the King's servants? Then be up and doing, for there are ten thousand things that must be done at once, if done at all, without waiting to discuss the best way of doing them."

At any rate, of this thing you may be quite certain, the professor of true religion who is negligent in His Lord's service must and will lose the comforts of His Lord's presence. I speak not, of course, of those who are sick, infirm, or helpless, for as I have already explained, by their patience and resignation and intercession they are exercising a very important part of the work of the Lord's house, but I speak of those of you who might be actively engaged, and I regard it as a rule without exception that sluggish Christians become uncomfortable. When you meet with a brother or sister in Christ who is always grievous, complaining of doubts and fears, sighing and groaning, crying and moaning over an experience that puzzles rather than profits, you need not ask many questions, for you may safely interpret all the symptoms. That person does not teach in the Sunday-school. That person does not go out preaching in the villages. That person is very likely doing nothing. An earnest worker may be occasionally beset with temptations, but he will not be perpetually bewildered with these throes of anxiety. If that be the regular, habitual condition of the man, it looks as if he had a want of occupation. There be many flies and moths and spiders and cobwebs in the chambers of the indolent. Surely they would be brushed away if there were more activity for Christ. I think any minister will tell you it is the people who do nothing themselves in a church that find fault with those who do the work. With great discernment they can always discover flaws in the policy and practice of the earnest brethren who take the pains and do the drudge of office. Bless their hearts, why do they not do it better themselves? No, not they. They seem to think that their department in the sacred household is to find fault with their Master's servants. Now I have looked all over His house, for I have been for years in it, occupying an official position; I have pried over my Master's books, and I have been into His record office, but do you know I have not found anywhere that He has ever issued appointments to any ladies or gentlemen to be the supervisors and censurers of His servants. I believe they act without commission, and that they will probably go without any wages. Or if all service rendered meets with an equitable retribution, and the wages of sin is death, their carpings will bring them no comfort, and their revilings will be requited with bitter remorse. O brothers and sisters, there is no colourable excuse for your culpable inactivity. Christ walks at a quick pace. If you want to walk with Him you must not loiter. He is no friend to the sluggard. I cannot always tell you where fellowship with Him may be found, but I can tell you where it can never be enjoyed. He is not where idlers lounge and congregate to gossip with gibe and jeer, with slur and sneer, railing at the very men whose conduct proves their conscience so pure that they would blight their own interests to bless the Lord's cause. But He is with His people who are diligently devoted to His service and seek to Him for strength to do that service well. Those that live with our King must work.

III. Now, thirdly, THOSE THAT WORK FOR OUR KING OUGHT TO LIVE WITH HIM.

That is the other side of it, for these potters and these gardeners dwelt with the king for his work. I offer to the Sunday-school teachers of the south side of London a motto which may last them for life: "With the King for His work." Put that up now over your mantelpieces. "With the King for His work." Work by all means, because you are with the King; but get with the King by all means, because you want to do His work. Oh, how important it is that every good servant of our heavenly Master should be with Him. Why? Do you ask me; why? Because you cannot know His will if you do not live with Him. He that lives with Christ gets his orders every day; and oftentimes from moment to moment he gets guidance from his great Lord's eye. He says, "Thou shalt guide me with Thine eye." You know how a servant in the house watches her mistress. The mistress does not need always to speak. Perhaps it is at a dinner. There is a number of guests. She does not keep calling, "Mary," and instructing her in measured sentences to attend to the various requirements, but by a simple movement of her head, or a quiet glance of her eye, Mary can understand all her mistress means. Now, those that live with Jesus Christ have a sort of secret alphabet between themselves and Him. Oftentimes when a Christian man does the right thing, you read as a story, or as an anecdote that enlivens a book, how strangely wise he was, how he dropped the fit word at the fitting moment, how he had a knack of giving the right answer to one who wrongly assailed him. Do you know why he had that knack? He lived with his Master, so he knew what you knew not. He knew the meaning of his Master's eye, and it guided him. Oh, I believe if Sunday-school teachers and ministers live with their Lord they will be made wise to win souls. Oftentimes things they never thought of saying they will say exactly at the right time to the right persons, and so surprising will it be to the persons addressed that they will almost think that you must have been told about them. Keep close to your Master, and then you will know your Master's will.

Why should workers live with the Lord, but that they may gather strength? Every hour of communion with Christ is an hour of increased vigour. In the old fable when Hercules fought with the giant he could not kill him. He flung him down with all his might, and Hercules *could* fling a fellow about. He thought he had dashed him to pieces, but every time he got up stronger than before, so down he flung him again. "Surely," he thought, "if I have destroyed the hydra and the lion I can kill this man—this giant." But up the giant sprang again, because the old fable said that the earth was his mother, and every time that he fell he touched his mother and got new life from her. So every time a Christian falls on his knees, draws near to his God, he gets a touch of his great Father, and he gets new strength. When the devil throws a Christian to his knees—throws him down with such force, too, that he thinks, "I will crush him," he gets up and is stronger than the devil again. Over he goes again. He trips him up, flings him down, but every time he falls to praying he rises from before the mercy-seat like a giant against the foe. Oh, then, dwell near the Lord, for that is the source of your strength as well as your knowledge.

Why should workers dwell with the King? Surely it is thereby to keep up their enthusiasm. Humanly speaking, the very soul of Christianity is enthusiasm. Cold religion—well, there are some cold things that give one a chill to think of. Cold religion! It is the most ghastly spectacle on which a pure and fervent heart can look. Cold religion! Ugh! It is nauseous. There is only one thing worse, and that is a cool, listless profession; for Jesus Christ tells us that the lukewarm made him sick outright. To the Laodicean, said the faithful and true Witness, "I would thou wert cold or hot, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth." Let your faith be at furnace heat. Religion cannot long be lukewarm; it will either die out or it will kindle and set you all on fire. If it consume a man, then it only reaches the heat at which Jesus Christ lived. Somebody has very properly said, "Blood-heat is the healthy heat for a Christian's soul." So it is. But what is the blood-heat? The heat of our great atoning sacrifice—the blood-heat of our blessed Redeemer when He sweat great drops of blood, and gave Himself for us. Would God we were filled with such flaming zeal. But ah! you never can attain unto it except you live with Him. The world is cold and icebound, and the Church is chill and pierced with the east wind. Would you get into the tropics where fruits luxuriant grow? Live near to Christ, then you will become enthusiastic, and pursue your work with a fervour all divine.

We must live with our King, too, that we may be inspired with courage. I suppose some teachers are timid. I know some preachers are haunted with strange fears. The way to quicken courage is to look the King in the face. When you see how patiently He endured reproach, and how resolutely He proceeded with His ministry of love, even to die for us, you will not be afraid of the faces of men, nor will you shrink from duty because nervous friends warn you of danger.

And you had need live with the King if you would cultivate the soft grace of patience. Sunday-school work is very trying. It often vexes the soul, and you get weary. But when you go and look at Him and see how He failed not, neither was discouraged, but went through with the work which He undertook till He could say, "It is finished," you will chide your soul for all its futile excitement and feverish unrest. By your patience and perseverance you will approve yourselves as children of God and followers of Christ.

In fine, dear friend, I do not know that a person can do anything for our Lord Jesus Christ aright without living in communion with Him. I am persuaded that Martha got into trouble about that dinner of hers, because she did not mix with her serving the sitting at the Saviour's feet with Mary. I am sure that we can attempt too much and accomplish too little; for we can do apparently a great deal, but because we have not had power with God, very little may come of it. Steeped seed is the best for Sunday-school teachers. It is always well to take care that the good seed you bring to the little plots—your children's little minds—has been laid in soak the night before in earnest prayer. It is wonderful how quickly it sprouts and what a deal of vitality it manifests if you put it asoak. The dry seed—dry teaching without any praying—without any communion with God—may be productive, but it is a long time in coming up and yielding a reward for your labour.

Believe me, my dear brothers and sisters, that to abide near to Jesus is the very life of Christian service. I would have you feel and speak on this wise, "I am engaged in the service of the King. Fifty little children I have under my charge—all infants—and I am trying to teach them something, but they are all full of fun, and I cannot get anything into their little heads, but it would never do to think of giving it up, because I am doing it for Jesus. I would not do it for anybody else." Or, "I have got half-a-dozen unruly boys in the ragged school. I would not undertake the work of this school for the biggest salary that could be offered me, but I can do it for Jesus Christ, and I will do it for the love and gratitude I feel to Him; in fact, I am happy in doing it because I know that He is looking on—that He sees all that I do—for if nobody else appreciates my service He does, and He will accept me, and He will help me, and some blessed result will come of it, so I will tax all my energies to the task as the workman wakes up when there is a king watching. With what care and diligence he will exercise his highest skill! So let thy task be performed with all thy might, for if done for Him it ought to be done well. Nothing should be slurred over in a slovenly fashion that is done for Jesus. This thought, that I am with the King is animating and helpful to *me*, I can assure you beyond any description of its influence that I can convey to you.

IV. Now to our last point, upon which only a few words. That which should reconcile us to live in any place is that we may work for the King in it; and that which should reconcile us to any work is that WE ARE WORKING FOR THE KING. "These were the potters that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work." In any place where you dwell you can dwell with the King. These pottery men and gardeners were on the king's estate. You need not live next door to a church; you need not live with a pious family to have God with you. Oh, bless the Lord, I have met with my Lord and Master by the bedsides of the sick in Kent Street many a time. My friend Mr. McCree has met the Lord many a time in a cellar in St. Giles's; and he is often to be found in Bethnal Green and Shoreditch—in the very worst habitations that ever human beings dwelt in. Dwell wherever you may—on the land or on the sea, in the hospital or in the workhouse,—you may still dwell there with the King. He does not want any carpets. He does not care about rich furniture. In fact, He does not often come where the floors are covered with Turkey carpets. I think the scarcest place for Christ is with the rich; they seldom have much to say about Him. I speak not of them all, but of very many. If for my part I want half an hour's real talk about Jesus Christ I must visit the poor man. I do not know how others find it. It is so; it is sadly so, in my experience. Well, wherever you dwell and whatever your rank, you may have the Lord dwelling with you; and this ought to reconcile you to dwell anywhere, if you can serve the Lord. I always find that when men are converted if they live in a very bad neighbourhood, they try and get out of it. That is right enough. I think if I were living in some neighbourhoods the sooner I could change my residence the better pleased I should be. At the same time, in an ill locality a good man is a great boon. Where is a bright lamp more wanted than down in a dark alley? Where is the pure light most wanted? Is not it amongst the depraved and profligate? Sometimes I almost fear that the repugnance with which Christian people fly away from a bad district is a misfortune for the population, especially for the young who are left behind. Of the sympathy that might be felt, and the good that might be done by their being there, the inhabitants are henceforth bereft. My dear brother, if you are placed in the very midst of ribald wickedness, an opportunity to serve the Lord where Satan's seat is might induce you to stop there awhile with the self-denial of a missionary among the heathen. It may be that it is cowardly and craven to run away. Rather should it become you to say, "I am put into this fort in the midst of the enemy, and I mean to keep it; my fixed purpose is to hoist the flag of Christ on the top of it, and instead of deserting the post to strive incessantly to win souls for Him." At any rate, if you are compelled to live in neighbourhoods that you do not like, it ought to be some comfort to you that the King will live there with you, and that perhaps He has placed you there to try your faith, to honour His name, and to bless the outcasts. Go, beloved, wherever you reside and realise that your abode is a station you are appointed to occupy for His work. Let the nurse-girl in the family, with the little ones about her, live for Christ and lose no opportunity of letting her light shine. Let the artizan, thrown into the large workshop, where there are none like himself, account that he is put there for the King's work. The tradesman, dealing with many who like to have a word across the counter, should order his conversation for the glory of Christ. The merchant, who will be sure to make many friends in business, should not forget his Lord, but bear a faithful testimony as often as he can. The employer of many hands should take care that he seeks the welfare of their souls, and consider by what manifold agencies he can promote the King's work. You that have leisure, dear friends, should feel that your spare time is a sacred trust, to be squandered never, but to be consecrated ever to the King's work. You that have talents should feel the like imperative obligation—yea, and especially you that have only one talent! It was the man of one talent that buried it. So it commonly is. You have not much talent you think—nothing brilliant. Then the temptation is to go and bury your bit of bronze because you cannot display any glittering gold. Your conscious weakness produces a wicked conceit. Do not withhold your mite from the treasury because you have not a million to contribute. Live still with the King for His work.

Doubtless I have been addressing some who have never served the King, who do not know Him, who do not love Him. I am not going to ask you to work for Him. No, no. My Lord wants none to work for Him who do not believe in Him. "Come and trust Him." Our soldier friends over there, a sprinkling of whom I am pleased to see, and proud to salute, know how to enlist in the service. How does a man first become a soldier? Well, he receives a shilling. He receives, and then he is a soldier. He that will receive Christ is made a soldier of Christ. It is receiving you have got to begin with. And after you have received Christ then you shall go forth and serve Him. Put out an empty hand and receive Christ into it by a little faith, and then go and serve Him, and the Lord bless you henceforth and for ever. Amen.

RECRUITS FOR KING JESUS

"And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto David. And David went out to meet them, and answered and said unto them, If ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you; but if ye be come to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it. Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band."—1 Chronicles xii. 16–18.

AT this time David was in the hold—I suppose in the stronghold of Ziklag, which the king of the Philistines had given to him. It was in that fortress-town that he received a welcome addition to his band. David was an exile; and it is not every man who cares to cast in his lot with a banished nobleman. He was outlawed, and his sovereign would have slain him with his own hand if he had found opportunity: few care to stake their all with a man in such a condition. The many who were on Saul's side spoke very bitterly of David, and, wishing to curry favour with the king, they slandered him to the blackest degree: few respectable people care to associate themselves with a person who is in ill-repute. Many to whom he had done no ill were eager to betray David, and sell him into the hand of his enemy; for men sought their own gain, and cared not whom they sold, so long as they clutched the price: it was no small thing for a band of men to unite with a man upon whose head a price was set. David had to stand upon his guard, for traitors were all around: the men of Keilah would have delivered him up when he went in all simplicity of heart within their gates. The fortunes of David were at a low ebb, and hence when these men came to David they did a valorous action—an action which he would be sure to remember in the after-days of his triumph.

I want to run a parallel between the case of David, and that of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the present moment our Lord Jesus, the Son of David, is still in the hold. Among the men of this world He is not yet enthroned: their hearts go after another prince, and as yet the kingdom has not come to the Son of David. I know that He reigns in heaven, and that He is in very deed King of kings and Lord of lords; but before the eyes of the mass of men He is still despised and rejected. His people, as yet, are but a feeble folk, and often hard put to it; while His kingdom is ridiculed, His claims are derided, and His yoke is scorned. The doctrines which He preached are tossed to and fro like a ball; and men at the present time are glorying in science or tradition, in reason or in speculation; yea, they speak as if human wisdom would soon wipe out the very name of Christianity. It is not so in truth before God; but it is so in appearance before men. This is an age of blasphemy and of rebuke for our Lord the King. Brave are they who will stand to Christ in this, the day of His exile. They shall be right royally rewarded who will now take up His cause, and will go forth to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. He is the man for the Lord Jesus who can now run the gauntlet of miles of scoffers, and be willing to be called a fool, a madman, or an idiot for His name's sake. Blessed are they who are not ashamed this day to bear the name of Christ written out large; and to confess that, after the way which men call "orthodoxy," so worship they the Lord God of their fathers. The philosophic Christian may escape if he will drown the Christian in the philosopher; but this is not to stand out square for Christ. It does our heart good nowadays to meet with a few brethren who are not ashamed still to believe in the merit of the Redeemer's precious blood, and in the power of His Spirit to regenerate. We feel at home when we drop in with a few who believe in prayer, and expect the Lord to interpose on the behalf of His people. I say, blessed are they who, like these men of Benjamin and Judah, are willing to go to the King in the hold, and take up His cause though it be at a low ebb, and stand up for Him when the many are ready to trample Him down, and are ridiculing His work and His cause. For my own part, I never loved my Lord better than now that He is defamed; and His truth is all the dearer to me because it is flouted by the worldly-wise.

It is to those who will volunteer for Jesus that I am about to speak; and our first head is, that using the text as a parable we have here *a commendable example*. It is a commendable example for men to join themselves with Christ while He is at a discount. Secondly, here is *a cautious inquiry*. When David sees these men come he does not at once receive them with open arms, but there is a reserve about him till he has asked them a question or two. He wants to know who they are before he writes down their names in his muster-roll. And, thirdly, here is *a very cordial enlistment* as they answer to his question, and say, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse; for thy God helpeth thee."

I. First, then, here is A VERY COMMENDABLE EXAMPLE. May the Holy Spirit lead many of my dear hearers to follow it.

Many of these men of Benjamin and Judah, in the first place, went to join themselves to David because *they had heard that he was the Lord's anointed*. They understood that Samuel had gone down to Ramah, and, in the days of David's youth, had anointed him in the name of the Lord to be king instead of Saul. Therefore they said, "Whom God anoints we will follow," and they came after David. It was fit that they should be loyal to David if they would be obedient to God.

Now, it is within the belief, I trust, of all assembled here, that the Lord God Almighty has anointed "One chosen out of the people" to be His King in Zion—the King of His church for ever and ever; and that One chosen out of the people is Jesus of Nazareth, of the house of David, who is Himself, as man, the servant of God, but who is also divine, and counts it not robbery to be equal with God. We have, I trust, all of us drunk in this doctrine, that the Lord Jesus is the Anointed of God, the very Word of God, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Now, it seems to me that if it be so, the next inevitable step for men who fear God is to go forth and follow

the Lord's Anointed. If Jesus be the Messiah, the sent One of God, in the name of everything that is gracious and right let us follow Him. God has given Him to be a leader and a commander to the people; let us rally to His banner without delay. If the Lord has anointed Jesus to be a Prince and a Saviour, let Him be our Prince and our Saviour at once. Let us render Him obedience and confidence, and openly avow the same. Our Lord puts it thus—"If I tell you the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" The argument is irresistible with true-hearted men. If any of you believe that Jesus is anointed to be the Saviour of men, I say that you are unreasonable if you do not practically accept Him as such. But if you are willing to come right straight out, and say, "Let others do as they will; as for me, I will be the loving servant of the Anointed of the Lord"; then you act rightly, and render a reasonable service. What better argument can I find with just and reasonable persons than this? You believe that God has anointed Jesus, therefore accept Him for yourself. If these men followed David because God had anointed him, infinitely more binding is it upon you and upon me, believing that God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth to be the King, for us to follow *Him*, that we may be found faithful in His cause and kingdom. Oh, my dear hearers, I am perplexed about some of you: you call Jesus Lord, and yet you do not obey Him; you own that He is the Saviour, and yet you do not trust in Him for salvation. Do think this over, and may the Holy Ghost lead you to a sensible decision. If Jesus be God's Anointed, let Him be your Beloved.

Next, these men, no doubt many of them, followed David because of *his personal excellencies*. They had heard of him—of what he was in his youth, what he had been at home, and at court, and in the army, and in the day of battle. He had behaved admirably everywhere, and these warriors had heard of it. I should not wonder if some of them remembered that, when he was a youth and ruddy, he came forth with his sling and stone and smote the giant foe of Israel on the forehead. Perhaps they had heard of all his mighty acts that he did when, as Saul's captain, he went in and out before the host and did valiantly in the name of the Most High. And when they heard of his gentleness, and of his courtesy, and of all the many virtues which adorned him, making him so greatly different from those leaders of free-booting bands who were so common in that land, I do not wonder if they enthusiastically gave themselves up to be the loyal followers of this David the son of Jesse. A good soldier should have a good, captain: a good captain deserves good soldiers. These men of war argued well when they enlisted under David. But how shall I commend the Lord Jesus Christ to you that are of a noble spirit? Was there ever any like unto Him? Who among the good the great, the brave, the beautiful, can be likened unto Him? He left the courts of heaven that He might save men. Love brought Him from glory to be the Redeemer of His enemies! Being found in fashion as a man, He gave Himself up to death, even the death of the cross for love of men. All His life long He did valiantly for the Lord His God, in all holiness and righteousness, defeating every temptation and overcoming all evil, and He ended His labour by going up to the cross to enter into personal duel with death and hell, therein overthrowing all the powers of evil on the behalf of His people. Oh, could I paint His face, and could you see it as it is beheld by the eyes of God, you would all be enamoured of Him! Oh, could all men know how good He is, how gracious He is, as some of us do know; even if they only went to that partial extent, surely no men would stand out, but the Prince Immanuel would win all hearts! All these young men and all the vast multitude who gather to this Tabernacle would gladly take up their cross, and follow after Jesus at once, if they had any idea of His surpassing excellence. O my soul, how wouldst thou rejoice if men would come at once to Jesus! Oh to hear you all say, "We also will be with Jesus in the day of His derision and His scorn; for we see what He is, and there is none like Him. He shall be our King and our Captain, for He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." He, being such a One, and so worthy of the anointing which He has received of God, I do as His recruiting sergeant commend Him to every one here. Oh, that you would all become His true followers at once; for He deserves the love and loyalty of every one of you. If ye would be safe and happy, come to my Lord, and be henceforth His servants. If ye would fight a good fight, enlist beneath this glorious "Captain of our salvation."

There was a third reason why brave spirits resolved to enlist under David, and that was, that he was so cruelly persecuted by Saul—*so misrepresented and abused by his enemies*. There are some cringing, fawning spirits in this world, who must always go with the majority. What everybody says they say: they take their cue from those who lead the fashion of the hour. They ask leave of common custom to breathe or eat. They dare not swallow down their spittle till they have obtained permission so to do. Cringing, fawning sycophants of all that is great, and all that is fashionable, scarcely could a soul be found in them if they were searched through and through with a microscope. These will never come to David when he is in the hold, nor need he wish that they would. On the other hand, there are brave spirits who rather prefer to be in the minority. They do not even care if they have to stand alone for truth and righteousness. They could have ventured to say with Athanasius, "I, Athanasius, against the world"; for they know the right and they cling to it; and it is not to them a question whether truth walks in silver slippers or whether she plods barefoot through the mire. It is the truth they care for, and not the habiliments with which she may be adorned or disfigured. Such men took up David's side chivalrously because it was the right side, and the despised side; and they liked it none the less because so many spake evil of it. Sadly true is it that the Lord Jeus Christ is still of so little account in this world. His name, ah, I am sick of the way in which they use His name to-day! Shame on some that are called Christian ministers! They believe in Christ, but it is a Christ without His crown, His atonement, His judgment-seat, or even His Godhead. They mock us with orthodox phrases, from which the essential truth is gone. They pretend that they believe in the atonement, and when we listen to their atonement we find that it does not effectually atone for any one. It is a mere fiction, and not a fact. It saves nobody, but is a mere sham. They have eviscerated the gospel, and then they hold up the empty carcase, and claim that they are Christians still. Christians who have murdered Christianity! Believers who doubt whether there is anything to be believed! Yet we are entreated in our charity to

hug such traitors to our bosom. We shall do nothing of the kind. We would sooner believe in infidels outright than in those who pretend to be Christians and are infidels at heart. "Modern thought" is a more evil thing than downright atheism; even as a wolf in a sheep's skin is worse than a wolf in his natural form. There are pretty things said of our Lord Jesus by those who deny the faith which are sickening to me. I loathe to hear our true Lord praised by false lips. They deny the doctrines which He taught, and yet prate about believing *Him*. It is a shallow trick, but yet it deceives shallow souls. Poor, weak minds say, "The man speaks so beautifully of Jesus, surely he cannot be in error." I tell you it is the old Judas trick—the Son of man is betrayed with a kiss. How nauseating their praises must be to Him whom they are betraying. Think not that they are honest; their designs are far other than appear upon the surface. They laud Him as man that they may dishonour Him as God: they cry up His life, and His example, that they may cast His atoning sacrifice into the ditch. They lift up one part of the divine revelation with no other intention than that they may dash down the other: they crouch at His feet that they may stab at His heart.

I avow myself at this hour the partisan of Christ, and of the whole truth of Christ, in its old-fashioned form: the more old-fashioned the better for me. I am for Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. I am for the gospel of martyrs and confessors who gave their hearts' blood as the seal of their faith. New gospels and new theologies I abhor. I am for that same ancient gospel which to-day is said to be absolutely defunct. Science has wiped out the evangelicals: we are dead: we are gone. So they say of us. Yet in our graves we turn: even in our ashes live our wonted fires: we expect a resurrection. Truth may be crushed down, but it cannot be crushed out. If there survived but one lover of the doctrines of grace he would suffice by God's Spirit to sow the world again with the verities of our holy faith. The eternal truth which Christ and His apostles taught is not dead but sleepeth; at a touch of the Lord's hand she shall rise in all her ancient power and look round for her adversaries, and they shall not be: yea, she shall diligently consider their place and they shall not be. Blessed are they who at this time are not afraid to be on the side that is ridiculed and laughed at. Truth will have its turn, and though it now grind the dust it shall be at the top before long, and they who are loyal to it shall share its fortunes. Let us be bold enough to say, "Put down my name among the fools who believe, and not among those whose wisdom lies in doubting everything." God save us from the wisdom which believes in itself, and give us more of the wisdom which believes in *Him!*

Once more. These men came to David because *they believed that David had a great future before him.* He was very poor when they came to him, an exile, as we have said, an outlaw, one who could not return to his land because the king himself had a personal feud with him. But they said, "It doth not yet appear what he shall be. This son of Jesse will be king yet, and his enemies shall beg their lives of him." So, looking to the great future that awaited him, they determined to take shares with him in his present low estate that they might be raised with him in his exaltation. Now, I think that I can say to every one here, "I would that ye would come over to David's side—to Jesus's side—for there is a future awaiting Him, a glory, a triumph, even here on earth, such as shall make those men gnash their teeth who throw away this opportunity of enlisting in His host." How will souls lament for ever their neglect of joining themselves to Jesus! It shall be their everlasting regret that they lost the opportunity of standing out for truth, and right, and love, as they are seen in the person of the Son of God. Oh, it will be an endless loss to have refused to stand upon the pillory of scorn, and avow Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. "Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him." Woe to those who pierced Him by refusing to believe in Him. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever, and the shout of "Hallelujah, hallelujah," shall come up from earth and descend from heaven. He shall sit upon the throne of His father David, and of His kingdom there shall be no end. Who does not desire to be with Him and to behold His glory? Cast in your lot with Him, then, O ye undecided! Let His cause be as it may in the eyes of worldlings, espouse it at once right heartily; for they that are with Him in His humiliation shall be with Him in His triumph.

Those are the reasons why, at this time, I stand here, and exhort, beg, beseech, entreat every one among you to be on the side of Jesus Christ our Lord. Woe unto you if you turn your backs upon Him! Woe unto you if you attempt to be neutrals! Woe unto you if you are lukewarm followers! Remember, he that is not with Him is against Him. He that takes not up his cross and follows not after Him is not worthy of Him, and shall not be counted among His disciples. Oh, that this whole company here to-night were distinctly and avowedly, perfectly and continuously, on the side of Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace, the coming King! O my friend, yonder, I speak to you personally, I would to God that you would at once put on the livery of my Lord Jesus, and become His sworn servant for ever!

II. Now, I have just a few words to say upon the second head. A CAUTIOUS INQUIRY.

These men of Benjamin and of Judah came to David, and David met them as a warrior standing upon his guard. The times were not such as to allow of a negligent confidence in all who professed friendship. The Benjamites were of the same tribe as Saul, and it was singular that they should come and join with David, the rival of their own leader. The men of Judah belonged to the same tribe as those men of Keilah who had betrayed David: therefore the hero was cautious and made careful inquiry. My Lord Jesus Christ is never so eager after disciples as to enrol those who cannot bear to be questioned. He did not go abroad sweeping up a heap of nominal followers who would increase His apparent strength and prove a real weakness to Him. He said to those who offered themselves, "Count the cost." "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," says one. Jesus does not there and then enlist him, but calmly replies, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." He wants followers, but He wants them to be of the right kind; therefore He does not delude them and excite them to enter suddenly upon a course which they will, before long, renounce. He does not act as, I am afraid, the recruiting sergeant does when he tells the brave boys of all the glories they will enjoy, and crosses their hands with a shilling, so that they may take Her Majesty's money and become her

servants. The sergeant does not say much about the wounds of battle and the pains of hospital: he does not dwell very long upon wooden legs, and broken arms, and lost eyes, and all that. No; he dwells on pleasure, victory, pension, glory. Our Great Captain does not in this manner entrap allies, but He sets the worst part of His service first, and bids men consider whether they will be able to carry out that which they propose to do. I would in this matter imitate my Lord: I have pressed you to come to His banner, but at the same time I would cautiously inquire of you.

Now, see what David said to them: He set before them *the right way*. He said, "If ye be come peaceably *unto me* to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you." If you wish to join with Christ's people, and have your name numbered with them, one main question is—Do you come unto *Him*? Do you first give yourselves to the Lord and afterwards unto His people? "If ye be come *unto me*," says David. It would have been useless for them to answer, "We have come because we are fond of some of the people that are with you." "No," he says, "if ye be come *to me*, then my heart shall be knit to you. Not else." Do you come to Christ, dear friend? Are you sure that Jesus is your Leader? Do not profess to be a Christian if you have not come to Christ, for Christ is the soul of Christianity. To come to Christ is this: confessing your sin, look to Him as the sin-bearer, trust Him with your future, trust Him with your soul altogether. By a sincere, simple, undivided faith, you do really come to Jesus: have you such a faith? Let Jesus Christ be first and last with you. Take Him to be your Saviour altogether. Do not be your own Saviour even in part. Let Him save you from beginning to end, from top to bottom, in all ways and respects. If it be so, come along with you, for our host will be glad to have its number increased by your coming. If you do not thus come to our Lord, pray do not come to us, for you will neither do good, not get good thereby.

Then David puts the question. "If ye be come *peaceably* unto me," and this was needful, for some are captious and quarrelsome. Some profess to come to Christ, but they quarrel with Christ at the very first. They would make terms with Him, and they come intending to dispute with His people. From the first they are discontented and fault-finding, rather patronizing Christ and His cause than humbly uniting with Him and His people. They do not think half as much of God's people as God thinks of them. When I hear people say, "Oh, there is So-and-So, who is not what he ought to be, and he is a member of the church," and then they begin finding fault with this, and with that, I say to myself, "That critic is no true friend." The church is not perfect, but woe to the man who finds pleasure in pointing out her imperfections. Christ loved His Church, and let us do the same. I have no doubt that the Lord can see more fault in His Church than I can; and I have equal confidence that He sees no fault at all, because He covers her faults with His own love—that love which hides a multitude of sins; and He removes all her defilement with that precious blood which washes away all the transgressions of His people. I dare not find fault with those whom the Lord has loved from before the foundation of the world; more especially since I find that I need all my time to find out my own faults and to get rid of them. If you are a faultless man I do not ask you to join the Christian Church, because I am sure that you would not find anybody else there like yourself. It is true that if you do not join a church till you find a perfect one you will not be a church member this side heaven; but I may add, that if there were such a church, the moment your name was written in the list it would leave off being a perfect church, for your presence would have destroyed its perfection. If you are coming to pick holes, and quiz, and question, and find fault, and talk about inconsistencies and so forth, then you may pass on and join some other army; but if you be come peaceably to our Lord and to us, then I offer you a hearty welcome. We are not anxious to enlist men who love to have the pre-eminence, nor men of fierce temper, nor unforgiving spirits, nor proud, envious, lovers of strife: we want only those who have the mind of Christ. Come peaceably, or come not at all.

Again David puts the question, "If ye be come peaceably to me *to help me*." Mind this and mark it well: they that join with Christ must join in His battles, join in His labours, join in His self-sacrifice. We must come to His Church not only to be helped, but to help. It is of no use your entering the army if you do not mean to fight; and it is of no use your uniting with the host of God unless you mean to take your share in the holy warfare. Many forget this, and look upon a religious life as one of sanctified selfishness. A great many stop the gospel plough. "Hi!" say they; "stop!" They want to ride on one of the horses. Yes, but the ploughman has no opinion of such friends. Let them lead the horses or hold the plough-handles, or do something, or else let them take themselves off. Of course, I do not mean the sick and faint; but all fit for war must go to the war. There is something for every church-member to do as well as to receive. They that join the Church of Christ must come to pull as well as to be pulled—come to work as well as to eat; and usually the rule is true in Christ's house as it ought to be in everybody else's "He that will not work, neither shall he eat." They that do not labour in the cause of Christ will very soon find that they are not fed in the house of God. Why should they be? I count it no office of mine to carry bread and meat to sluggards and lie-a-beds: I would sooner feed swine. They who never do a hand's turn among us ought to be turned out from us. If ye be come peaceably to help us, then I speak for my Captain, and bid you welcome; but if you do not mean real service, please to march on.

There are the three questions, then. Do you come to Christ and accept Him? If so, come along. Do you come with a desire to maintain peace among your Christian brethren? If so, come! Do you come with the intent of helping the Lord Jesus Christ to spread abroad His truth? Then come, and welcome, and the Lord be with you and with us!

Do you know what Jesus says to you who come to Him aright? "My heart shall be knit unto you." Oh, I think that if I had been Amasai, I should have felt the Spirit come upon me to speak just as Amasai did when he so heartily declared that he and his brethren came to join heart and soul with David. With all that loving warmth which was so natural to him, David said, "My heart shall be knit to you." Now when the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Will you espouse My cause? Will you accept Me for leader? Will you come and join with My people? Then My heart shall be knit unto you"—do not your hearts leap within you? What a charming promise it is! What union of soul it sets forth! I do not know much

about knitting; but some of you do. Things knit together are not merely joined in one, but they are one. They are not merely sewn together by a machine, so that they can draw out a thread and the pieces divide; but they are knit together and are of one piece, one fabric, one substance. Come, then, ye truly faithful, you shall be knit together with Christ, His heart with your heart; you shall never be separated from Him any more. It is a great thing when the hearts of God's people are knit together; but it is greatest of all when their hearts are knit with Christ's heart, and His heart is knit with theirs. Come hither, ye true-hearted: cast in your lot with your Lord. Is it not reward enough for coming into His host that His heart shall be knit to you? I count this my heaven upon earth, to have my Lord's love; do you not agree with me?

Notice how David put the other side of it, and set before them *the wrong way*;—"But if ye come to betray me to my enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it." Will persons ever join the church to betray the Lord Christ to His enemies. I say not that such is their present purpose; but a great many have acted as if they were from the beginning traitors to Him and to His truth. They have come into the church, and yet they have betrayed Christ to His enemies; yea, they have been aided in their treachery by having been admitted within our ranks. Some have done this by giving up the doctrines of the gospel. Falling into this error and that, they have denied the gospel, overthrown the weak, and shaken the strong. Some have proved themselves the enemies of the cross of Christ by their inconsistent lives. People have pointed at them, and said, "Those are followers of Christ, you see. They can lie, and cheat, and get gain as the basest rogues do." They say that they are Christians, and yet you cannot trust them in trade. They are just as gay, and worldly, and false as if they were not Christians at all. Why, then I suspect that they are not Christians at all; but like Judas Iscariot, they are children of perdition. Then there are some in all ages who betray the Lord Jesus by apostasy. They run well for a time, and then they are hindered. Being armed and carrying bows, they turn back in the day of battle. They are trees twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Such sorrowful heart-breaking cases do occur in all churches, where men come to the very front, and appear to do great service for Christ, and yet forsake Him, and walk no more with His people, nor in His ways; even denying that they ever were associated with Him and with His cause. They open His wounds! They put Him to an open shame! Woe unto them! Sorrowfully, yet sternly would I say, If there should be one here who will in some future day wilfully betray the Saviour on any account whatever, the Lord have mercy upon such, and prevent his joining with our church lest we be overwhelmed with shame and sorrow. True-hearted men, we invite you! Half-hearted, fickle men, we would avoid you! Yet such do come, and will come, and what can we say of them? "The God of our fathers look thereon and rebuke it,"—aye, rebuke it so as to prevent it, that they may not be as thorns in our side.

III. But time fails me, and therefore I must finish up, thirdly, by describing from the text A CORDIAL ENLISTMENT. The captain of these brave men felt the Spirit come upon him, and he spoke up as warm-heartedly as David had spoken, saying, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace, be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee."

He began thus:—"Thine are we, David." Now, that is the first thing I want of those who are going to join the church—"Thine are we, Jesus. We are not our own; we are bought with a price." Well may that man avow himself to belong to Christ who has been bought with the blood of Christ: "For ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." Now, if ye be indeed redeemed by Him, I pray you confess that you are altogether and absolutely your Lord's. Sing with your whole heart—

> "All that I am, and all I have
> Shall be for ever Thine."

Do not sing it alone, but practise it. Let your lives say—Thine are we, Jesus. Neither count we anything that we possess to be our own; but all is dedicated to Thy royal use.

Then Amasai added, "and on thy side, thou son of Jesse": for, if we belong to Christ, of course we are on Christ's side, whatever that side may be. In religion, morals, politics, we are on Christ's side. Here is the side of the learned; there is the side of the ignorant: we are on neither the one, nor the other: we are on Christ's side. In every political question we desire to be and ought to be on Christ's side; we are neither of this party nor of that, but on the side of justice, peace, righteousness. In every moral question we are bound to be on Christ's side. In every religious question we are not on the side of predominant thought, nor on the side of fashionable views, nor on the side of lucre, but on the side of Christ. Make this your oracle—"What would Jesus do?" Go and do *that*. How would Jesus think? Go and think *that*. What would Jesus have you to be? Ask God to make you just *that*. "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse."

Then he added, "Peace be to thee." "Peace, peace, be to thee." Double peace to thee. So say we to our Lord Jesus Christ; our heart salutes Him and invokes peace upon Him. Blessed Master, we are at peace with Thee so completely as to be at one with Thee. What Thou sayest we believe; what Thou doest we admire; what Thou commandest we obey; what Thou claimest we resign; what Thou forbiddest we forego. We yield ourselves up to Thee wholly, and are at perfect peace with Thee in all Thy purposes, and designs, and acts. Peace, peace, to Thee.

"And peace be to thy helpers." We desire all good for all good men. We pray for the peace of the peaceful. The day that we were converted we felt that we loved every Christian. I used to say of the little village where I first preached, that I had such an attachment to every inhabitant in it that if I had seen a dog that came from Waterbeach I would have given him a bone. Do you not feel the same towards all the Lord's people? The proverb hath it, "Love me, love my dog"; and when you love Christ you love the very lowest of His people. Aye, if Jesus had a dog, you would love that dog for Christ's sake. I am sure that it is so. When a man is always cavilling I fear he has not the Spirit of Christ, and is none of His. We know some people who might be compared to hedgehogs, they cannot be touched by anybody, they are all spines and prickles; such people may think well of themselves, but it is to be feared that the loving Jesus does not think well of them. The man with a hot head and a bitter heart, is he a friend of Jesus? I

cannot imagine that such a head as that will lie in Jesus Christ's bosom. Oh, no, dear friends; he that loveth is born of God, but not the man of hate and spite. Give me the eyes of the dove, and not those of a carrion crow. When the dove soars aloft into the air, what does she look for? Why, for her dovecote, and when she discovers the beloved abode she uses her wings with lightning speed, for there is her delight. If you were to throw a raven or a carrion-crow into the air, it would be looking for something foul which it could feed upon; and there are men and women in every Christian church who are always trying with far-reaching and greatly-magnifying eyes to find out some wretched scandal or another. If you want to go to your bed uncomfortable, and to lie awake all night, if you are a pastor of a church, have a few minutes' talk with a friend of this order. These are the folks who have just sniffed out a matter that ought to be inquired into. When it is inquired into there is nothing to discover, and great heart-burning is caused in the process of investigation. These same scandal-mongers will have something fresh to-morrow morning wherewith to keep their dear tongues going. May we be favoured with very few of these irritating beings. May those that come among us always be those that can say, "Peace be to thy helpers." Whatever helps Christ I would help. Wherever I see anything of Christ there my heart shall rest. Oh, to have a large increase to this church and all the churches of hearty, loving, peace-making people!

The last word that they said to David was, "For thy God helpeth thee"; and I shall keep that last sentence very much to myself: I want to feed upon it as my portion of meat; you must not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn, and I am that ox at this time. "Thy God helpeth thee." How I do rejoice to think that God is helping the Great Son of David. All the powers of the God of nature and providence are working to aid the Lord of grace. The stars in their courses are fighting for our Immanuel. Everything is being overruled for the advance of Christ's kingdom. We are all on the tremble as to the Soudan and Egypt; but could we see all things we should rejoice. None of us know what is coming. I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I venture to foretell that mountains will be levelled for the coming of our Lord even by calamities and disasters. There will be a speedier dissolution of the empire of the false prophet and of the false prophet's imitator because of all this mixing up of the west and the east in an unwilling conjunction. I say not how or when, but the Lord's purpose shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure. When the ocean roars at its utmost fury, the Lord puts a bit into the mouth of the tempest and reins up the storm. Jehovah maketh a way for Himself amid the tumult of great waters. When confusion and uproar predominate everywhere, and old chaos seems to be coming back again, all this is but a phase of unbroken order. How swift and sure are the revolutions of the wheels which are bringing nearer the chariot of the Son of God!

Cast in your lot with "the Leader and Commander of the people," who has God with Him. It is the glory of Christ's cause that the Lord God is involved in it. Mr. Wesley's dying words were, "The best of all is, God is with us!" As I repeat the truth my heart cries, "Hallelujah! Blessed be the name of the Lord!" The Lord thy God helpeth thee, O Christ of God! The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in Thy hand. Thou must reign: Thy Father swears it to Thee. Thou shalt divide a portion with the great, and Thou shalt share the spoil with the strong, for Thou hast given up Thy soul unto death, and permitted Thy glory to be rolled in the dust; and Thou hast risen and gone into the glory; therefore Thou must reign. O Anointed of the Lord, Thy throne shall endure for ever! To-night Thy servants salute Thee again, Thou Son of David. Wounded Christ, we lay our fingers in the print of the nails, and say, "My Lord and my God." Risen Christ, we look upward as the heavens receive Thee, and we adore. Ascended Christ, we fall at Thy dear feet, and say, "Thine are we, O Son of David, anointed to be a Prince and a Saviour." Coming Christ, we wait and watch for Thine appearing! Come quickly to Thine own! Amen and amen.

THE LESSON OF UZZA

"And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets."—1 Chronicles xiii. 8.

"And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?"—1 Chronicles xiii. 12.

"So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obed-edom with joy."—1 Chronicles xv. 25.

DAVID had, in his heart, an intense love of God. During Saul's reign, God had been well-nigh forgotten in the land. The ordinances of His house had been almost, if not entirely, neglected; and when David found himself firmly seated upon his throne, one of his first thoughts was concerning the revival of religion,—the re-establishment of that form of worship which God had ordained in the wilderness by the mouth of His servant Moses. So he looked about him to see where the ark of the covenant, that most sacred of all the ancient symbols, was; and he wrote, "We heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood." Out of pure love and reverence to God, he called the people together, consulting with them so that the thing might not be done by himself alone, but by the nation. It was agreed that the ark should be brought up, and placed upon Mount Zion, near the palace of the king, in a conspicuous position where it should be the centre of religious worship for the entire nation. It was to be placed near that sacred spot where Abraham had, of old, offered up his son Isaac, that, in the great days of assembly, the Israelites might wend their way thither, and worship God as He had commanded them.

David's intention was right enough, no fault can be found with that; but right things must be done in a right way. We serve a jealous God, who, though He overlooks many faults in His people, yet, nevertheless, will have His word reverenced, and His

commands obeyed. "Be ye clean," says He, "that bear the vessels of the Lord." He will be honoured by those that attempt to draw nigh to Him. So it came to pass that, though David had a good intention, and was about to do a right thing, yet, at the first, he had *a great failure.* When we have considered the cause of that failure, we shall note that this failure wrought in David *a great fear;* and when we have meditated for a while upon that fear, we shall see that, when he set to work to honour his God after the due order, he did it with such *a great joy* that, perhaps, we have scarcely another instance of such exuberance of spirit in the worship of God as we have in the case of David, who leaped and danced before the ark of the Lord with all his might.

I. First, then, we are to consider DAVID'S GREAT FAILURE. It followed almost immediately after "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets." This was David's first attempt to bring up the ark of the covenant into the place appointed for it.

Observe, dear friends, that *there was no failure through lack of multitudes.* It is, to my mind, very delightful to worship God with the multitude that keep holy day. I know some people who think themselves the only saints in the whole world. They do not imagine that any can be the elect of God if there are more than seven or eight, "because," say they, "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"; and, therefore, simply because they are few in number, they straightway conclude that they have passed through the strait gate into the narrow way. It needs far better evidence than that to prove that they are in the right road; and, for my part, I love, as David did, to go with the multitude to the house of God, to keep time and tune with many hearts and many voices all on fire with holy devotion as they lift up the sacred song in a great chorus of praise unto the Most High. There was no failure, in that respect, on this occasion, for David gathered all Israel together, from Shihor of Egypt even unto the entering of Hemath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim." Thus they came, from all parts of the land, in their hundreds and their thousands, an exceeding great multitude; yet their attempt to bring up the ark proved a sad failure. So, you see that it is of little value merely to gather crowds of people together. However great the multitude of nominal worshippers may be, it is quite possible that they may offer no worship that is acceptable to God. We, ourselves, may come and go in our thousands, yet that alone will not guarantee that the presence of God is among us. It would be far better to be with a few, if God were in the midst of them, than to be with the multitude, and yet to miss the divine blessing.

Neither was there *any failure so far as pomp and show were concerned.* It seems that these people paid very great honour, in their own way, to this ark;—putting it on a new carriage, and surrounding it with the princes, and the captains, and the mighty men of the kingdom, together with the multitudes of the common people of the land. I doubt not that it was a very imposing array that day; and, truly, the solemn worship of God should be attended to with due decency and order, yet it may be a failure for all that. Sweet may be the strain of the sacred song, yet God may not accept it because it is sound, and nothing more. The prayer may be most appropriate so far as the language of it is concerned, yet it may fail to reach the ear of the Lord God of Sabaoth. Something more is needed beside mere outward show,—something beyond even the decent simplicities of worship in which we delight.

Neither was there any failure, apparently, *so far as the musical accompaniment was concerned.* We are told, in our text, that "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets." I like that expression, "with all their might." I cannot bear to hear God's praises uttered by those who simply whisper, as though they were afraid of making too much noise. Nay, but,—

> "Loud as His thunders, sound His praise,
> And speak it lofty as His throne";—

for He well deserves it. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, in praise of its great Creator. Let all the winds and the waves join in the concert; there cannot be any sound too jubilant for Him who is worthy of the highest praise of heaven and earth. It is right to sing unto the Lord with all your might; yet there may be a certain kind of heartiness which is not acceptable to God because it is natural, not spiritual. There may be a great deal of outward expression, yet no inward life. It may be only dead worship, after all, despite the noise that may be made. I do not say that it was altogether so in David's case; but, certainly, all the multitude, all the pomp, and all the sound, did not prevent its becoming an entire failure. What was the reason for that failure?

If I read the story aright, it seems to me, first, that *there was too little thought as to God's mind upon the matter.* David consulted the people, but he would have done better if he had consulted God. The co-operation of the people was desirable, but much more the benediction of the Most High. There ought to have been much prayer preceding this great undertaking of bringing up the ark of the Lord; but it seems to have been entered upon with very much heartiness and enthusiasm, but not with any preparatory supplication or spiritual consideration. If you read the story through, you will see that it appears to be an affair of singing, and harps, and psalteries, and timbrels, and cymbals, and trumpets, and of a new cart and cattle; that is about all there is in it. There is not even a mention of humiliation of heart, or of solemn awe in the presence of that God of whom the ark was but the outward symbol. I am afraid that this first attempt was too much after the will of the flesh, and the energy of nature, and too little according to that rule of which Christ said to the woman at Sychar, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Yes, beloved, all worship fails if that is not the first consideration in it. Let the singing be hearty and melodious, let everything in our services be in proper order; but, as the first and most important thing, let the Holy Ghost be there, so that we may draw near to God in our heart, and have real spiritual communion with Him. The outward form of worship is a very secondary matter; the inward spirit of it is the all-important thing; there appears, to me, to have been too little attention paid to that in the first attempt that David made to bring up the ark; and, therefore, it was a failure.

One very important omission was that *the priests*

were not in their proper places. They appear to have been there, but they were, evidently, not treated as their position entitled them to be. The men of war were brought to the front, and the men of worship were pushed aside. Now, in all true worship, the priest is of the first importance. "What," you ask, "do you believe in a priest?" Yes, in the great High Priest of whom the Aaronic priesthood was the type; all my hopes for time and eternity are centred in Him who is "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." If you do not put Him into the first place,—I care little what sort of worship you render,—you may be very intense, and very devout, after your own fashion,—but it is all in vain. There is no way of coming unto God except through the "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." There is no way of approaching God except through the one great High Priest, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You may cry unto God, but your prayers cannot reach His ear until Christ presents them to His Father. You may bring your sweet spices, but they will never have any fragrance before the Lord until the great High Priest puts them into the golden censer, and mingles with them the precious incense of His own merits, and so makes them acceptable before the Lord. A prayer without Christ in it will never reach heaven. Praise, which is not presented through the merits of Christ, is but a meaningless noise which can never be well-pleasing unto God.

These people not only had not the priests in their proper places, but *they also had a cart, instead of Levites, to carry the sacred ark.* The labouring oxen took the place of the willing men who were appointed by God for this service. David and all the people appear to have forgotten the appointments which God made concerning the ark, so they fell into trouble, and all their efforts proved to be a failure.

Next, I notice that, the first time, *there were no sacrifices.* They put the ark upon the cart, and went before it, and behind it, and around it, with their instruments of music, but there was no sacrificial blood shed. They had been so long out of the habit of worshipping God in His appointed way that they had forgotten very much. I wonder that David did not notice this fatal omission, and I am not surprised that Uzza died as there is no mention of the sprinkling of blood upon the mercy-seat that day. And beloved, if we leave the blood of atonement out of our worship, we leave out that which is the very life of it, for the blood is the life thereof. If you have no respect unto the atoning sacrifice of Christ, God will have no respect unto you. If you have no regard for the great propitiation which Christ has made for sin, the Lord will not accept either prayers or praises at your hands. Without the shedding of Christ's blood, there is no remission of sin.

All through this incident, we see that there was no taking heed to the commands of God, and to the rules which He had laid down. *The people brought will-worship to God,* instead of that which He had ordained. What do I mean by will-worship? I mean, any kind of worship which is not prescribed in God's own Word. It has sometimes been pleaded, as an excuse for the observance of some rite or ceremony which is not commanded in the Scriptures, that it is very instructive, or very impressive. That is no excuse or justification for disobedience. The first commandment may be broken, not only by worshipping a false god, but by worshipping the true God in another way than that which He has ordained. If you set up a mode of worship not warranted by His Word, whatever you may plead for it, it is idolatrous, and the Lord may well say to you, "Who hath required this at your hands?" Mark this,—if it be not of His appointment, neither will it meet with His acceptance. Inasmuch, therefore, as these people did not show any reverence for God by consulting His record of the rules which He had laid down for their guidance,—seeming to think that, whatever pleased them must please Him,—whatever kind of worship they chose to make up would be quite sufficient for the Lord God of Israel,—therefore, it ended in failure. Beloved take care how ye worship God. If ye are to take heed how ye hear, ye are also to take heed how ye pray, and to take heed how ye praise, and to take heed how ye come to the communion table. Take heed how, in any way, ye seek to draw near unto the living God, for He is not to be approached in any slipshod fashion that you may choose to invent. He has His own way by which alone He can be approached. His august court has rules, even as the courts of earthly kings have their regulations and laws; and if ye transgress the King's command, it may be that he will smite you as He slew Uzza, or, at the least, your worship will be unacceptable to Him.

II. Now we turn to our second text, to the second head of our discourse, namely, DAVID'S GREAT FEAR: "And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?"

What changeable creatures we are! From a careless, and almost criminal, want of thought, David's mind speedily travels to great seriousness of thought, attended with a very terrible dread. Do you wonder that *the death of Uzza caused David to fear greatly*? The procession is going along, and the harps, psalteries, timbrels, cymbals, and trumpets are sounding the high praises of God when, on a sudden, the oxen come to the threshing-floor of Chidon, and, perhaps, tempted by the sight of the grain they turn aside,—or, at least, they stumble, and the ark is likely to be upset. One mistake usually leads to another. If they had not put the ark on that cart, this trouble would not have happened. And now young Uzza, who had been living in the house where the ark had been kept so long, perhaps not thinking he is doing wrong, puts out his hand to hold the ark, and instantly falls a corpse. A thrill of horror goes through the crowd, the music stops, and David stands aghast. At first sight, it does appear to be a very severe punishment; yet we must remember that this is not the only time that God acted thus toward those who profaned the service in which they were engaged. Nadab and Abihu, instead of taking the proper fire to light their censers, took strange fire. There did not seem much difference; is not one kind of fire very much like another? Those two young men went in before the Lord with their censers kindled by strange fire, and they fell dead in a moment before God. They had only broken the law in a small matter, as it seemed; but God has His ways of measuring things, and His method is very different from ours. David ought also to have remembered how more than fifty thousand of the men of Beth-shemesh were slain when the Philistines brought back the ark, and the men of Beth-shemesh looked into it. Truly "our God is a consuming fire." He will not be trifled with. This was His ark, and He would make them know that it was His; and albeit that, with good intentions, they had surrounded it, yet since they had not reverently obeyed His commands, He would let them

see that He was not to be trifled with, nor that His ark could be touched with impunity. Do you wonder that, in the presence of that corpse, David was afraid of God that day?

He was also afraid of God for another reason, namely, that *he himself had been in a wrong frame of mind*, for we read, in the 11th verse, that "David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza." He does not seem to have been displeased with Uzza, but he was displeased with God. It seemed, to him, a hard thing that he had gathered all that crowd of people together, and that they had been doing their best, as he thought, for the honour of God, and now the whole proceedings were spoilt by the outstretched hand of an angry God in their midst. So David was angry; and when he remembered that such wicked thoughts had ever crossed his mind, he began to feel afraid of God for his own sake.

Then, I daresay, *his own sense of unworthiness for such a holy work* made him cry, "How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" He feared lest, in some unguarded moment, he might be guilty of irreverence, and so perish, as Uzza had done. I have often had, in a measure, that kind of fear upon me which came over David that day. To be a child of God, is the most blessed experience in the world, but it also involves stern discipline. When God makes you His child, you are sure to feel His rod. Others may escape it, but you will not, "for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." If you live very near to God, and you get many tokens of His favour, you will find that you must watch every step you take, and every thought you think, for the Lord is a jealous God; and where He gives the most love, there will be the most jealousy. He may leave a sinner to go to great lengths in sin, but not His saints. He may let ordinary Christians do a great deal without chastening them; but if you are privileged to lie in His bosom, if you have high fellowship with Him, you will soon know how jealous He is. I have often heard men, while praying, quote as if it were a text of Scripture, "God, out of Christ, is a consuming fire." The Bible does not say anything of the kind; it says, "Our God is a consuming fire." So, the prophet Isaiah asks, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" And what is his answer? "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly." He is the only man who can live amid such burnings,—the sacred salamander from whom the fire only burns out any remaining sin. When you ask to live near to God, see in what a terrible place, and in what a supremely blessed place, you ask to live. You want to live in the fire of His presence, even though you know that it will consume your sin, and that you will have often to suffer much while that sin is being consumed. I have said, again and again, "My Lord, burn as fiercely as it may, I do aspire to dwell in this sacred spot. Let the fire go through me till it has burned up all my dross; but, oh! do let me dwell with Thee!"

Yet I am not surprised if someone starts back, and says, "I can hardly ask for such a trial as that." Like James and John, we want to sit on the right and left hand of our Master in His glory; but when He asks, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" it will need much more grace than they had if we are able to say, from our hearts, "'We can.' By Thy grace, we shall be able and willing to endure anything if we may but dwell with Thee." For, beloved, if you have ever had even a glimpse of God in His innermost tabernacle, —if He has made His glory to shine upon you,—you have felt willing even to die, have been almost eager to die, that you might have yet more of that beatific vision, and never have it clouded again. One of the good old saints said, when he had very much of the love of Christ poured into his soul, "Hold, Lord, hold! It is enough. Remember that I am but an earthen vessel. If I have more, I shall die." If I had been in such a case, I think I would have said, "Do not hold, Lord. I am but an earthen vessel, so I shall die in the process, and glad enough shall I be to die if I may but see Thy face, and never, never, lose the vision any more."

We need not wonder that David was afraid after such a manifestation of the divine displeasure. He did the best thing he could do under the circumstances, he left the ark with Obed-edom for a while, determined to set about its removal in a different fashion another time.

III. Now we come to our third subject; that is, DAVID'S SACRED JOY: "So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obed-edom with joy." Obed-edom took the ark into his house, and *God blessed him*. Then it occurred to David that there was not much, after all, to be afraid of in the ark. That awful thing, that had smitten Uzza, had been in this other man's house, and been a blessing to him. That fact has often made my heart rejoice. I have said, "Well, I know that it is a solemn thing to live near to God; but I have seen a poor, bed-ridden woman live in the light of God's countenance, year after year, as happy as all the birds of the air; then, why should not I do the same? I have seen a plain, humble, Christian man walking with God, as Enoch did, and happy from the first of January to the last of December, and God blessing him in everything; so, come, my soul, though thy God is a consuming fire, there is nothing for His children to dread." So, after David had seen that God blessed Obed-edom for three months, he thought to himself, "Well, now, Obed-edom has had his turn, and I may have mine. I will set to work to see if I cannot worship God rightly this time, and bring up the ark unto my house in the right way."

So he began thus. *He prepared a tent for the ark.* I do not read that he did that before; but, in the 1st verse of the 15th chapter we read, "David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent." Now you see that he is thoughtful and careful in preparing a place for the ark of God; and if I want God's presence, I must prepare my mind and heart to receive it. If I want to enjoy communion with my Lord at His table, I must obey that injunction, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." I must not observe the ordinances of the Lord's house without proper thought and solemnity. As the priests washed themselves before they ministered at the altar, so would I come, cleansed and sanctified by the purifying Word, that I may acceptably appear before God.

Then, next, *the mind of the Lord was considered.* In the 2nd verse of this 15th chapter, David says, "None ought to carry the ark of the Lord but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God"; and he asserts that the breach upon them had been made because they "sought Him not

after the due order." Now is David anxious to obey God. He will do, not what he thinks proper, but what God thinks proper; and that is the right way for us to worship the Lord. How I wish that all professing Christians would revise their creed by the Word of God! How I wish that all religious denominations would bring their ordinances and forms of worship to the supreme test of the New Testament! "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." But, alas! they know that so much would have to be put away that is now delightful to the flesh, that, I fear me, we shall be long before we bring all to worship God after His own order. But, my soul, if thou art to be accepted of God, thou must see to it that, in all thine approaches to the great King, thou dost strictly observe the etiquette of His court. What is the rule for courtiers who come into the presence of the King of kings? What dress are they to wear? With what words can they approach the throne? In what spirit are they to draw nigh to God? Answer all these questions, and see that thou dost ask the Lord to make thee obedient in all things, to His gracious commands.

Further, you see that, this time, *the priests were put into their proper places.* David said, "Because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order." Now they are where they should have been at the first, in the front of the procession; and, brethren, when God accepts us, Christ will take the first place. Our great High Priest will be in the front, and we shall do nothing except through His name, and in the power of His precious blood.

Then, on this second occasion, *sacrifices were presented unto the Lord.* Scarcely had the ark rested upon the shoulders of the Levites than they offered seven bullocks and seven rams as a sacrifice unto God. So, we should never think of doing anything in the worship of our God without the seven bullocks and seven rams which are all summed up in the one perfect offering of our ever-adorable Lord. O brothers and sisters, keep Christ ever before you! Let all your good deeds be done through the strength you receive from Him, for "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." Nothing can be right that is apart from Him; but if He is our Alpha and Omega, and all the letters between, there is no fear that we shall not bring up the ark of the Lord aright. In this spirit of loving obedience, and holy awe, relying upon the sacrifice which they had presented, they seemed like hinds let loose; and David, especially, who I suppose was a representative of the whole of them, seemed as if he did not know how he could adequately express the joy that he felt. He had his harp, of which he was a master-player; so, with his skilful fingers moving among the familiar strings, he began to sing; and as he sang, he leaped like some of our Methodist friends do when they get so excited that they must needs begin to jump and to dance. I suppose that all the crowd cried, "Amen!" as David sang some of his most joyous songs of praise unto the Lord, and that a great shout went up to heaven, for everyone was glad that day, and especially David, as he danced before the Lord with all his might.

We must not forget that this carrying up of the ark was a type of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there is anything that should make a Christian's heart leap for joy, it is the fact of his Lord's return to heaven. See Him! He has risen from the dead, and now He is rising from the midst of His disciples. He continues to ascend till a cloud receives Him out of their sight, and angels fly to meet Him as He nears the pearly gates. Squadron after squadron salutes the conquering Prince, and bids Him welcome home. And who, I pray you, is this Lord of Hosts who now ascends His Father's throne, and sits down at His Father's right hand for ever, as the acknowledged King of kings and Lord of lords? It is the Man that died on Calvary,—the great representative Man who is also God. Lo, at His chariot wheels He drags sin, Satan, death, and hell. He leadeth captivity captive, and giveth gifts unto men.

> "Sing, O heavens! O earth, rejoice!
> Angel harp, and human voice,
> Round Him, as He rises, raise
> Your ascending Saviour's praise."

Now may ye, who love Him, dance with all your might; now may ye let your souls revel in intensest delight, and plunge themselves in the bottomless sea of ineffable bliss. God grant you so to do, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

THE RECORDERS

"To record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel."—1 Chronicles xvi. 4.

DAVID took care of every part of divine worship; he saw that nothing was neglected in the service of the God in whom he delighted. Let this stand as an example to us to be careful about everything which concerns the honour of God. Do not allow any one of the duties of your holy faith to be forgotten, but seek to exhibit harmonious and entire obedience to the divine will. Do not merely attend to what are called religious duties, but with equal religiousness regard your social duties, and present to the Lord as far as you can a complete service. Such David desired to do. You observe that he had those about him who offered burnt offerings unto the Lord continually, morning and evening, as God had commanded—these things were not to be left undone. And then he set apart certain others to attend to the service of song. Theirs it was to sound the trumpets and to call the people together; theirs to touch the harmonious strings of harps, or to sound with cymbals of brass, or to lift their voices on high in the sweet praises of Jehovah; for God is to be served with sacrifice, and praised with song. Our God accepts us when we labour for Him, and when we praise Him: let both be done heartily. It were a pity if we worked so hard that we could not sing; it were equally unhappy if we sang so much that we idled away our time; there must be a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and

a pomegranate, music and fruit, service and song. There was also a third company set apart for a somewhat extraordinary work, namely, as out text tells us, *to record*. They were to take notes of what God had done, and was doing; they were to be the chroniclers of the nation, and out of their chronicles they were to compose the psalms and songs. Perhaps that is the meaning of the word "record" here, but the original bears another meaning—"to bring to remembrance." If they were not to act as historians to record, they were as minstrels to tell out what had been written in old time, and bring it to remembrance. I rather prefer the idea that their duty was to do both—to record the loving-kindness of the Lord and to bring to the remembrance of the people what the Lord's right hand had done in former times. Now, if you think a minute, this third class of people who are placed between the Levites before the ark, and the singers who thanked and praised the Lord would be useful both to those who went before and to those who followed after. Those who had to serve before the ark of the Lord are mentioned first. Now, what could so cheer them in their service as to read of the goodness of the Lord? What so inspire them to attend reverently to the service of the Lord's house as to remember the former loving-kindness of the Lord? What arguments could they have for fidelity that should be more powerful than the record of His mercy which endureth for ever? Those who were to conduct the praising and the thanksgiving are mentioned after these recorders. But what is the raw material of which praise is made but the record of what God is and of what He has done for His people? Methinks whenever they wanted to sing they would turn to these remembrancers and recorders, and say to them "Tell us something of what God has done, for the simple record of Jehovah's acts is the noblest psalmody." Do you notice that, whenever we praise God best, we simply declare what He is, for the bare fact about God is the highest praise, and you have only to mention what He does in order to produce the sublimest poetry: the grateful mention of His glorious acts is in itself adoration. You cannot adore the Lord better than by devoutly rehearsing His mighty acts—so good is His name, so blessed are His deeds. "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can shew forth all His praise?"

Now, from the fact that David set apart certain Levites to record, I gather three or four thoughts, of which I am going to speak to-night. The first is,—it is implied that *there is a fault in man's memory*. It is equally clear, in the second place, that *we ought to endeavour to assist memory*. Thirdly, it is certain, too, from the appointment of recorders, that *there is a good deal worth remembering*. And, fourthly, from the connection of these recorders with the singers we see that, *to right-minded persons memory will always produce praise:* when we have recorded the great mercies of the Lord, then we shall be sure to thank and praise Him.

I. First of all, we may gather, I think, without any straining of the text, that if recorders were appointed, THERE IS SOME FAULT IN OUR MEMORY TOWARDS THE LORD.

What faults there are in our memory touching the work and word of God! Perhaps some of you have very powerful memories, and may be able to treasure up whole volumes as some have done. It might be said of you as it was of Dr. Lawson, that if the whole Bible had been destroyed, he could have reproduced it from memory. This is a great gift and a worthy use for it, but I fear that few of us have it. It is not likely that men could say of us as of the famous Grecian, that out of ten thousand soldiers he knew every one of his men by name. I do not find fault with short memories, but with good memories which are treacherous towards divine things. What I complain of is that memory may be very strong concerning self-interest, grievances and trials, and yet towards God's mercies it may be very weak. I am not going to speak about memory in general, I speak only of that faculty as it is exercised towards the favours and loving-kindness of the Lord—and I am sure there is a fault in it, for, first of all, *it has been prejudiced by the fall*. Do you not know that if anything bad ever reaches your ear you cannot forget it. That lewd song which you heard in your youth—in your unregenerate times; you would give everything to forget it, but it will come up—a snatch of it has perhaps been suggested by a hymn tune sung in worship, or even by the language used in prayer. What a grasp memory has for things that never ought to have crossed the mind at all, and which, though they have crossed the mind, ought to be forgotten. Well said an old divine, "Man's memory is a pond in which all the fish die and all the frogs live." I am sure it is so. The bad remains and the good—ah, how you have to charge and constrain yourself to recollect a tithe of it. The filth of Sodom is drawn to shore by memory, but the fair products of Jerusalem are permitted to glide down the stream to the ocean of oblivion. The fall has given a sad bias to memory; like a strainer it lets the good liquor run through and only retains the dregs.

Again, memory towards God's mercy has been *very much impaired by neglect*. Any one part of the body left unused will lose power, and any faculty of the mind which is never exercised will gradually become weak. Now you may have very powerful memories, as I said before, towards earthly things, but I will venture to say that some of you have never sought to remember the mercies of the Lord. Nay, you have not seen them to be God's mercies. It has never occurred to you to try and recollect what God has done for you. I would not bring a harsh impeachment, but I suggest the question,—Have you not lived as if there were no God? as if the mercies of every day were indeed of your own procuring? as if you had no indebtedness to God, and were under no obligation to be grateful to Him? I do not wonder that your memory towards divine things is weak, for you have never exercised it—never thought of exercising it; and consequently, my friend, if ever you are to learn to praise the Lord you will have need of great helps in the work, for your memory will not furnish you with materials. It has no store of good things with which to feed your devotion, you have kept its chambers empty by neglect.

Memory, touching God's mercy, too, is often *overloaded with other things*. Memory can only carry a certain amount, but, oh, what waggon-loads of mischief memory is freighted with! Some of us can remember so little that it is a pity for us to try to recollect anything trifling or of minor importance. It might be well to dedicate that faculty to the weightiest things only: to things imperative for this life, to things essential for the life to come. How foolishly some will stuff up their memory with

rubbish that is not worth harbouring. There are songs and pieces of "poetry," so called, and scraps taken from novels, and I know not what besides, with which poor memory is gorged, till it is blown out as a balloon with foul gas. It is fed upon mere husks till it is surfeited, stuffed, and crammed, and labours under an indigestion. I think Aristotle used to call memory the stomach of the soul, in which it retains and digests what it gathers; but men cram it full of everything that it does not want—upon which the soul cannot really feed, and thus they ruin it for remembering the best things. Some people can hardly carry home the text of the discourse. Is it likely they would? Other thoughts choke up the memory and put the good thing, the gracious thing, the grateful thing, the right thing, entirely out of the mind. Unload thy memory to-night, man, if thou canst, even of thy necessary cares. It is good when a sermon helps to unload you. You recollect the man who said that when he went to church generally he used to calculate how many looms the building would hold, and how many workmen might be employed in it; but, said he, "When I heard Mr. Whitefield I forgot that there was a loom in the whole world." I wish it was always so in God's house. But there, the good woman recollects her household, she does not know whether she put the guard on the fire; she wonders what may have become of the baby while she is away. Another misses a ring from her finger; did she leave it in the basin when she washed her hands before she came away? The merchant is worrying about that bill which is coming due to-morrow: he wishes that he could forget it, but the business will come in. And this is why you cannot remember God's mercy, because your memory is occupying itself with a host of earthly things which ought not to intrude into God's day and into God's worship; or if they do should be treated as Abraham treated the carnivorous birds when they came down upon his sacrifice. The ravens and the kites came to defile and eat what he had offered unto God, but we read that "when the birds came down upon the sacrifice Abraham drove them away." So must you try to do. When the time has come to remember God's mercies and to worship Him, you must keep the birds away, or else they will devour the ripe fruit of your praise before you can gather it.

Memory has also suffered from another cause, namely, from *its connection with the other faculties.* Every power of the mind has been injured by sin. The evil results of the fall went through the entire system, and weakened and perverted our entire nature, so that the whole head is sick. *The understanding* among the rest, a very noble power, has been very much darkened, and, as every single part of a man operates upon the rest, the darkening of the understanding has caused a grievous weakening of the memory with regard to divine things. You will see this in a minute, for what a man does not understand he does not readily remember. Many forget God's mercies because they do not appreciate them when they have them. They do not see the mercy of them; they have not the power to see how much love there is in them, and how little they deserve them, and therefore they are not impressed by them so as to make a note of their being received. When daily favours come such men take them into stock as wholesale dealers receive parcels of goods, and send them out again without so much as opening them, or taking their quantity. They scarcely know the meaning of the loving-kindness of the Lord, for He is not in all their thoughts. Of course, a man does not remember what he does not understand. If you set a boy to learn a passage without any meaning in it he may be able to repeat it to you the next time he says his lesson, but before long it must glide out of his memory, because he does not understand it. Becloud the light of the understanding, and the image formed upon the memory will be dull and indistinct, and very apt to vanish away.

Again, *the affections* have been perverted, as well as the understanding. Man, by nature, does not love God. I tremble when I think of that sad truth, for it seems to me the most awful thing that can happen to an intelligent being not to love God. That would be my hell. I count it the hell of hell not to love God: to be in such a condition that the infinitely lovable One, so perfect, both in His character and His actions, so divinely fitted to be adored, should not be loved is horrible. It is death, and worse than death. I will not say it is blindness, deafness, and the loss of every honourable moral power; it is utter death not to love God. It is partly because we do not love Him that we forget His mercies. Reflect a moment, and you will soon see. Here is a present which has been given you by an entire stranger, and though it may be of some value, you do not think much of it; but there is a ring that was given you by your mother—your mother now among the angels. Ah, you will not forget that gift, love has registered it among your richest possessions. I have many things that have been given to me by divers friends, and I value them all: I never forget them, I never can because of my esteem and affection for those who gave them to me. And so when you view divine mercy as given you by your dear and ever blessed Father in heaven, then you do not forget it; but if it is merely regarded as a passing stranger's gift, you care not for it. If you think of a blessing as "the gift of fortune," as the world generally does, or look upon it as a windfall from the tree of luck, you will not remember it. See in the bread you eat a Father's hand supplying you; see even in the cup of cold water the bounty of your God; see in the comforts of home and health, and the sparing of your reason, the goodness of Him who loves you and whom you love; and memory will put forth her strength. Want of love breeds want of recollection in us, and so the memory grows faulty.

And, alas, one thing more. Our memory of God's goodness is often *crushed down by a sense of present pain.* When you suffer from sharp pains and weary aches and a fevered brow, you are prone to forget the days of health and strength, and only recollect the sharp intervals of weakness and sorrow. When you stand over the grave of one you love, you are apt in the loss to forget the loan. When a dear one is taken away, the right way to look at it is, that a precious loan has been called in by its Owner. We ought to be very grateful to have been allowed to borrow the comfort so long, and ought not to repine when the Owner takes back what He so kindly lent. The husband to whom you have been married these ten years, or the child that has nestled in your bosom two years, or the friend that communed with you half a life-time, or the brother who was such a comfort all his days—when these are gone, do not look at the going only, but thank God that you ever had them. Be honest enough to acknowledge the good as well as to lament the evil. Bless a taking

as well as a giving God, for He takes but what He gave. It is not so with us as a rule. We are living in the present too much; we strike a mark of oblivion across the happy past, we look with dread upon the unknown future, and dwell on the troublous present, and so we forget the Lord's mercy to us. You are getting old now and you are feeble, but bless the Lord you had fifty years of manly vigour. You cannot now do what you once did, and your mind is enfeebled, but bless God there was a time when you could serve Him with body and soul without fatigue. Perhaps you are brought low in estate and are afraid of poverty; be grateful that you have had enough and to spare for many long years. Perhaps you are now a little sad. Aye, but recollect the days when you used to praise the Lord on the high-sounding cymbals, and stood upon the high places of the earth. Do not let memory fail you because of the present crushing sorrow, but bless the name of the Lord for what He has done. May the Holy Spirit help your infirmities, and bring the loving-kindness of past years to your remembrance.

Memory is defective—this is our first inference, and I think it is clear enough.

II. Now, secondly, as David appointed recorders, this proves, in the second place, that WE OUGHT TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN TO ASSIST OUR MEMORIES TOWARDS GOD. We should not allow the mercies of the Lord to lie forgotten in unthankfulness and without praises die, if we can help it. How can we strengthen memory?

I conceive that sometimes it is a good thing to *make an actual record* of God's mercy—literally to write it down in your pocket-book, so as to look at it another day. I am sure it is a proper thing to do, and often it will prove to be a very useful memento. I do not believe in keeping diaries and putting down every day what you feel, or what you think you feel but never did feel. I fear it would become a mere formality, or an exercise of imagination to most of us; for when I read very pious people's diaries they always seem to me to have had an eye to the people who would read them, and to have put down both more and less than the truth; I am a little frightened at the artificial style of experience which it must lead to. The fact is that we have not a great deal to put down every day if we lead an ordinary life; but there are days which ought to have a memorial. Days of sore trouble and of great deliverance, days of sharp temptation, and of wonderful help: these must needs be chronicled. Some days of brilliant mercy are like seven days in one. There are days which seem like chips of heaven, fragments of eternity, stray days of delight which have broken loose from the days of heaven and wandered down to earth. Make a note of the favoured day. Put the event down in black and white just as it occurred. Never mind if nobody else ever reads it: *you* will read it one of these days; and thank God that it stands recorded for the strengthening of your faith. Therefore make a record. "I cannot express myself well in writing," says one. Well, you know, Jacob used to set up a stone and pour oil on the top of it; this was his way, though he knew little or nothing about pen and ink. You can invent some way surely by which you can remember choice favours. You can make a notch somewhere, a mark on an old tree, a line on the margin of the Bible over against the text that blessed you. You can put a scratch somewhere of which you shall say afterwards, "I know what that means. I did not want to forget the divine goodness, and there is the record. Glory be to God, it comes fresh to my soul again as I look upon it.

Another help to memory is to *be sure to praise God thoroughly at the time you receive His goodness.* You will not forget it if, when it has come, your mind is in a suitable condition of gratitude; and, indeed, if you use the mercy at once to God's glory you will do better still. Days that are full of thanksgiving will be remembered, and those mercies around which we burned the incense of praise will leave their fragrance in the heart's secret chambers. Take care that if your memory is weak, you praise God while the mercy is newly born in your house.

Frequently it will help memory much to *set apart a little time for meditation.* A godly man and his wife were accustomed to take half-an-hour on Saturday evening to go over the mercies of the week: this is a good example. But, says one, "I could not spare so much time." No, no, I do not suppose you could, but you spare hours to grumble over the miseries of the week. Oh, yes, we talk freely when we get together about our pains and our losses, and about the bad times. They are very bad now, are they not? And you have all talked about them seven days a week for many a long week together. You have said fifty times, "I never saw such a season, there is no business, there is nothing stirring; there never was such stagnation." Now, as we all know all about that, and are pretty well agreed that it is true, could we not now go on to something else, and could not the time which we waste in telling out our troubles be spent in meditating on our mercies? Try if you cannot spare half-an-hour with your wife for such an exercise as I have mentioned, and I believe that you would spend half an hour more happily and profitably. Say, "Come, wife, and help me; help my memory, and I will help yours. Let us remember what God has done for us this week"; then go over your own story, and listen to her pleasant annotations. I do not hesitate to say that my life-story is as full of mercy as a honeycomb is full of sweetness when it drips with honey. How God has treated you I do not know, but He has indulged me with such love that if He will only let me get into a corner in heaven and praise Him to all eternity, I will scarcely ask Him for anything else but the opportunity to adore Him: I mean to bless Him whatever comes to me: I cannot help it. I have been so favoured of providence and grace that, if I were crushed in a mortar, I think every little bit and fragment of me would bless and praise His holy name, "for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever." This is my advice, and I have not given it you without having tried it myself—often meditate on what the Lord has done, and that will help your memory.

Then, again, *often rehearse His mercy in the ears of others.* I like to get with dear brethren who talk about God's loving-kindness, they are good company. I have noticed the difference between two farmers for instance. One of them never did have a good crop, though, to my knowledge, he had a "middling" one once, and that was at the time that he could hardly gather it, for it was too heavy for the reapers. But then it was a "middling" one. He has never made any money; I know he was a poor man when he began, and I know he has brought up a large family, and is rich now, but he never made any money—never. Nobody ever does by farming, or by any

other business, as you all know by common report. Well, I heard the grumbler's story, and I turned to another friend. This farmer says, " Well, it may not have been a very good year for wheat last year, but then there is a capital crop coming on to make up for it." Another year he said, " Well, I do not think the grain will pay, but the sheep are turning out uncommonly well." He has always something to say by way of honouring God's mercy. And is not that as it ought to be? He says, " Blessed be God, I have always had bread to eat and raiment to put on; I am a deal better off now than I thought I should be, and I have my portion to give to the work of the Lord, who has dealt so well with me." That is the way to talk, for it is truthful and it praises God, and it is the talk that God should hear from us. If you tell others your mercies you will not be so likely to forget them.

Sometimes it will help you to remember your mercies *if you use everything about you as a memento.* How can that be? Have you got a boy? Look at him and think of what mercy is bound up in that child: remember when he was little and sickly, and you prayed that he might live; when he met with an accident, and yet he was not killed, as he might have been; when he went out into life, and God kept him out of temptation; when you saw the first sign of piety; when you heard his first prayer; when you found that he was trying to be useful; when you heard his first address as he tried to speak to others about the Lord Jesus. I know the joy of such mercy, and I cannot hold my tongue when I think of it, for I am highly favoured; and I hope that you either have had the same blessing on your growing lads or will have it. Well, the boy will be a memento of God's mercy. Look at anybody's child and say, " I, also, was a child once," and then think of the mercies of God to you from childhood to the present time. Go into the street and meet a beggar. Should not that make you thank God that you are not forced to beg your bread, and wear rags, but are provided for? Turn down by Bethlehem hospital, and as you pass that institution thank God that you have not lost your reason. Look at the Blind School, and thank God that you have not lost your eyesight. Pass by the hospital, and thank God that you are not stretched upon a bed of agony, having lost a limb. Go into a churchyard, and thank God that you are yet alive. Reflect upon the judgment to come, and thank God that you are not in hell. Oh, my dear friends, everything ought to make us praise God, from the little birds that wake the morning to the twinkling stars that glad the night. Every breath of air, and drop of rain, and gleam of sunlight ought to refresh our memory and arouse us to praise the Lord.

That is the second point: we ought to do our best to assist our feeble memories.

III. Thirdly—and here I shall ask you to preach to yourselves—WE HAVE ALL HAD MERCIES TO REMEMBER.

I am going to include everybody in these remarks first, whether they are converted people or not.

We have all had *common mercies.* I have already hinted at them in speaking of those who are suffering from their loss. From our childhood until now we have had bread to eat and raiment to put on. Some of us have enjoyed an abundance of common mercies; we have not had to live from hand to mouth, nor labour like slaves. Others who have had a harder lot should thank God that there has always been deliverance in the hour of need, bread has been given, and water has been sure. They have not always had what they might have liked, but there has been enough to keep them alive; and here they are in good health to prove it. Oh, to have your reason: to have the use of your limbs; to have your children about you! Even though you be poor, these are great blessings. Even these ordinary mercies should awaken your gratitude.

Then, in addition to common mercies, we have had those of *special providence.* Is there one person here who has not been at times favoured with remarkable interpositions of God's providence? Flavel used to say, " Those who notice providences will not be long without providences to notice." I think it is so. I could remember scores. If I had time to write them I could mention dozens of remarkable providences which have occurred to myself, some of which would not be believed by anybody else, and therefore shall not be told, but they are true for all that. There are matters known only to the Master and His unworthy servant for which I praise His name in my heart of hearts. Have you not had some such secrets between you and God: remarkable things, special things which, if you could write them, men would not believe them? Well, praise His name for the peculiar favours, but do not forget the more usual ones. Recollect what the Puritan said. He and his son had to ride some twenty miles each to meet each other, and when his son came in he said, " Father, I have had a most remarkable providence. My horse stumbled badly three times, and yet he did not fall." " I am grateful," said the old gentleman, " but I have had a remarkable providence, too, for my horse never stumbled all the way." We do not think of that. If there is a railway accident, and we just escape by the skin of our teeth, we say, " What a wonderful mercy! " Ought you not to be quite as grateful when you travel without an accident? Should you not see as much the hand of God in your perfect safety as in your rescue from danger? Remember the hourly providence of God which watches over you when you observe it not.

I should like to remind every unregenerate man here present of *the longsuffering mercy of God.* You have not loved Him, but He has blessed you. You have sometimes spoken very sad things against His gospel, but He has not resented it. Possibly I speak to some who have even cursed His name, but He has not cursed *you.* You have defied Him; and oh! it often seems to me to be a wonderful thing that a man should lift his hand to heaven and defy God, and that God remains quiet in pitying patience. Do you think that God—the infinite God—is going to be put into a passion by such a puny thing as you are? No, He has appointed a day in which He will settle these matters with you by His Son Jesus Christ who will judge the quick and the dead. He will not stir Himself out of His sublime compassion for you. But what a wonderful thing it is that He does not! Why there are thousands of men who if we had done a hundred thousandth part as much evil towards them as we have done towards God, would have fallen upon us with a word and a blow, or rather there would not have been any word, there would have been two blows; and if it had been in their power to take our lives they would not have hesitated. Men could not have borne such provocation as sinners heap upon the Lord. You have provoked Jehovah

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to His face and thrust your finger into His eye. "Nay," say you, "how is that?" Why, when you mock religious people,—when you make jests and mirth about those who fear Him you do this. Recollect that text, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of My eye." That is an irritating thing enough, is it not? and yet you have touched the apple of Jehovah's eye; and instead of smiting you into nothingness in return, or sending you down to hell, He has still had mercy upon you. Let us gratefully remember this almighty patience, and bless His name, whoever we may be.

"Lord, and am I yet alive,
Not in torment, not in hell?
Still doth Thy good Spirit strive—
With the chief of sinners dwell?
Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am, I am, out of hell."

Furthermore, we should all praise God, or at any rate the most of us here, that we have enjoyed *gospel privileges.* If you have not believed in Jesus, yet you have heard of Him. If you have rejected His grace, yet the kingdom of God has come nigh unto you. The door has been set open if you have not entered; and the call of the gospel has been given though you have not accepted it. You are still on praying ground and pleading terms with God. You are still where you are wooed by a Saviour's love. Do thank God for this! Do thank God that you are not living in the dark ages, or in a far-off heathen land where the saving Name is not known; but you are where the brazen serpent is lifted high, and the message comes to you—"Look and live." "To you is the word of this salvation sent."

Dear brethren, though I have thus spoken to everybody in the place, there is a special class to whom I must address myself. You, my brethren in Christ,—you have, above all others, ten thousand times ten thousand reasons for remembering the past and blessing the name of the Lord. Look back to the hole of the pit whence you were digged. Remember Him who digged you thence. Look to the blood that bought you. Look to the Holy Spirit who renewed you. Look at the pardon which absolved you; look to the grace that changed you; look to the love that saved you; look to the wisdom that has guided you; look to the power that has upheld you. The life of a Christian should be unbroken gratitude, for it is a life of unceasing mercy. While others should praise God as creatures we must praise Him as new creatures. They can praise Him because He made them; we must praise Him because He hath "begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Therefore, lift up your hearts and voices, beloved, and praise the Lord at the remembrance of His goodness.

IV. The last thing is to be this—that ALL OUR MEMORIES SHOULD TEND TO MAKE US PRAISE AND BLESS GOD. We can rest but a minute here.

Remember your mercies. Remember there is not one you have deserved. That bread which does not choke the sinner might justly do so, for he is an unworthy recipient of it. The earth which does not open to swallow you up must often wonder why it is not commissioned so to do, for you are so rebellious against God. We do not deserve the air we breathe, or the water we drink. Everything we have is sweetened with unspeakable mercy.

All the good that we enjoy comes from God. Recollect that! Alas, most men forget it. Rowland Hill used to say that worldlings were like the hogs under the oak, which eat the acorns, but never think of the oak from which they fell, nor lift up their heads to grunt out a thanksgiving. Yes, so it is. They munch the gift and murmur at the Giver. Would God we did begin to remember that every good gift comes to us from the Divine hand, and that therefore the Lord is to be praised. We have received mercies at times, when, if we had not had them, the absence of them would have ended our lives, or would have involved us in misery worse than death. Do you not, some of you, remember now when you said in your soul, "Oh Lord, if Thou dost but help me this time, I will praise Thee as long as I live"? Yet, when you received the benefit you rendered no fit return. For the time you were grateful after a sort, but, as bread eaten is soon forgotten, so your remembrance of the mercy of God passed away. It ought not so to be.

I am now going to put a few questions to all present. First, *have you ever lived in gratitude?* Are you now living to God's praise? Are you now conscious of your obligations, and anxious to show that you feel them? If not—if not, I would like you to *feel how mean you are.* Does that offend you? I would like you to be offended with yourselves. What do you think of those who are ungrateful *to you* when you have been kind to them? Ah, you look upon them with indignation. Sometimes when I know that a man has been ungrateful to a friend of mine, very ungrateful, I cannot help looking upon him with contempt. If you have lived in this world for fifty years, and have never shown any gratitude to God in life, *feel mean.* Feel what a miserable wretch you are to be living wholly for yourself, while the God who has fed you and blessed you all your life long has not had the turn of a penny from you in the way of real praise and true gratitude. I say again, feel mean, and then go to Jesus' feet and tell Him that you feel it, and cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." If you have never been a drunkard or a swearer, or unjust, think it bad enough to have been ungrateful. If you have lived without serving your God, think it sin enough to have made yourself base as the dirt beneath your feet, and, at the thought of it, humble yourself before your gracious God.

Next if you are able to say "Through divine grace I have praised God, and I do desire to live entirely to His glory," yet, dear brother, *have you or I ever praised Him enough? Have we ever praised Him as we ought?* "Oh, no," say you, "and we never shall." And I agree with you: we never shall. The poet stretched words a little, but his meaning was right enough, when he said—

"But, oh, eternity's too short,
To utter all Thy praise."

We must feel, we ought to feel, the happy burden of the Lord's praise to be too heavy for us. We confess that we cannot bless the Lord enough, either as to heartiness, frequency, or service. No human strength can praise God sufficiently, but still let us be doing something more for God than ever we have done. We sang just now, and we sang, I think, very fairly; but let us act as well as sing. Let us consecrate ourselves and our substance far more fully to God. What are you doing for God? What are you doing for my Lord Jesus? Have you a precious alabaster box at home which you would like to break,

that you might pour the ointment on His head? Do it, and do it soon. Some are very choice about their alabaster boxes, and keep them under lock and key. They take their friends upstairs, and show them their rare treasures. They ask them to visit their houses to see their alabaster boxes, and they even talk of what will be done with their choice things when their estate shall go through the Probate Court. That is what they are talking about, but as to actually pouring the costly perfume on the head of the Lord Jesus personally, in their own lifetime, it has not entered into their heads yet. God lead you to honour your Redeemer at once with the best you have. Give to God your best—your very best. Give God yourself: your all. He is worthy of it. And, oh, count it a high honour if He accepts it at your hands through Jesus Christ your Saviour.

Lastly, if anybody here says, "I would like to begin to remember the Lord's mercies, and to praise His name," then you must begin at the cross. The centre of everything that is good is the cross of Christ. No man begins a life of praise, or a life of prayer, or a life of holiness aright unless he begins within sight of the crucified Saviour, led there by the Holy Spirit. Go there with your ingratitude like a burden on your heart, and look to the flowing of the Redeemer's precious blood, and the load of ingratitude will roll into His sepulchre and will never be laid to your charge. And then when you get rid of the guilt you can begin—yea, you will begin—henceforward to praise Him and magnify His name. God give you a memory capable of treasuring up His favours. May He enrich you with the benedictions of His covenant that you may have much to treasure up; and may the whole of the sweet canes and precious spices which memory has laid up be used as fuel for the flame of thanksgiving in life, and in death, and through eternity.

THE THRESHING-FLOOR OF ORNAN

"At that time when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there."—1 Chronicles xxi. 28.

"Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel."—1 Chronicles xxii. 1.

DAVID was for many years searching for a site for the great temple which he purposed to build for Jehovah his God. It had been ordained that the sacrifices offered to the one God should be offered by all Israel upon one altar; but as yet the ark of the Lord was within curtains, near to David's palace, and the altar of burnt offering was situated at Gibeon. Where should the one altar be erected? Where should the ark find its permanent dwelling-place? David said, "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Yet for a long time he received no indication as to the exact spot whereon the Lord's altar should be reared, save only that he was told that the Lord had chosen Zion and desired it for His habitation.

David watched, and waited, and prayed, and in due time he received the sign. God knew the spot, and had consecrated it long before by His appearance unto Abraham. The other Sabbath-day, you remember, our text was "Jehovah-jireh," and we then learned that in the mount the Lord would be seen. Upon Mount Moriah, on or near that particular spot which had been named Jehovah-jireh, was the temple to be built. Abraham had there unsheathed the knife to slay his son. Wondrous type of the great Father offering up His Only-begotten for the sins of men! The scene of that grand transaction was to be the centre of worship for the chosen people. Where Abraham made the supreme sacrifice, there should his descendants present their offerings. Or if we look into the type and see God there presenting Jesus as a sacrifice for men, it was most suitable that man should for ever sacrifice to God where God made a sacrifice for him. As yet it was not known to David that this was the chosen place. Now it is indicated by memorable signs; the angel of justice stands above the spot; and his sword is sheathed there in answer to the cries of the afflicted king, according to the long-suffering mercy of God. Then David clearly saw the mind of the Lord, and said, "This is the house of Jehovah my God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel." Then he commenced at once with double speed to prepare the materials for the temple. Though he knew that he might not build it, since his hands had been stained with blood, yet he would do all that he could to help his son Solomon in the great enterprise.

This problem which David had at last worked out by the good hand of God upon him, is one which in a deep spiritual sense exercises our hearts full often. Where is it that man may meet with God? How is it that man may speak with his offended Lord and be reconciled to Him? Is there not some meeting-place where the sinner may express his repentance, and where mercy may grant full absolution? Many are saying, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" Hearts touched by the Spirit of God are still seeking after God if haply they may find Him. In what condition, and by what means may man be at peace with God, and dread no longer the sword of His justice?

For the heart of some of us that problem takes a further shape; we know where man may meet with God, but we want to know how the careless, proud, rebellious heart shall be induced to come to God in His appointed way. We know it is by the power of the Holy Ghost, through the preaching of the word, and the uplifting of the all-attracting cross; but we would fain know the state of mind which will lead up to reconciliation; for now we often have to go back to Him that sent us, and to cry, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" We would lead men to God by Jesus Christ if we could; we stretch out the finger, and we point the way, but they will not see; we stretch out both hands, and intreat them to come, but they will not yield; our heart breaketh for the

longing that it hath to present every man in Christ reconciled unto the living God; but how shall it be? How shall the sinner come unto God?

We may get some light from the type before us upon that question—Where shall God's temple be? How shall men be brought to it? We speak not at this time upon natural things, but upon the things of the Spirit; therefore let us pray the Holy Spirit to enlighten and instruct us, for only by His aid shall spiritual truth enter our hearts!

And, first, I remark that *externally there was, and there is nothing in any place why it should be the peculiar meeting-place of God with man;* but, secondly, that *spiritually the place which God did choose was most suitable;* for in it we read the true ground upon which God does actually meet with men in a way of grace. When we have lingered over these two subjects, we shall then have to exhort you after this fashion,—*heartily let us use the place which God hath set apart to be our meeting-place with Himself.* "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."

I. First, then, this truth is believed by you, though, alas! not by all men, that EXTERNALLY THERE IS NOTHING IN ANY PLACE WHY GOD SHOULD THERE MEET WITH MEN.

The Lord chose the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite as the spot whereupon for many a day His holy worship should be openly celebrated according to the outward ceremonies of a typical dispensation. There the Temple was built, and for a thousand years it stood as the centre of Divine worship, so far as it was visibly presented according to His ordinance. What that mount may yet become we will not at this time consider. Prophets give us bright hints of what shall yet be even on Mount Zion, which has so long been trodden under foot of the adversary. But why was the threshing-floor of Ornan to be the meeting-place of David with his God, and the spot where prayer was to be heard?

Certainly it was *a very simple, unadorned, unecclesiastical place.* The threshing-floor of Ornan boasted no magnificence of size, or beauty of construction. There was just the rock, and I suppose a composition spread upon it of hard clay or cement, that the feet of the oxen might the better tread out the corn. That was all it was; yet when the Temple with all its glory crowned the spot, God was never more conspicuously present than on that bare, ungarnished threshing-floor. "Meet God in a barn!" saith one. Why not? Does that astonish you? God met Adam in a garden, Abraham under a tree, and Noah in an ark. There is less of man in the open field than in the cathedral, and where there is least of man there is at least an opportunity to find most of God. "Meet God on a threshing-floor!" Why not? It may be a thousand times more sacred than many a chancel; for there simple minds are likely to pay their homage in hearty truthfulness, while in the other the artificialness of the place may foster formality. God has met with man in a dungeon, in a cave, in a whale's belly. When you have displayed all your skill in architecture, can you secure any more of the Divine Presence than the disciples had in the upper room? Can you get as much of it? A tasteful building may be a way of showing your pious regard for the Lord, and so far it may be justifiable and acceptable; but take care that you do not regard it as essential, or even important, or you will make an idol of it. If the church or chapel be esteemed for its form or tastefulness, it will become a mere exhibition of skill and industry, and so be no more sacred than the house of a greedy merchant, or the palace of a profligate prince. No chisel of mason, or hammer of carpenter can build a holy place. Without either of these a spot may be none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. God chose a threshing-floor for His audience with David, just as aforetime he had chosen to reveal Himself in a bush to Moses. His presence had been glorious on the sandy floor of the wilderness, in the midst of the curtains of goats' hair; and now it was gracious among the sheaves and the oxen. How can He that filleth all things care about a house which is made with hands? You know how curtly Stephen dismisses even Solomon's Temple with a word—"but Solomon built him a house. Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." What was that golden fane to the Infinite Majesty? Is not His own Creation sublimer far? No arch can compare with the azure of heaven, no lamps can rival the sun and moon, no masonry can equal that city whose twelve foundations are of precious stones. Thus saith the Lord by the prophet: "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest? For all those things hath Mine hand made." Wherefore, then, should He not choose the hill whereon Ornan had made a hardened floor whereon to thresh his corn? At any rate that was the Lord's meeting-place with David, His audience chamber with the suppliant king; as if to show that He careth not for tabernacles or temples, but by His own presence makes that place glorious wherein He reveals Himself.

Moreover, it was *a place of ordinary toil,*—not merely a floor, but a threshing-floor in present use, with oxen present, and all the implements of husbandry ready to hand. It was so ordinary, and so everyday a place, that none could have been more so: as if the Lord would say to us, "I will meet you anywhere; I will be with you in the house and in the field; I will speak with you when you till the ground, when you thresh your corn, when you eat your bread." Every place is holy where a holy heart is found. This ought to gladden the solitude of godly men. God is with you, therefore be of good cheer. If you are on board ship, or if you are wandering in the woods, or are banished to the ends of the earth, or are shut out from the Sabbath assemblies of God's house, yet

> "Where'er you seek Him He is found,
> And every place is hallowed ground."

On the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite did God meet with David, and in your workroom, at your bench, or upon your bed, or behind the hedge, or in the corner of a railway carriage, the Lord will hear you, and commune with you.

My heart rejoices when I think that this was not only a very unadorned place, and one that was given up to common uses, but it was also *in the possession of a Jebusite.* The Jebusites were among the nations doomed for their iniquities; they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise; and this vast rock on which the Temple is to stand, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, belongs at first to one of the accursed seed of Canaan. Herein the Lord showeth that He is no respecter of persons; He would

meet the king, not on the land of an Israelite, but on the threshing-floor of a Jebusite. The Jews wrapped themselves up within themselves, and said, "The temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord are we": but the Lord seemed to rebuke their national pride by saying, "And your Temple is built upon the threshing-floor of a Jebusite." If they would but have remembered this, the Jews might in our Lord's day have been more tolerant of the conversion of the Gentiles to God. Moreover, Gentile blood flowed in the veins of that very king who established their empire, and who was now prostrate before his God, interceding for Jerusalem. Remember Ruth, and whence she came. She put her trust under the wing of Jehovah, God of Israel, and became the great-grandmother of David. David never seemed to forget that fact, for his psalms are full of far-reaching desires and good wishes for all the peoples of the earth. Remember his words: "Let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." He looks back upon his birth, as the son of Jesse and the great-grandson of Ruth, and a large heart beats within his breast, desiring that Jehovah may be the God of the whole earth. Let us, therefore, not consider our own peculiar nationality or condition, or rank among men, as if salvation came by natural descent. The blood of fallen Adam is in the veins of every man, and there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ Jesus. If you happen to have been born of parents who did not train you in the fear of God, yet do not despond; for as the Temple was built upon the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, so shall the great God dwell in your heart though your fathers knew Him not. Say thou in thy soul, "The Lord shall have a dwelling within my heart, Jebusite though I be."

Once more, there was one matter in reference to Ornan's threshing-floor which it would be well to mention: before it could be used *it had to be bought with money.* I frequently meet with impossibly spiritual people who hate the mention of money in connection with the worship of God. The clatter of a collection jars upon their sublime feelings. The mention of money in connection with the worship of God is more dreadful to them than it is to God Himself; for He saith, "Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane with money"; and again, "None shall appear before Me empty." To these pious persons money saved and hoarded is abundantly pleasant; their only objection is to giving it. In this they somewhat differ from David who paid to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. Before he would offer a sacrifice he paid down fifty shekels of earnest money; for he said, "I will not offer burnt offerings unto Jehovah my God of that which doth cost me nothing." It is a very curious thing, is it not? that one man should show his spirituality by his liberality, and another should pretend to do it by the reverse method. In connection with all true worship of God in the olden times there was always the offertory, and frequently the sound of gold or silver. Beneath the drawn sword of the avenging angel money is given, and land is bought. The solemnity of the transaction is not marred thereby. Yet there was no absolute need for money, since Ornan said, "Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all." David cannot endure to worship at another man's expense, and he answers "Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price." That religion which costs a man nothing is usually worth nothing. Under the old dispensation, when men went up to worship God, it was with a bullock or with a lamb; even the poorest brought at least a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons. Do you think that this bringing of cattle and birds into the sanctuary would spoil your spirituality? It would do so if you have no spirituality; but if you have grace in your heart, your spirituality will choose just such a practical way in which to show itself. Some men's godliness is a thin, misty, ghostly, ghastly nothing: true adoration is a thing of substance, and of truth. The highest act of adoration that was ever paid on earth was when that woman, whose name is to be mentioned wherever the gospel is preached, emptied upon the head of our blessed Lord an alabaster box of precious nard. That gift was known to have cost her at least five hundred pence. It might have been sold for much, but the costliness of the perfume entered into the very essence of the act in the mind of the holy and grateful woman. The Lord Jesus Christ when He sat over against the treasury not only read the hearts of the givers, but He noticed the actual offering of the woman who dropped into the box two mites that made a farthing, which were all her living. Some people would sneeringly allude to the two dirty half-farthings, and condemn the collection as spoiled by Alexander the coppersmith; but the Lord is not so dainty as His servants, for He accepts the poor gifts of His people. The rattle of the coins did not take away from the heavenliness and the spirituality of that woman's worship. Far otherwise. The top of Moriah, where God appoints that His Temple should be builded, saw the weighing out of gold and silver, and was all the fitter for Divine communion because thereof.

From the whole, learn that it is not needful for meeting with God that you should be aided by persons arrayed in special robes, oxen will do as well; neither do you require a holy pavement, a threshing-floor may be holiness unto the Lord: neither do you need stained glass and vaulted roofs, the open air is better still. Do not believe for a moment that visible grandeur is necessary to the place where God will meet with you. Go to your threshing-floor and pray; aye, while the unmuzzled oxen take their rest, bow your knee and cry to the Lord of the harvest, and you shall meet with God amongst the straw and the grain. Fear not to draw nigh to God in the streets, but consecrate all space to the Lord your God. Study simplicity and plainness of worship. Remember how the Lord hated altars of brick, and how He would have His people build an altar of earth or of unhewn stone, to keep His worship simple and natural. "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."

II. But now, secondly, SPIRITUALLY THIS THRESHING-FLOOR OF ORNAN WAS AN ADMIRABLE TYPE OF HOW GOD MEETS WITH MEN.

I think, first, *its extreme simplicity enters into the essence of the type.* So far from thinking that a threshing-floor was a bad place to pray in, if I look a little beneath the surface I think I can see the reason for it. Golden grain is being separated from the straw by the corn drag—whence came this corn? From Him who openeth His hand and supplieth the want

of every living thing. Here, then, God meets me in the kindest way. Where can I meet Him better than where He gives me food? Where can we better adore than in the midst of His rich gifts by which He doth sustain my life? Why, I think if I had gone out to gather manna every morning with my omer, I should have kept on praising God every moment as I collected the heavenly bread. Never could spot be more propitious than where the gracious Preserver of men spread out needful food for His children. We cannot do better than praise God when we are in our daily service earning our daily bread, or gathered at our meals refreshing our bodies. At the gate of God's almonry let us wait with worship. Where better a temple out of which the bread of eternal life shall come, than on a threshing-floor where the bread of the first life is to be gathered? The two things seem to meet right well together. The temporal and the eternal join hands in common consecration. That same prayer which teaches us to say, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," leads us on to cry, "Give us day by day our daily bread." There is a spiritual significance in the type.

Would it be fanciful if with a glance I indicated that the *threshing-floor is the exact type of affliction?* Tribulation signifies threshing in the Latin, and the saints through much tribulation enter the kingdom. One of the titles of the people of God is "My threshing and the corn of My floor." Now it is well known that the Lord is with His people in their trials. When He smites with one hand He holds with the other. In the lion of trial we find the honey of communion. The temple of glory is built on the threshing-floor of affliction. I do not thrust forward this observation as though it were of great weight; but even if it be a fancy so far as the type is concerned, the thought conveys a truth in a pleasing manner.

But much more, *this was the place where justice was most clearly manifest.* Above Ornan's threshing-floor, in mid air, stood a dreadful apparition. A bright and terrible figure, a mysterious servant of God, was beheld with a drawn sword in his hand, which he brandished over the guilty city of Jerusalem. Deaths were constant. The people fell as forest leaves in autumn. Then was it that David went out to meet with his God, and make confession before Him. O, sirs, the lack of many of you is that you have never yet beheld sin in its consequences, sin in its guilt, sin in its doom. God is angry with the sinner every day. Men do not fly to God till fear puts wings upon their feet. Take away the dread of the wrath to come, and you have removed the great impulse which makes men seek for mercy. Men will not meet God till they see the angel with the drawn sword. They will trifle and play with sin, and neglect the invitation of God, and even doubt His existence, till conviction comes home to them, and they are made to feel that sin is an exceeding evil and bitter thing. Conviction of sin wrought by the Spirit of God is more powerful than argument. I had religiousness, but I never drew near to God in spirit and in truth till I had seen and almost felt that drawn sword. To feel that God must punish sin, that God will by no means clear the guilty, is the best thing to drive a man Godward. To feel that sword as it were with its point at your own breast, its edge ready to descend upon your own being, this it is that makes the guilty plead for pardon in real earnest. Men cry not "Lord save" till they are forced to add "or I perish." I could wish for certain preachers that I hear of that they were made more vividly to realize the terror of the Lord in their own souls. He who has felt the hot drops of despair scald his throat, has had it cleared for the utterance of free grace doctrine. If some men had more fully felt that they were sinners, they would have made better saints. David meets with God at the place where he sees that sin necessitates condign punishment, and I do not believe that any man can be in fellowship with God and be blind to that truth. David saw the result of his own sin, and dreaded what would further come if, day after day, the Lord should visit him and his people with judgment. He had grown proud of the number of his subjects, and had begun to act the independent potentate, instead of loyally remaining the viceroy of Jehovah; but now he sees that he has been guilty of high treason, and beholds the sword at his neck. There he bows himself, and there the God of all grace meets with him.

Perhaps the point which brought David out into complete brokenness of heart was a clear view of the deadly effect of his sin upon others. Seventy thousand people had died of the black death already through his sin, and still the pestilence raged: this brought the matter home to his heart. Every ungodly man ought to reflect upon the mischief which he has caused to others by his evil life: his wife has been hindered from good things, his children have grown up without the fear of God, his companions with whom he has worked and traded are hardened in their wickedness by a sight of his wickedness: youthful minds have been seduced from virtue by his vice, simple hearts have been led into infidelity by his unbelief. O men, you know not what you do. You let fly sparks, but what the conflagration may have already been none of you can tell. Carelessly, O man, hast thou cast the thistledown to the wind; but what harvests of the ill weed have come, and may yet come, from thy single handful, who can tell? Are there not some in hell through thine influence? Are not others going there through thine unhallowed teaching? O thou whose hair is snow-white with sixty or seventy winters, how much of ruin hast thou wrought already! How much more is still to come! This came home to David, and he stood aghast at it, crying to God about it, and pleading as for his life that the evil might be stayed.

Thus, you see, when the deadly fruit of sin is clearly perceived, then the soul turns to God, and the Lord meets that soul. The cross is the place of doom: under its shadow we admit our guilt, and vividly see it, and thus put ourselves into a truthful position, where the God of truth will meet with us. God will meet with sinners when they come to Him as sinners; but He will not hearken to them while they refuse to see their sin, and will not believe in the vengeance due to it.

Furthermore, that place where God met with David and made it to be His temple for ever, was the place *where sin was confessed.* David's confession is very frank and full. David says, "Is it not I? Even I it is that sinned." Go thou, sinner, to the Lord with thine own personal confession. Shut thine eye to thy fellow-man, and say, "Father, I have sinned." Cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Make private confession, without comparing thyself with thy fellow-men,

and the Lord has promised to forgive thee, and all those who confess their transgressions.

Set forth in thy confession the aggravated nature of thy sin. David said, "I it is that have sinned and done evil *indeed*." He emphasizes the evil, "I have done evil *indeed*." You will not find God in a way of grace till you begin to put an "indeed" at the end of the evil which you confess. Have you not sinned against light, sinned against knowledge, sinned against love, sinned against warnings, sinned against entreaties? Then, go and tell the Lord that you have sinned with grievous aggravations. "Father," said the prodigal, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Where such a confession as this is offered, God will meet the sinner.

That confession also had within itself an admission of the justice of the punishment; for he says, "Let Thine hand be on me, and on my father's house." He does not cavil against the sword of the Lord and its deadly blows. That sinner truly repents who feels—

> "My lips, with shame, my sins confess,
> Against Thy law, against Thy grace:
> Lord, should Thy judgment grow severe,
> I am condemn'd, but Thou art clear.
>
> "Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
> I must pronounce Thee just in death;
> And, if my soul were sent to hell,
> Thy righteous law approves it well."

That repentance which questions the justice of God in the punishment of sin is a repentance that needs to be repented of; but when the penitent doth, as it were, lay his head upon the block, yield his neck to the rope, and give himself up to God, saying, "I have sinned," then mercy feels free to display itself. As long as a man quarrels with justice he cannot be at peace with mercy. We must accept God as King, even though He beareth not the sword in vain, or else He will never put up that sword into its sheath. Condemn thyself, and God will acquit thee. Come penitently and submissively, and the just God will be a Saviour unto thee.

But this is only the beginning of it; for Ornan's threshing-floor was then the place *where sacrifice was offered and accepted*. Hastily they piled the altar of unhewn stones; they brought up to it ox after ox that had been lately threshing out the corn: the blood flowed in plentiful streams, and the sacrifice was laid upon the wood. God meets with men not where the blood of bulls and of goats flows in rivers, but where the glorious person of His own dear incarnate Son is offered up once for all for guilty men. Calvary is the trysting-place between God and penitents. Now we have reached it. This is the site of the temple: this is the Temple "not made with hands," once destroyed, but builded up in three days. The Person of the Lord Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead, is that place where God meeteth guilty, confessing man, and striketh hands with him; aye, eats and drinks with him in peace, as was indicated by the peace offering which David presented, and the Lord accepted. O, souls, you need to see this, for if you do not see it you will never see God. A reconciled God is only to be seen through the smoke of the great sacrifice. The wounds of Christ are the windows of the heart of God. If thou canst believe in Jesus Christ, by faith presenting Him again to God as thy sacrifice, then God will meet with thee.

But what did David see ere long when he had laid his bullock on the altar? A flame descended from the Lord. Like a flash of lightning it came, and the sacrifice was consumed; sure token that the Lord had accepted it, and was well pleased because of it. Even thus has the Lord accepted the one great sacrifice for sin. When our Lord Jesus offered Himself He came under the judicial sentence, and cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He was consumed with sorrow. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." The Lord Himself put Him to grief, and made His soul a sacrifice for sin. "He was made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." And now the Lord has placed His mercy-seat where the blood is sprinkled. He accepts us in the Beloved whose sacrifice He accepted long ago when He raised Him from the dead. We have access by the blood of Jesus. Come, poor trembling sinner; come with thine eye on Jesus crucified and thou shalt be welcomed of the Lord.

As soon as David had seen the sacrifice he had only one more sight to see, and that made the threshing-floor of Ornan more glorious than ever. *He beheld the sign of peace.* Above the threshing-floor stood the angel of the Lord; but what a change! The drawn sword, which threatened death to the city and to the nation, was suddenly thrust into its scabbard, and all was still. Not a soul more in Jerusalem should die of the pestilence. The sword of the Lord rested and was quiet. Oh, the joy of David's spirit when he saw this! What a solemn but joyous melting of heart he felt as his soul gushed forth in streams of gratitude. Learn from this that the point of full communion with God to-day is the place where we see the angel with the sheathed sword. Oh, how sweet to know that God hath nothing against us! He hath blotted out our transgressions, and will never remember them. He cannot smite us, for He has justified us in His Son. How shall He destroy those for whom Christ hath shed His blood? He hath a sword, but it is for those who are the adversaries of our souls, even for the arch-fiend who would destroy us. Its edge is not for us who are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. Many of you cannot draw near to God, and I do not wonder at it, because you have not yet seen that sin was in very deed put away by the sacrifice of Jesus. You have seen the drawn sword, and that is something; but you have not yet beheld that sword sheathed, nor heard the voice of Jehovah saying, "It is enough." The place where love meets love, where your little tiny stream melts into the great river of God's love, is where we sing, "O Lord, I will praise Thee; for though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me." Henceforth our life flows with the life of Jesus in one deep, peaceful stream, onward and onward for ever. You cannot rest in the Lord and live in Him till you have seen the Sacrifice and its eternal results in peace with God. May God bring you there! Atonement is the basis of worship. The sacrifice of Christ and His righteousness, these are the Jachin and the Boaz, the two sublime pillars of the temple gate. God communes with men where Jesus becomes man's rest. You cannot pass to the mercy-seat to speak with God except through the veil of the Saviour's body which was rent on our behalf.

Thus I think I have made you familiar with the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, and showed you wherein it was felt to be a place of divine manifestation and a fit site for the permanent temple of God.

III. And now I am going to close by HEARTILY EXHORTING YOU TO USE THIS PLACE. Brethren and sisters, if we have found out where to meet with God, then let us meet with Him continually. Do you feel guilty this morning? Is your sin heavy upon you? Do you see the sworded angel? Well, you have to meet God even there! Therefore, gird up your loins! "What garments shall I put on?" Put on sackcloth. I mean not literally; but while there is any guilt upon you come to God with lowliest penitence, mourning for sin, as David did, and the elders that were with him. You may not come now in the silken garments of your luxury, nor in the purple robes of your pride, nor in the mail of your hate. Put these away from you, and come with sackcloth and ashes, weeping for your transgressions, and God will meet with you; for He will meet with sinners who come to Him mourning because of their sin.

When you thus come, I want you to be quiet a while. Stand still! Listen! Suppose you had been with those elders of Israel; what would you have heard? You would have heard your shepherd-king pleading for his flock: "These sheep, what have they done? Let Thine hand be on me, and on my father's house." But now David is dead and buried, and his sepulchre is in his own land; but another King of the house of David, one Jesus, is standing before the Lord pleading for mercy. While you are clothed in the sackcloth of your repentance, you may hear Him cry, "As for these sheep, let them live. Thou hast awakened the sword against Me, their Shepherd, therefore let My sheep be spared! Thine hand has been on Me, therefore let these go their way!" Do you hear that intercession? Jesus is pleading in that fashion now. He is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Oh it is blessed to come to God that way—with the sackcloth on your loins, but with the prevalent intercession in your ears; confidently believing that Jesus maketh intercession for the transgressors, and that He must and will so prevail that by His knowledge He shall justify many.

Further, when you are coming to God, dear hearts, always take care that you come to the sacrifice. We frequently miss communion with God, I am persuaded, because we do not remember enough that precious blood which gives us access to God. When you go upstairs to pray, and you cannot get near to God, then do not speak, but sit in silence, and muse upon the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion of the Lord, and all the circumstances of His wondrous death, and say, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." There is a matchless power in the Lord's sacrifice to remove the stone out of the heart, and pluck away selfishness from the affections. Come, come, come, come to the sacrifice! There shall you dwell with God in sweet delight.

If you would come still nearer to God, do not forget the effect of the sacrifice and intercession in the sheathing of the sword of justice. I have already set forth this truth; now I entreat you to turn it to practical use by enjoying it.

> "Oh how sweet to view the flowin
> Of my Saviour's precious blood,
> With divine assurance knowing
> He has made my peace with God."

Do not say, "I hope that the sword is sheathed"; it either is so, or it is not so. Do not be content with questionable hopes, but aim at certainties. Rest not till you obtain a solid assurance of your peace with God. If Jesus Christ was punished for your sin you cannot be punished for it; if He did bear your sin He did bear it, and there is an end of it; and if you have believed on Him you have the full proof in the word of God that you are justified before God. What more do you want than God's own word for it? and that word declares that you, as a believer, have eternal life and shall never perish, neither shall you come into condemnation. Do not continue to mutter, "Well, I hope I may yet realise it." Why these debates? It is so: "he that believeth in Him is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses": God has turned away His wrath from the believer, and the sword is sheathed; therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And lastly, if this be so, and you realize it, go away and begin to build a temple. You say, "Do you want us to build a new place of worship?" No, I speak only of a spiritual house. Of course, build as many meeting-places as you can where people may come together to hear the Word, for many are needed in this growing city, but the peculiar sort of building which I urge upon you is of the heart and spirit. Make your entire being a living temple for the living God. Begin now: the foundations are laid, you would not dream of building on any other; for "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid." The Divine Moriah of Christ's person, the sacred place of His sacrifice is the mount wherein God shall be seen. Jesus Christ has Himself become the foundation of your hope; go and build on Him. Set up the pillars of earnest supplication, and arch them over with lofty praises. Remember, your God "inhabiteth the praises of Israel." Build Him a house of praise, that He may dwell in you, make your bodies to be temples of the Holy Ghost, and your spirits the priests that sacrifice therein. In acts of holiness, piety, charity, and love spend all your days. Let your houses be churches dedicated to His fear and love; and let their chambers be holy as the courts of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Let each morning and evening have its sacrifice. Be yourself a priest at the altar. Let the garments of your daily toil be as vestments, your meals as sacraments; let your thoughts be psalms, your prayers incense, and your breath praise. Let every action be a priestly function, bringing glory unto the Lord from this day forth and for ever. He that died for you reckons you to be dead to all things but Himself; and so it becometh you to be. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price," and from this day forward your motto should be,—"Thine entirely. Thine entirely, O my God, I am." Begin to build this living temple, and the Lord help you to complete it to His praise. A poor edifice it will be when you have finished it, compared with the Lord your God; but yet if you have laboured sincerely and earnestly it will turn out to be compacted of gold and silver and precious stones, and it will be found in the day of Christ to honour and glory. So may the Lord bless you, beloved, now and for ever. Amen, and Amen.

ONE WORKER PREPARING FOR ANOTHER

"Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord, an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto."—1 Chronicles xxii. 14.

THE building of the temple is an admirable type of the building of the Church of God. I am afraid that there are some present with us at this time who have never helped to build the spiritual temple for Christ. They are not, themselves, living stones. They are no part of God's spiritual house; and they have never helped to bring their cedar, or iron, or gold to the great Builder of the Church. In fact, there may be some here who have rather helped to pull it down, some who have delighted to throw away the stones, and who have tried to hide from the divine Builder the precious material which He intends to use in the sacred edifice. Judge your own hearts; and if you cannot say that you are a living stone, if you have not helped to build up the Church of Christ, may you repent of your sin, and may the grace of God convert you! But if you are workers for the Lord, if your hearts are right with God, I think that I shall be able to say some things that will encourage you to work on, even if you should not for a time see any immediate results from your work.

There were many who helped to build the temple: David gathering the materials; Solomon, the master mason, by whose name the temple would afterwards be called; the princes helping him in the great work; strangers, foreigners, and aliens, who dwelt throughout Israel and Judah; these all took their share, and even the Tyrians and Zidonians had a part in the work. Now, we have here many ministers of God and students, Davids and Solomons; but I pray that many, who are strangers as yet, may be enlisted in this holy service by our great Lord and King, and that some, who are farthest off from Christ, Tyrians and Zidonians, who have gone far away from God, may be enabled, by divine grace, to contribute their share to this glorious work of building a house for the living God, a house not made of gold, and silver, and stone, and timber, but a spiritual house for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

I. In considering our text, let us notice, first, that DAVID HAD ZEALOUSLY DONE HIS PART, although he might not build the temple. There are many servants of God whose names are little known, who, nevertheless, are doing a work that is essential to the building up of the Church of God. I have known many such, who have never lived to realise any great success; their names have never been written upon any great temples that have been built; but, nevertheless, they have worthily done their part, even as David did.

You see, then, first, that *David had gathered the materials.* Many a man collects people together, and yet he has not the fashioning of them. He is the founder of a Christian congregation; but he does not live to see many conversions. He gets together the raw material upon which another shall work. He ploughs and he sows; but it wants another man to come and water the seed, and perhaps another to gather in the harvest. Still, the sower did his work, and deserves to be remembered for what he did. David did his part of the work, in getting together the materials for the temple.

Besides which, *he fashioned some of the materials.* He had the stones cut from the quarry, and many of them shaped to take their places, by-and-by, in silence in the temple, when it should be reared without sound of hammer or axe. So there are teachers and preachers who help to form the characters of their scholars and hearers, by working away upon their minds and hearts. They will never build up a great church; but still they are knocking the rough edges off the stones. They are preparing and fashioning them; and by-and-by the builder will come and make good use of them.

David had prepared the way for Solomon's temple. It was by his fighting that the time of peace came, in which the temple could be erected. Though he is called a man of blood, yet it was needful that the foes of Israel should be overthrown. There could be no peace till her adversaries had been crushed; and David did that. You do not hear much about the men who prepare the way for others. Somebody else comes along, and apparently does all the work; and his name is widely known and honoured; but God remembers the heralds, the pioneers, the men who prepare the way, the men who, by casting out devils, routing grievous errors, and working needful reforms, prepare the way for the triumphal progress of the gospel.

Moreover, *David found the site for the temple.* He discovered it; he purchased it; and he handed it over to Solomon. We do not always remember the men who prepare the sites for the Lord's temples. Luther is rightly remembered; but there were reformers before Luther. There were hundreds of men and women who burned for Christ, or who perished in prison, or who were put to cruel deaths for the gospel. Luther comes when the occasion has been made for him, and when a site has been cleared for him upon which to build the temple of God. But God remembers all those pre-Reformation heroes. It may be your lot, dear friend, to clear the site, and to make the occasion for others; and you may die before you see even a cornerstone of your own work laid; for it will be yours when it is finished, and God will remember what you have done.

Further, *it was David who received the plans from God.* The Lord wrote upon his heart what He would have done. He told him, even to the weight of the candlesticks and lamps, everything that was to be arranged. Solomon, wise as he was, did not plan the temple. He had to borrow the designs from his father, who received them direct from God. Many a man is far-seeing; he gets the plan of the gospel into his heart, he sees a way in which great things can be done, and yet he is scarcely permitted to put his own hand to the work. Another will come by-and-by, and will carry out the plan that the first one received; but we must not forget the first man, who went into the secret place of the Most High and learned in the place of thunder what God would have His people do.

David did one thing more; before he died, *he gave a solemn charge to others*; he charged Solomon, and

the princes, and all the people, to carry out the work of building the temple. I revere the man who, in his old age, when there is weight in every syllable that he utters, concludes his life by urging others to carry on the work of Christ. It is something to gather about your last bed young men who have years of usefulness before them, and to lay upon their conscience and their heart the duty of preaching Christ crucified, and winning the souls of men for the Lord.

So you see that David had done his part toward the building of the temple. I should like to ask every believer here, *Have you done your part?* You are a child of God; God has loved you, and chosen you; you have been redeemed with precious blood. You know better than to think of working in order to save yourself; you are saved; but have you diligently done all that you can do for your Lord and Master? It was well said, in the prayer-meeting before this service, that there were several thousand members of this church who could not preach, and there were some who did preach of whom the same thing might be said, for it was poor preaching, after all; and our brother said in his prayer, "Lord, help us who cannot preach, to pray for the man who does!" Have you, dear friend, who cannot preach, made a point of praying for the pastor of the church to which you belong? It is a great sin on the part of church-members if they do not daily sustain their pastor by their prayers.

Then there is much else that you can do for Christ, in your family, in your business, and in the neighbourhood where you live. Could you go to bed to-night, and there close your eyes for the last time, feeling, "I have finished the work which God gave me to do. I have done all that I could for the winning of souls"? I am afraid that I address some who have a talent wrapped in a napkin, hidden away in the earth. My dear man, go home, and dig it up, before it gets altogether covered with rust, to bear witness against you. Take it up and put it out to heavenly interest, that your Lord may have what He is entitled to receive. O Christian men and women there must be very much unused energy in the Church of God! We have a great dynamo that is never used. Oh, that each one would do his own part, even as David did his!

We shall soon be gone; our day lasts not very long. "The night cometh when no man can work." Shall it be said of you, or of me, that we wasted our daylight; and then, when the evening shadows came, we were uneasy and unhappy, and though saved by divine grace, we died with sad expressions of regret for wasted opportunities? It is not very long ago that I sat by the bedside of one who was wealthy, I might say very wealthy. I prayed with him. I had hoped to have found him rejoicing in the Lord, for I knew that he was a child of God; but he was a child of God with a little malformation about the fingers. He could never open his hand as he ought to have done. As I sat by his side, he said, "Pray God, with all your might, that I may live three months, that I may have an opportunity of using my wealth in the cause of Christ." He did not live much more than three hours after he said that. Oh, that he had woke up a little sooner to do for the Master's Church and cause what he ought to have done! Then he would not have had that regret to trouble him in his last hours. He knew the value of the precious blood, and he was resting in it; and I had great joy in knowing that all his hope and all his trust were in his Lord, and he was saved; but it was with a great deal of regret and trembling. I would spare any of you who have wealth such trouble on your dying bed.

If there is a young man here, who has the ability to preach the gospel, or to be doing something for Christ, and he is doing nothing, I am sure that it will be a pain to him one of these days. When conscience is thoroughly aroused, and his heart is getting nearer to God than it has been, he will bitterly regret that he did not avail himself of every occasion to talk of Christ, and seek to bring souls to Him. I should like these practical thoughts to go round these galleries, and through this area, till some men and women shall say, "We have not done our part, as David did; but by God's grace we will do so, and He shall have all the praise."

That is my first head, then, David had zealously done his part.

II. But, secondly, there is this remarkable fact in the text, DAVID HAD DONE HIS PART IN TROUBLE. Read it: "Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold"; and so on. In the margin of your Bibles, you will find the words, "in my poverty." It is strange that David should talk about poverty when his gifts amounted to many millions of pounds.

David thought little of what he had prepared. He calls it poverty, I think, because it is the way of the saints to count anything that they do for God to be very little. The most generous men in the world think the least of what they give to God's cause. David, with his millions that he gives, says, "In my poverty I have prepared for the house of the Lord." As he looked at the gold and silver, he said to himself, "What is all this to God?" And the brass and the iron, that could not be reckoned, it was so much and so costly; he thought it was all nothing to Jehovah, who fills heaven and earth, whose grandeur and glory are altogether unspeakable. If you have done the most that you can for God, you will sit down, and weep that you cannot do ten times as much. You that do little for the Lord will be like a hen with one chick; you will think a great deal of it. But if you have a great number of works, and you are doing much for Christ, you will wish that you could do a hundred times as much. Your song will be,—

> "Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
> My great Redeemer's praise!"

Oh, to be multiplied a thousand-fold, that we might, anywhere and everywhere, serve Jesus with heart, and mind, and soul, and strength! So David here considers that what he did was very little.

Yet, *it was a proof of his sincerity.* That he should be saving all this wealth, and preparing for the house of his God in the time of trouble, was a proof of great sincerity. Some Christians want to have all sunshiny weather, and the birds must sing all day and all night to please them. If they receive a rebuke, or somebody seems a little cold to them, they will do no more. I have seen many, who called themselves Christians, who were like a silly child at play who says, when something offends him, "I won't play any more." They run away at the first rough word that they hear. But David, in the day of his trouble, when his heart was ready to break, still went on with

his great work of providing for the house of God. Some who have attended this house of prayer have been absent, and when we have enquired the reason, they have said that they had become so poor that they did not like to come. Oh, dear friends, we would like to see you, however poor you are! Why, if you are in trouble, you should come all the more; for where could you go to find comfort better than to the house of God? Never, I pray you, stay away on account of poverty. David said that he had prepared for the house of his God in the time of his trouble; and that proved his sincerity. One said to me, "Ever since I have been a Christian, everything has seemed to go wrong with me." Suppose that everything should be taken away from you, should you not be grateful that you have an eternal treasure in heaven, and that these losses, which might have broken your heart if you had not known the Saviour, are now sent in heavenly discipline to you, and are working for your good? It shows that a man is right with God when he can walk with Christ in the mire and in the slough. God does not want you to wear silver slippers, and to walk on a well-mown, well-rolled grassy lawn, all the way to heaven.

David prepared for the house of the Lord in his trouble; and I have no doubt that *it was a solace to his sorrow.* To have something to do for Jesus, and to go right on with it, is one of the best ways to get over a bereavement, or any heavy mental depression. If you can pursue some great object, you will not feel that you are living for nothing. You will not sit down in despair; for, whatever your trouble may be, you will still have this to live for, "I want to help in building the Church of God, and I will do my part in it whatever happens to me. Come poverty or wealth, come sickness or health, come life or death, as long as there is breath in my body, I will go on with the work that God has given me to do." Do I speak to any who are in great trouble? If you are a Christian, the best advice that I can give you is this, get to work for Christ, and you will forget your trouble. If you are not a Christian, I advise you to trust the Saviour at once, for He is the only solace of spiritual sorrow.

Again, *it was an incentive to service* when David, in his trouble, prepared for the house of the Lord. There were many things in trouble that would tend to damp his ardour, and make him feel as if he could not hold out any longer; but he said to himself, "I must go on with this work for God. His temple must be 'exceeding magnifical,' and my son Solomon must build it, so I must go on gathering the materials." So he just roused himself afresh, and went on with his work with new earnestness, whenever his trouble would otherwise have depressed him.

It must also have given an elevation to David's whole life. To have a noble purpose, and to pursue that purpose with all your might, prevents your being like "dumb driven cattle," and lifts you out of the mist and fog of the valley, and sets your feet upon the hill-top, where you can commune with God. I would suggest to our younger friends that they should begin their Christian life with a high purpose. and that they should never forget that purpose; and if trouble should come, they should say, "Let it come; my face is set, like a flint, to do this work to which my Lord has called me, and I will pursue it with all my might." It may seem as if there were no spiritual help in such advice as this; but, believe me, there is. If God shall give you grace to go on with your life-work, he will thereby give you grace to overcome your life-trouble.

Ye who would be like your Master, ask not to have a smooth path, and great success. Remember what a life of sorrow He lived. He was grief's close acquaintance. Yet although He saw but a small Church rising before His bodily eye, He knew that He was doing the work that God had given Him to do, and He went on with it through agony and bloody sweat, through shame and spitting. He was not more in earnest when He rode in state through the streets of Jerusalem than He was when He hung on the cross of Calvary. He was resolved to do His work; and in trouble He did it, and He amassed treasure beyond all conception for the building of His Church. Riches of grace and wonders of glory He gathered together by His suffering and His death. If you would be like your Lord, you must be able to say with David, "Behold, in my trouble, I have prepared for the house of the Lord." God give His troubled ones to enter into fellowship wth the Lord Jesus Christ in this respect!

III. I am glad that I have come to my third point, for my strength well-nigh fails me. What I have to say here is this: DAVID'S WORK FITS ON TO THE WORK OF ANOTHER. That should be a great joy to some of you who do not see much coming of what you are doing. Your work is going to fit on to somebody else's work.

This is *the order of God's providence* in His Church. It does not often happen that He gives a whole piece of work to one man; but He seems to say to him, "You go and do so much; then I will send somebody else to do the rest." How this ought to cheer some of you up, the thought that your work may be no failure, though in itself it may seem to be so, because it fits on to the work of somebody else who is coming after you, and so it will be very far from a failure! You have sometimes seen a man take a contract to put in the foundations of a house, and to carry it up to a certain height. He has done that; he will not be the builder of that house; that will be the work of the next contractor, who carries up the walls, and puts on the roof, and so forth. Yes, but he who did the foundation-work did a great deal, and he is as much the builder of the house as the man who carries up the walls. So, if you go to a country town or village, and you preach the gospel to a few poor folk, you may never have seemed very successful; but you have been preparing the way for somebody else who is coming after you.

I am told that my venerable predecessor, Dr. Rippon, used often, in his pulpit, to pray for somebody, of whom he knew nothing, who would follow him in the ministry of the church, and greatly increase it. He seemed to have in his mind's eye some young man, who, in after years, would greatly enlarge the number of the flock, and he often prayed for him. He died, and passed away to heaven, about the time that I was born. Older members of the church have told me that they have read the answer to Dr. Rippon's prayers in the blessing that has been given to us these many years. If you keep your eyes open, you will see the same thing happen again. You will notice how one shall do his work, which shall be necessary to some larger work that somebody else will do after him. This is God's way, so that the second man, the Solomon coming after David, may do his work all the better because of what his father has done before him. Solomon had not to spend

years in collecting the materials for the temple; he might not have got through the building if he had had that task. His good old father had done all that for him; and all that he had to do was to spend the money that David had gathered, work up the gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, bring in the big stones, and put them in their places, and build the house for God. I daresay that Solomon often thought gratefully of his father David, and what he had done; and you and I, if God blesses us, ought always to think with thanksgiving of the Davids who went before us. If you have success in your class, my sister, remember that there was an excellent Christian woman who had the class before you. You come, young man, into the Sunday-school, and you think that you must be somebody very great because you have had several conversions in your class. How about the brother who had to give up the class through ill-health? You took his place: who knows which of you will have the honour at the last great day? I was about to say, Who cares? for we do not live for honour, we live to serve God; and if I can serve God best by digging out the cellar, and you can serve God best by throwing out that ornamental bay window, my brother, you go on with your bay window, and I will go on with my cellar, for what matters it what we do so long as the house is built, and God is glorified thereby? It is the way of God in providence to set one man to do part of a work which pieces on to that of another man.

But *this is a terrible blow at self.* Self says, "I like to begin something of my own, and I like to carry it out; I do not want any interference from other people." A friend proposed, the other day, to give you a little help in your service. You looked at him as if he had been a thief. You do not want any help; you are quite up to the mark; you are like a waggon and four hourses, and a dog under the waggon as well! There is everything about you that is wanted; you need no help from anybody; you can do all things almost without the help of God! I am very sorry for you if that is your opinion. If you get into God's service, He may say to you, "You shall never begin anything; but shall always come in as the second man"; or, "You shall never finish anything; you shall always be getting ready for somebody else." It is well to have an ambition not to build upon another man's foundation; but do not carry that idea too far. If there is a good foundation laid by another man, and you can finish the structure, be thankful that he has done his part, and rejoice that you are permitted to carry on his work. It is God's way of striking a blow at our personal pride by allowing one man's work to fit on to another's.

I believe that *it is good for the work to have a change of workers.* I am glad that David did not live any longer; for he could not have built the temple. David must die. He has had a good time of service. He has gathered all the materials for the temple. Solomon comes, with young blood and youthful vigour, and carries on the work. Sometimes, the best thing that some of us old folk can do is to go home and go to heaven, and let some younger man come, and do our work. I know that there are great lamentations about the death of Dr. So-and-So, and Mr. So-and-So; but why? Do you not think that, after all, God can find as good men as those that He has found already? He made those good men, and He is not short of power; He can make others just as good as they have been. I was present at a funeral, where I heard a prayer that rather shocked me. Some brother had said that God could raise up another minister equal to the one that was in the coffin; but prayer was offered by another man, who said that this preacher had been eyes to his blindness, feet to his lameness, and I do not know what beside; and then he said, "Thy poor unworthy dust does not think that Thou ever canst or wilt raise up another man like him." So he had not an omnipotent God; but you and I have, and with an omnipotent God it is for the good of the work that David should go to his rest, and that Solomon should come in, and carry on the work.

Certainly, *this creates unity in the Church of God.* If we all had a work of our own, and were shut up to do it, we should not know one another; but now I cannot do my work without your help, my dear friends; and, in some respects, you cannot do your work without my help. We are members one of another, and one helps the other. I hope that I shall never have to do without you. God bless you for all your efficient help! In many Christian works you will have to do without me, one of these days; but that will not matter. There will be somebody who will carry on the work of the Lord; and so long as the work goes on, what matter who does it? God buries the workman, but the devil himself cannot bury the work. The work is everlasting, though the workmen die. We pass away, as star by star grows dim; but the eternal light is never-fading. God shall have the victory. His Son shall come in His glory. His Spirit shall be poured out among the people; and though it be neither this man, nor that, nor the other, God will find the man to the world's end who will carry on His cause, and give to Him the glory.

This leaves a place for those who come after. One thing David said to Solomon I like very much, "Thou mayest add thereto." I have quoted that sometimes when the collection has been rather small. I have said to each of our friends who were counting the money, "Thou mayest add thereto." It is not at all a bad text for a collection-sermon; but it may also be used in many other ways.

Here are certain preachers of the gospel. Cannot I put my hand on some young man's shoulder, and say to him, "Thou mayest add thereto; thou hast a good voice; thou hast an active brain; begin to speak for God; there are numbers of godly men in the gospel ministry; if thou art called of God, thou mayest add thereto"? We have a good Sunday-school, though some of you have never seen it. We have a number of loving, earnest teachers; "thou mayest add thereto." Go thou, and teach likewise; or engage in some other work for which the Lord has qualified you.

I wonder whether there is an unconverted man here this evening, or an unconverted woman, whom God has ordained to bless, and to whom He will speak to-night, some stranger whom He will bring in by His almighty grace, some servant of the devil who shall to-night be made a servant of Christ. My Master has a large number of servants; "thou mayest add thereto." If thou wilt yield thyself to Christ, thou mayest come, and help God's people. We want recruits; we are always wanting them. May God lead some, who have been on the side of sin and self, to come out, and say, "Set my name down amongst God's people. By the grace of God I am going to be on Christ's side, and help to build

His temple." Come along, my brother; come along, my sister; we are glad of your help. The work is not all done yet; you are not too late to fight the Lord's battles, nor to win the crown of the victors. The Lord has a large army of the soldiers of the cross; and "thou mayest add thereto." God save thee! Christ bless thee! The Spirit inspire thee! May it be so with very many, for Christ's sake! Amen.

"THE BEST OF ALL IS, GOD IS WITH US"

"Is not the Lord your God with you?"—1 Chronicles xxii. 18.

WHILE we were reading this chapter, you must all have been struck with the melting of one man's life into another. Here is David most anxious about the building of the temple at Jerusalem; he is not permitted to erect it himself, and therefore he sets to work with diligent care to gather together the gold and the silver, the brass and the iron, the timber and the stone, that would be required. He also instructed the workmen who would be needed, so that, when he was gone, and his son Solomon had ascended the throne, the temple might be built. Did David live in vain? Can it be truly said that he failed in the grandest project of his life? Assuredly not; he did all that he was permitted to do, and by making those elaborate preparations, he was really the means of the building of the temple.

Let every man and every woman among us judge of our life, not merely from that little narrow piece of it which we ourselves live, for that is but a span; but let us judge it by its connection with other lives that may come after our own. If we cannot do all we wish, let us do all we can, in the hope that someone who shall succeed us may complete the project that is so dear to our heart. That is a blessed prayer which Moses wrote in the 90th Psalm, "Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children." We shall be quite satisfied to do the work, and scarcely see the glory, if we may but know that, in another generation, the work that we shall have done shall produce glory to God which shall be seen among the sons of men. No, Elijah, thou must not do all the Lord's work; but thy mantle must fall upon Elisha, and with it shall come a double portion of thy spirit, and he shall work twice as many miracles as ever thou didst, and shall do greater things for the Lord God of Israel. I do not think it ought ever to be any question of ours what people will do after we are dead and gone. The God who did very well without us before we were born, will do very well without us after we are dead. It is enough for us to do to-day's work in the day; let somebody else do to-morrow's work if we are not spared to do it. To-day, do that which cometh to thy hand, and be not dreaming of the future. Put down that telescope; you have nothing to do with peering into the next hundred years. The important matter is, not what you spy with your eye, but what you do with your hand. Do it, and do it at once, with all your might, believing that God will find somebody else to go on with the next piece of the work when you have finished your portion.

There is also another delightful thought here, and that is, the continuity of the divine blessing. God was with David in the gathering together of the great stores of treasure for the building of the temple; but then God was also with Solomon. Oh, what a mercy it is that God did not give all His grace to other people before we came into the world! The God of grace did not empty the whole horn of grace upon the head of Whitefield or Wesley; He did not pour out all the blessings of His Spirit upon Romaine and John Newton, so as to leave nothing for us. No; and to the end of time He will be the same God as He was yesterday, and as He is to-day. There is no break in the Lord's blessing; He has not ceased to be gracious, His arm is not shortened that He cannot save, nor His ear heavy that He cannot hear. God buries His workmen, but His work goes on; and He, the Great Worker, wearies not of it, nor shall He ever fail or be discouraged. All His everlasting purposes shall be accomplished, and Christ shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied. Wherefore, let us be of good heart, if we have been apt to look upon the future with fear. The Lord Jesus still lives, and He will take care that His Church shall live and work on until He Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.

This text seems to me, dear friends, to have a very immediate bearing upon ourselves. David is talking to Solomon and the princes of Israel about the building of a temple; we are not building a material temple, but we are building a spiritual temple. We do not believe in gorgeous architecture, nor in the expenditure of needless gold and silver upon the house wherein we meet to worship God, for we still hear our Lord and Master say, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." We sing with Cowper,—

> "Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,
> There they behold Thy mercy-seat;
> Where'er they seek Thee, Thou art found,
> And every place is hallow'd ground."

We believe that God is as much present beneath the blue sky, and out there in the street, as He is in any kind of building that we can erect for Him. It is very singular that, as soon as ever the temple was built, true religion began to decline; the day when Solomon opened it was the culmination of the glory of true godliness in Israel, and from that hour it began to darken down into an awful night. Yet it was proper that there should be a temple which, in its magnificence, should call for the respect of men towards God, being typical of that far greater temple, not made with hands, even the glorious Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We, however, are engaged in the building of a temple, in a spiritual sense. God has sent His servants into the world, to gather together for His beautiful house, stones hewn out of the quarry of nature, to be shaped, polished, and prepared for building

into the temple of His grace. The Church is the living temple of God, "exceeding magnifical." It is a wondrous idea that men's hearts and souls can be blended together, and built up into a spiritual temple wherein God will dwell. This temple is to be builded of stones taken from the quarry of nature, and, God being with us, you and I are to go forth, and to hew out and shape and prepare the stones for the building of this house of the Lord which shall endure for ever.

In order to do this, we certainly need the presence and the help of God; for what can we do without Him? In the work of conversion, what can be done without the Spirit of God? I would like anybody who thinks he can convert another person without divine help, to try and do it, and see what a wretched failure he will make of it, or what a dire hypocrisy he will produce by his apparent success. We must have God with us for this work; we cannot create a spark of grace, how then can we create a new heart and a right spirit? Conversion is an absolute creation, regeneration is a miracle of divine grace, the work of the Spirit of God; and this is altogether beyond our power. We need the Spirit of God to aid us in the building of a temple for God; but, brethren, with the Lord's presence we can do it.

The text says, "Is not the Lord your God with you?" I will go any length with the brother who likes to preach upon the incapacity of man, the utter and entire weakness of the creature apart from the Creator. You cannot, I think, exaggerate there, but do not always keep dwelling upon your own weakness, recollect that, when you are weak, then you are strong, if you do but fall back upon the omnipotence of God. "Is not the Lord your God with you?" Has He sent us into the world with the gospel, and will He not be with us in the preaching of it? Has He sent us to be the means of seeking souls, and made our hearts to ache because of the sins that men have committed against Him, and will He not be with us? Do not let us talk as if we had to live and labour without our God. We have been brought to know Him, we have been made members of the mystical body of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in us, if we are what we profess to be,—the Church of the living God; will He not occupy the house that He has built? "Is not the Lord your God with you?" Then, what can be too difficult for you?

Now, dear friends, I shall treat our text, first, as *an assertion;* for, oftentimes, in Scripture, a question is one of the strongest modes of assertion when it is anticipated that to that question there can be no other reply than "Yes." Secondly, I shall treat it as *a question*, for there are some here to whom it is a question, some doubting, trembling ones to whom we must say, "Is not the Lord your God with you?" When I have handled it first as an assertion and then as a question, I will briefly use it *as an argument:* "Is not the Lord your God with you?" Therefore, arise and be doing. Something great and glorious ought to be done by men who have so divine a Helper with them.

I. First, then, this is AN ASSERTION.

Brethren and sisters in Christ, the Lord our God is with us. I do not entertain any doubt upon that point, and I hope you do not. Is the Lord your God? Is He your God by a holy covenant? Have you entered into bonds of fellowship with Him? Have you taken Him to be your God by trust, by love, and by the consecration of your body, soul, and spirit to Him? Can you say of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, "This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death"? Very well, then, if He be your God, He is with you. Do you ask how I know that?

Well, I know it, first, because *He has pledged Himself to be with His people* "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" Is not the Lord your God with you, then? Assuredly He is, if He keeps His promise; and you do not doubt His fidelity, do you? Can He forget His promise, or, remembering it, will He treat it as if it were mere verbiage, words without meaning? There are men who can do that, we know; but does God act so? Can you suppose it possible? No, not for an instant; then, as He hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," He will keep His word. We say, "Never is a long day," and so it is, for it covers all time; and the Lord hath said, "I will *never* leave thee,"—in poverty, in sickness, in slander and reproach, in depression of spirit, in the hour of death, in the day of judgment,—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He has pledged Himself to this, and God forbid that we should, for even a moment, doubt that He will keep His word! To believers in their church capacity, there is a pledge given by the blessed Lord Jesus Himself which refers especially to His work: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." "Lo, I *am* with you," says Christ, as much as to say, "Not only do I promise to be with you, but I *am* with you, I am already fulfilling My promise to you. For the past, for the present, and for the future, 'Lo, I am with you alway.'" Let not any Church of God hesitate to answer this question, "Is not the Lord your God with you?" If He be your God, He is with you as individuals, and He is especially with you as a Christian community going forth to preach His gospel to every creature. That ought to be enough, surely? He has pledged Himself to be with us.

Next, *He is pleased to be with us* It is the good pleasure of God to be with His people. He is our Father; and do not fathers love to be with their children? The loving father says, when he has little ones at home, "I will get back from my business early, that I may spend my evening in the family." We feel ourselves happiest when, laying aside external cares, we leave the world, and rest with our loved ones at home; so God is at home with His people, as a Father He delights in His children Remember how Divine Wisdom said, "My delights were with the sons of men" It is a wonderful thing to be able to say, but God takes a great deal more pleasure in us that we do in Him; yet there seems in us nothing that can give Him pleasure, while in Him there is everything that can afford us delight The Lord so loves His people that He is never long away from them. You know that dear relationship into which our Lord has entered with His Church; she is His bride, He loves her as He loves His own soul. In some respects, He loves her better than He loves Himself, for He gave Himself for her; and do you think that He is happy away from His bride, His

spouse? It is not so; He saith to her, "Let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely;" and whenever she calls for Him, saying, "Let my Beloved come into His garden," His quick answer is, "I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse" He so loves us that, when we shut the door against Him, He stands and knocks, and cries to us, "Open to Me, My sister, My love, My love, my undefiled; for My head is filled with dew, and My locks with the drops of the night" Do not think that He has gone from you when He loves you so as your Father, and as the Husband of your soul Moreover, He will be with His Church in her work, because her work is His work; and wherever there is a heart on the earth, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, in sympathy and harmony with the heart of Christ, depend upon it He is assuredly there, for that sympathy and that harmony are created by His very presence Well, then, as He has pledged Himself, and He is Himself pleased to be with His people, we believe the assertion which is implied in the enquiry, "Is not the Lord your God with you?"

I hope also, brethren beloved, we can say that *we have had proofs that God is with us.* In this house we have had many plain proofs of the Lord's presence. If you had been with me last Tuesday week, and the Tuesday before that, it might have made your hearts ring for joy, all the bells of your soul would have given forth blessed chimes as you heard how God had saved one and another who had strolled in here as if by accident, and others who had come in great heaviness of heart, but who here found the Lord. Our ministry is nothing, but the Lord makes it something, He makes it everything to many souls; and blessed be His name for that! And you, brethren and sisters, in your labour and service for the Master, have brought many souls to Christ; therefore I say to you, "Is not the Lord your God with you?" Assuredly He is, or you would not have beheld all this blessedness.

The Lord has proved His presence with us by preserving us in the hour of temptation. Some of you who have been lately converted to God have had very fierce temptations since then. In this wicked city, our young people—yet I do not know that I need say our young people alone,—have been exposed to a furnace of temptation which has been seven times heated. The days in which we live are grievous to the last degree; and if the Lord had not been with us, our soul would not have escaped like a bird out of the snare of the fowler. Often our feet have well-nigh slipped, and we should have fallen if the Lord had not been with us to preserve us. "Is not the Lord your God with you" when you have been kept alive with death so near? Assuredly, He is.

Some of you also know that the Lord is with you because you have been so greatly comforted in time of trouble. A sister said to me, the other day, "I could not have thought that I could have lived through the bereavements I have lately endured. When I used to think of the possibility of my husband's death, it seemed to me that I must die with him." Yet she is not dead; and she does not despair; though she had to endure that bereavement, and another as well, she said, "Oh, how good God was to me to sustain me as He did!" "Is not the Lord your God with you?" I know some dear friends who have experienced very great temporal trouble through heavy losses in these trying times; yet they are as happy as when they had ten times as much. The little bird still sings at the window, the blue sky hovers overhead, and the heart's-ease still grows in their garden, and they love it well. Yes, dear friends, the comforts that God gives us in times of deep trouble are a sufficient proof that He is with us.

Besides that, there have been times when we have been in the house of prayer, or when we have been alone in our chamber, aye, in the middle of the night sometimes, when pain has kept us from sleeping, when we have felt that we did not want to sleep; for we have been flooded with delight. Did you ever feel that deep calm which sometimes comes over a believer, when there seems to be no evil in the world, when we could not invent a doubt if we tried, when we could not have a dark thought concerning our Lord? After our Saviour had been tempted in the wilderness, angels came and ministered unto Him. Do you know what that experience is when there seem to be angels upstairs, and downstairs, and all through the house, ministering to you, and your life seems set to a gentle psalm tune, and instead of the sound of the trumpet calling you to battle, there is only the dulcet music of an instrument of ten strings praising the God who has given you rest? So, when the question is put, "Is not the Lord your God with you?" you can answer, "Aye, that He is, and blessed be His holy name!" Oh, what a blessing it is to live with a present God! If anyone says to me that there is no God, he might as well tell me that there is no air. I cannot see it, but I know that I am living in it, and that I could not live without it; so, "in Him we live, and move, and have our being." The Lord is life, and light, and love, and liberty, and all in all to some of us. "Is not the Lord your God with you?" is no question to us, for we know that He is with us, and we glorify His holy name that so it is.

II. Now, secondly, we must devote a few minutes to those poor weary souls to whom this is A QUESTION: "Is not the Lord your God with you?"

"Oh!" says one, "I have no joy; I have very little rest; I have nothing but trouble; deep calleth unto deep at the noise of His waterspouts, and I am so weak, so feeble, so faint, I cannot imagine that the Lord is with me. I see no signs of His presence, neither do I perceive even a star of hope amid the dense darkness of the night." Listen, dear friend; have you taken Him to be your God? Are you trusting Him? Are you determined to rely on nothing but the finished work of Christ? Then, He is with you; though you do not perceive His Holy Spirit, in the deepest darkness He is with you.

If the Lord had not been with you, *your despondency might have become despair.* If He had not been with you, your despair might have gone further still. You are yet alive, remember, you have not laid violent hands upon yourself, as you might have done if you had been left to yourself. God is with you, keeping you, even while you live on the very brink of despair. I know that there are some here who were sure God was with them in their darkness because it did not grow any darker. It was a black night, but still it was not altogether dark, there was a gleam of light left. Ah, yes! it was your gracious Lord who gave you that little ray of hope.

Tell me, sad heart, what is it that causes you to

hate sin, and makes you so wretched without the presence of the Saviour? It is because *you have His presence though you do not know it.* You have, perhaps, seen your boy play with a magnet and a needle; the needle is above the table, and the magnet, though out of sight, acts upon it, the needle feels the attraction of the magnet, and moves after it; and those desires, those groans, those cries, that inward anguish, that self-despair, that horror of great darkness, all these prove that God is secretly working with you, and drawing you to Himself. He is with you; and if you take Him afresh to be your God, if you come and trust in His promises, I should not wonder but that, even now, your midnight shall burst into a glorious meridian. The Lord send it to you right speedily! Only, do rest in Him.

The Lord is not far from any one of us; a cry will fetch Him, He will hear even a groan, and He will quickly come to the rescue of those who call upon Him. Do but trust Him, do but take Him to be yours, and then He cannot leave you. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee." There is such love in God's heart towards the very feeblest of His people, that He cannot turn away from them. Mother, is it not so in your family, that the child who is most ill, most weak, most full of pain, is the one who is best remembered by you? While you have been sitting here, this evening, you have not thought of John and Thomas, who have grown up, and gone out into the world, and are strong and healthy, but you have thought of poor little Jane, whose spine is injured or of the little boy who has to lie still so many hours a day, and who suffers so much. I am sure that, while I have been preaching, your thoughts have been trotting home to that dear child, and you have been thinking much of him. Well, remember that, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him;" and remember also how the Lord takes the mother's part as well as the father's, and says, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." These are cheering truths for those who do raise the question; I wish they could enable you to get rid of that question, and to know assuredly that the Lord is with you. I recollect how Mr. Joseph Irons used to say of some who were always hoping, "It is all very well to have hope, but do not keep on hoping and hoping, or hopping and hopping, but put both feet down, and begin to run." I trust you may do the same, and get beyond the "hoping" and the "hopping" to the full assurance of faith.

> "And art Thou with us, gracious Lord,
> To dissipate our fear?
> Dost Thou proclaim Thyself our God,
> Our God for ever near?"

Then, as Doddridge continues to sing,—

> "Why droop our heart, why flow our eyes,
> While such a voice we hear?
> Why rise our sorrows and our fears,
> While such a Friend is near?"

III. Our last point is that, here is AN ARGUMENT: "Is not the Lord your God with you?"

It is a reason for us to *arise, and be doing.* You observe how it is put in the sixteenth verse, "Arise therefore, and be doing, and the Lord shall be with thee,"—so it is in the original. Let all true Christian people arise, and be doing, because the Lord is with them. Perhaps, I need not say much to my own people about that matter, for most of you are doing what you can for your Lord. There is a brother who is just going out to Australia; when he came to bid me farewell, he gave me a little sketch of his life during three-and-twenty years. It has been a time of incessant activity in the church; and he said to me, "Yes, sir, you drove me out to work for Christ, you would not let me be idle. You said, 'The worst kind of lazy people are lazy Christians,' and you also said, 'To come here twice on a Sunday, and hear me preach, and to be doing nothing for the Master, is not at all the right thing.'" Then the good man added, "I do not often get to hear you now. I have been secretary of a Sunday-school for some time, and I often go out preaching, so I cannot come to the Tabernacle." I do delight in so many of the members not coming to hear me because they are doing the Master's work elsewhere! I know that in many churches the main thing is to sit down in a corner pew, and be fed. Well, of course, every creature needs to be fed, from the pig upwards;—you must excuse my mentioning that unclean animal, for he is the creature whose principal business it is to feed, and he is not a nice creature at all, and I do not at all admire Christian people whose one business is to feed and feed. Why, I have heard them even grumble at a sermon that was meant for the conversion of sinners, because they thought there was no food for them in it! They are great receptacles of food; but, dear Christian people, do not any of you live merely to feed,—not even on heavenly food; but if God be with you, as you say He is, then get to His work.

"What shall I do?" asks one. That is no business of mine; you have to find work for yourself. He who works for God does not need to go to this man, or that man, and enquire, "What shall I do?" Why, do the first thing that comes to hand, but do get to work for your Master! Many Christians live in country villages where there is no preaching of the gospel; then, preach it yourself, brother. "Oh, but I could not!" Well then, get somebody who can. "But we have no chapel," says one. What do you want with a chapel these bright days? Preach on the village green, where the old trees that were cut down a year of two ago are still lying, and will serve for seats. "I could not preach," says one, "I should break down." That would be a capital thing to do; break-down sermons are often the best for breaking down other people as well as the preacher. Some of the greatest enterprises in the world have sprung from very little causes; the forest of the mightiest oaks in the world was once only a handful of acorns. Oh, that we might all do what we can for Him who laid down His life for us, and who still continues to abide in us, to be our joy and our strength!

David also exhorted these people to *set their hearts upon what they had to do:* "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God." Oh, how much there is of our religion that is a kind of celestial going to sleep! The preacher preaches as if he had not really woke up yet; and the people hear in the same fashion. Are there not, even in our churches, many who, if a guinea were to jingle, would be sufficiently wide awake to look for it, but when the gospel is being preached, they are not

thoroughly aroused? As to speaking to strangers, and saying a word for the Master, that has not yet occurred to them.

"I do not know what I can do," says one. Brother, *if the text is true, I do not know what you cannot do.* The text says, "Is not the Lord your God with you?" "Well, I could not—" "Could not,—could not"; do you put God and "could not" together? I think it would be infinitely better to put God and "can" or God and "shall" together. If God be with us, what can be impossible, what can be even difficult to us? God being with His people, "he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them."

I cannot speak longer to you, nor is there any need that I should do so. If you Christians will all go out and seek to save sinners, you will be prolonging my sermon, not only for a few minutes, but for many a day and many a year to come. God be with you, brothers and sisters, in this holy service! And if any to whom I am speaking are obliged to say, "No, God is not with me, I am not saved;" remember that the way of salvation is to trust the Lord Jesus Christ. If you trust Him, He is with you, and you are saved; for "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." God is with you if you are trusting Him, and you may go forth in His might to serve the Lord who has redeemed you. God bless you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

SINCERE SEEKERS ASSURED FINDERS

"If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee."—1 Chronicles xxviii. 9.

ALTHOUGH this was addressed to Solomon, it may, without any violence to truth, be addressed to-night to every unconverted person here present, for there are a great many texts of Scripture of a similar import which apply to all ungodly ones, such, for instance, as that, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." And that other, "He that seeketh findeth; to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." I should like to go round, if it were possible, and say to every hearer here, as I put my hand upon his shoulder, "If thou seek thy God, He will be found of thee"—even of thee. May I ask you to take it as spoken to each individual—not to your neighbours, not to one who is better or worse than yourselves, but to you? You, young man, and you of riper years, you of all ages, classes and sexes, "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." I know that those who think at all about religion, and do not understand it, are very apt to conceive that there is something wonderfully mysterious about it. That a man should follow it, and may perhaps attain the blessing of it towards the end of life, or on a dying bed, though some conceive that then nobody is quite sure that he is saved, unless it is some extraordinarily good man. Oh! is not this strange, that with a book so plain as this, and with a gospel preached by so many in these days, yet the mass of mankind are in a cloud and a fog about the blessed revelation of God? Jesus Christ is salvation. He is to be had—He is to be had now. You may know you have Him. You may be now saved—completely saved, and live in the full enjoyment of that knowledge. "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." The notion is that there are a great many very mysterious preliminaries, a great deal to do, and a great deal to be, and all quite beyond our power. It is not so, but seek Him. We will tell you what that means, and He that seeks Him finds Him. "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." It has been supposed that we should want a good deal of help in seeking after salvation. Certain persons who step in to be absolutely necessary priests between us and God. A great delusion, but there be thousands who believe it and who fancy that God won't hear them if they pray, except they have some respect for these human mediators. Away with the whole, away with any pretence for anyone to stand between the soul and God, save Jesus Christ. "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee. Though thou bring no other man with thee, but come empty-handed as thou art to God here, without paraphernalia, or altar, or sacrifice of the Mass, He will be found of thee. Take the text in its simplicity and sublimity. It is just this: that if any heart really seeks God in His way, it shall find Him; if any man really wants mercy from God and seeks it as God tells him to seek it, he shall have it. Any man of woman born, be he who he may, if he comes to God in the way laid down, and sincerely asks for salvation, that salvation he shall surely have. The matter is simple enough; our pride alone obscures it. The way to heaven is so plain that "a wayfaring man, though a fool, may not err therein." We do but muddle it because we dislike it; we do but add this and that and the other to it because, like Naaman, the Syrian, we want to do some great thing, and we are not content to take the prophetic word, "Wash and be clean." I aim at nothing to-night, therefore, but that some here present may be brought to see the way of salvation, and may be led to run in it. Oh! may God grant that, out of this company, there may be some at least who will be willing to seek and to find. While we shall cast the net, may the Master grant that some may be taken in it to their own eternal welfare. We shall try to do three things, four mayhap; first, to notice *that there is a promise here explained; we will then give directions;* thirdly, *we will answer objections*; and, if time serves us, we will *offer a stimulant* to the pursuit of this. First, then, there is:—

I. A PROMISE TO BE EXPLAINED.

"If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." I have almost completed my explanation already. We have lost our God by the Fall—by our own sin. We have alienated ourselves from Him, but our case is not hopeless. Since Jesus Christ has come into the world, and given the gospel, and provided an atonement. It is a certainty that, if we desire the Lord and seek Him, He will be found of us. Now He has told us the way in which to seek. It is by coming to Him as He is revealed in Christ Jesus, and trusting our souls with Jesus. If we do this, we have found God, and we are saved. The sum and substance of

the promise is this: any soul that, by prayer, seeks God, desires salvation through Jesus, through faith in Jesus—such a soul shall be heard, shall get the blessing it desires, shall find its God. You shall not pray in vain. Your tears, and cries, and longings shall be heard. Christ shall be revealed to you, and, through your believing in Christ, you shall certainly be saved. There is not, and never will be, in hell, a single person who dare say that he sought the Lord through Christ and could not find Him. There is not living a man who dares say that, or if he did, his own conscience would belie him. They that seek Him may not find at once, but they shall ultimately. Delays from God are no denials. I will repeat what I said. There is not, and there never shall be, in the pit of hell a soul that shall dare to say, "I earnestly sought mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and did not find it." They who never found mercy in Christ never sought it, or never sought it aright, and earnestly; but the seeker will become a finder. Seeking in God's way, heartily and earnestly, God will not reject him. "How know you who I may be?" saith one; "you speak at large of all." I do not know who you may be, but I do know this, that if "the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turns unto the Lord, He will have mercy upon him, and our God will abundantly pardon" him. I know this also, concerning you, my friend, that "whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," and be you who you may, I am bidden to preach this gospel to every *creature* under heaven, and surely you are a *creature*. And what is this gospel? Why, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." Therefore, however peculiar your case or circumstances, there stands the one grand, glorious promise, "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." The only "if" there is, is with thee; if thou seek Him—no "if" about His being found of thee. Oh! shall it be an "if"? Shall it be an "if"? The Lord convert that "if" into a certainty, and may you be constrained to say to-night, "I will seek Him, and I will never cease my seeking, until in my case the promise is true, and I have found Him of whom it was written, 'If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee.'" I have thus explained the text, though it scarcely needed it. Now let me give:—

II. Some directions.

What is it to seek the Lord? To seek the Lord is, in one word, simply this: the readiest way to seek Him is *to believe that Jesus is the Christ*, and to trust Him; that Jesus, the Saviour, is God's anointed, and to trust Him as God's anointed to save your soul. You shall find peace the moment you do that "But," saith one, "I want to get this faith you speak of—this trust which you explain." Well then, let me help you somewhat. How do we get faith in anything? Why, surely by trying to know what it is. It would be very idle for me to stand here and say to you, "Believe, believe, believe"; but not tell you what to believe—what is to be believed. A man cannot command his faith about a something that he knows nothing of; therefore, let me say to every soul that is seeking mercy, "Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace." "Study the Scriptures." Try to understand God's way of salvation. See who Christ is; what He did; what was the result of what He did. Get a clear view of His person and His work and this will materially help you to believe.

Next to that, remember *faith cometh by hearing*. Frequent, therefore, the hearing of the Word, and be careful that thou seek not after the gaudy words of man's eloquence, which may feed thy pride and vanity, and tickle thine ear, but can never save thy soul. Seek a Christ-exalting ministry. Desire to be where thy soul will be handled with fidelity, and where Christ will be held up before thee with simplicity and earnestness, for the hearing that God blesses is not the hearing of every man that speaketh, but the hearing of the Word of God that "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"; "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even the very chief. Listen with all thine ears when Christ is being talked of, and pray whilst thou art hearing, and say, "Lord, bless that message to me." Open thy soul to the message; pray the Lord to open it, that thou mayest be like Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things which were spoken to her by Paul. Then when you think you understand the gospel, and have heard it so as to pretty plainly see it, if there should remain some difficulties which do not seem to be opened up to you by the ministry, *seek some earnest Christian*, to whom you may unbosom your soul on such points. You shall find that what is very difficult to you will be very easy to some believers; and they will be able, in God's hands, to be the means of removing the scales from your eyes. It was so with Paul when he was converted—he must go to Ananias, and when Ananias should come in, then should the scales fall from Paul's eyes. Meanwhile, take care to *be constantly in prayer*. Cry unto God to show thee the way; ask Him to do it, for, remember, He can do for thee what thou canst never do for thyself. Understand that thou canst not save thyself—that thou hast no right to be saved—that if saved, it will be His sovereign grace; therefore, cry humbly, but oh! note the value of the blessing thou needest, and, therefore, pray earnestly. Do not let Him go, except He bless thee. Rob thyself of sleep, sinner, rather than rob thy soul of Christ. Search the Word again and again, and turn each promise into a prayer, and if thou canst only get a hold on the edge of a promise, go with it to the mercy-seat and plead it. Be thankful for the smallest degree of hope; trust that the first beams of day will soon expand and deepen into dawn, and into noonday. Grieve not the Holy Spirit by going on with thy old sin. Part with thy old companions; seek the house of God; seek the people of God; *addict thyself to holy company and holy pursuits*; and although I would not put all this together in the place of my first word, which was, "Believe now—believe now in Christ," yet if there be difficulties in the way, they will yield under such an earnest mode of seeking as I have tried to point out to you. Oh! if a soul be resolved, "I will not perish if mercy is to be had; I will stoop to anything; I will have Christ for nothing; I will be nothing; I will let Him do what He wills with me, if I may but be saved; I will make no terms and no conditions, only let my sins be blotted out"—my friend, thou art already not far from the kingdom of God. Already grace is at work in thy soul, and "if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." Continue in that blessed search. Let nothing take thee off from it; it is thy life; thy soul hangs on it; heaven and hell tremble in the balance for thee; give thy heart to God, thy faith to Christ, thy whole soul to the purpose of seeking thy salvation, and say, "It is my only business, with holy faith and holy fear,

to make my calling and election sure, while here I stand upon this narrow neck of land, betwixt the two unbounded seas." I have thus given you some directions, but I am not going to linger over them, but pass on to :—

III. ANSWER A FEW OBJECTIONS.

I cannot anticipate them all, and objection-hunting from sinners is an endless work, for when you have destroyed fifty objections, they will be ready with fifty more. But still there are a few common ones ; and one is, " *I am too guilty.* Why should I seek, when it is impossible I should ever be pardoned ? " Oh, if thy soul rested with a man like thyself, or even with an angel, great sinner, I would not encourage thee ; but who is the Saviour ? Bethink thee for a little. He is the Mighty God. He that made the heavens and stretched them out like a tent to dwell in—He who speaks, and it is done—the everlasting Father—is anything too hard for Him ? Look to Him. He becomes a man, and yields Himself up to death. With sufferings that can never be understood or fully described :—

" He bears that we might never bear
His Father's righteous ire."

Is anything impossible for the Saviour ? Oh ! conceive not so. The idea that any guilt is too great for Christ to pardon scarcely deserves to be replied to. It is so absurd when you are dealing with the infinite mercy of a Saviour who is God Himself. It was said some years ago that the city of Pekin in China suffered greatly from a severe climate at one part of the year, and paid much for fuel, and yet underneath it, or close to it, there were large coal mines. And when the Chinese were asked why they did not work them, they said that they were afraid of disturbing the equilibrium of the globe, and perhaps the world might turn over, and the celestial empire, which had always been at the top, might be at the bottom. Nobody thought it worth while to answer so absurd a theory ; and when any say, " My sins are too great for Christ to pardon," I could almost smile in the same way at a conception so ignorant. What can be too great for the infinite mercy of the eternal God, who took our sins upon Himself upon the cross ? Sinner, think not so.

There is another objection far more common, however, which is not put into words, but it means this : " *I am too good to seek Christ.* Why, have I not always been brought up religiously ? I am not as those poor sinners are that have been drunkards and the like. I have not any need of seeking Him." Oh ! soul, if there is one that is least likely to be saved, it is you, for they that go about to establish their own righteousness are the last to submit to the righteousness in Christ Jesus, and verily the publicans and the harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven before some of you, for be ye sure of this, no man shall ever enter heaven by his own works. There is one gate to glory, and but one for queen or beggar, for the best or for the worst, and that is through the blood and righteousness of the one only Redeemer, and if thou hast not this, be thou never so good, thou art utterly undone. Oh ! lay aside that thought ; thou art neither too good nor too bad, but " If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee."

But I hear somebody in the corner saying, " It is no use my thinking of seeking Christ, *I am too poor.*" Oh ! my dear friend, your mistake, indeed, is a strange one, for did not Jesus say, " To the poor the gospel is preached " ? I'll be bound to say you are not poorer than the Saviour Himself, for He said, " Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the Son of man, have not where to lay My head." Dream not this. Gold and silver have no value in His kingdom. The poorest is as wealthy as the wealthiest if he come to Christ.

" Aye, aye," saith another, " but I am *too ignorant.* I scarce can read. Unhappily for me, I was brought up where I got no learning. I can never understand these things." Friend, if thou be not able to read a word in the Book, yet mayest thou read thy title clear to mansions in the skies. Thou needest not have all this learning ; it were a good thing for thee if thou had it—serviceable for a thousand purposes, but not needful to the entering of that kingdom. If thou knowest thyself as a sinner, and if thou wilt trust Christ as a Saviour, thou shalt be as welcome into the kingdom as doctors who have taken their degree at the Universities, or the wisest men that have ever sat at the feet of Gamaliel. Come and welcome ; come and welcome ; come and welcome. Let not this keep thee back.

But I have heard one say, " I would fain seek the Lord, but *I have no place to seek Him.*" " What mean you ? " " I have no chamber into which I can go and pray alone." That is a sad deprivation, I grant you, but do not think for a moment that you need any special place in which to seek the Lord. I remember a sailor who used to be much in prayer, and he was asked where he went to pray. " Oh ! " said he, " I have been many a time alone with Christ up on the mast." Why not ? It is as good an oratory as a cathedral. Another man, when he was converted, used, while under conviction of sin, to make use of an old coach that was in his master's yard. Why not ? Why not ? I know one whose prayer-place used to be a saw-pit, and another a hay-loft. What matter ?

" Where'er we seek Him, He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground."

Every place is consecrated where there is a true heart. In that seat you may seek and find Him. Standing there, up in that corner of the gallery, your soul may find her God. In Cheapside, walking in the busiest street, or at the plough-tail amidst the fields, let thy soul but cry, " Jesus, pity a sinner "—let thy heart trust in that Jesus—no place is wanted—any place sufficeth. Raise not that excuse.

" *I have not the time,*" says another. Not the time ! What time, pray, does it require ? But if it did require it, oh ! man, art thou mad to say, " I have no time " ? Ye have time enough to dress your body ; you stay for that other pin, and that other ribbon, and that adornment of your person. Not time to put on the robe of righteousness ! You have time to feed your bodies, to sit down to your meals. Not time to eat the bread of heaven ! Time to cast up your accounts to see how your business stands, and not time to see to your soul's affairs ! O ! sirs, be ashamed to make such an excuse. I charge you, give not sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids till you are saved. A man wakes up in the night, and finds his house is on fire. There is a noise in the street. The fireman is calling to him. The ladder is at the window. " I have not time," says he, " to go down the ladder and escape. I have little enough time for rest, and I must have my sleep while I can." The man is mad, sir, and so is every man who says,

"I have not time to seek my God." Perhaps, however, you speak the truth, for ere the next word leaves my lips you may fall down a corpse. God sometimes makes our base excuses turn into solemn truth. Oh! while you have time, use it. "Escape for your life; look not behind thee"; stay not, but hasten till you find the Saviour, and never think of resting till Christ is yours.

Another reason that some bring is one which occurs to them as if it were very satisfactory, and that is, "*I cannot.* No man can come, except he be drawn, and I cannot." Yes, but you may put a truth into such a shape that it is a lie. Will you let me put that into the right shape? Every time when a sinner cannot, the real reason is that he will not. All the cannots in the Bible about spiritual inability are tantamount to will nots. But when you say, "I cannot repent," you mean, "I will not—I will not seek, I will not believe." Now put it honestly to your own soul, for that is what you mean, for if you would you could. If the will were conquered, the power would be sure to come with it, but the first difficulty is, "You will not"; and this is it, you will not seek eternal life; you will not escape from hell; you will not have heaven; you will not be reconciled to God; you will not come into Christ that you might have Christ. You make it as an objection, but I charge it upon you as a crime, a crime which aggravates all the rest, and is in itself a greater crime, perhaps, than all the rest put together. Ye will not come. "Do you want to come?" "Yes, but there is much I cannot do." "Aye! but there is means provided to help you." God the Holy Spirit helps you, yea, works mightily in you. Have you never heard of that negro servant who was sent by his master on an errand? He did not particularly like to go there. He was sent with a letter. He was back in a short time; and his master said, "Sam, you have not gone with that letter." "No, massa." "Why not?" "Massa couldn't expect Sam to do impossibilities." "What impossibilities, sir?" "I went on as far as I could, massa—came to river—couldn't swim across river—very wide river—couldn't swim across it." "But there is a ferry-boat." "Ferry-boat t'other side, massa—ferry-boat t'other side." "Did you call to the ferry-boat, sir?" "No, massa; didn't." "Oh! you rascal," said he; "that is no excuse at all. Why didn't you call for the ferry-boat? Why didn't you call for it?" Now if that negro had only just said, "Boat, ahoy there!" the ferry-boat would have come to him, and all would have been well. It was an idle thing to say, "I cannot." It was true, but it was false. So when I come to a point where there is something in the matter of my being saved which I cannot do, yet if I pray the Holy Spirit to work in me that I cannot work in myself, He will do it. Jesus Christ will give me "true belief and true repentance—every grace that brings me nigh." I have only to ask for all that I want, and I shall have it. It is idle for me to say, "I cannot do it." Nobody asked you to. Christ will give it to you; only do stand and call—call mightily, and cry with all your soul until the blessing be come. But now I must close. I want to offer just a few sentences only.

IV. A STIMULANT, to lead you to seek Him who will be found of you. And the first is, "*Is it not our duty to God* that we should seek Him?" With some persons this reflection may be important. You remember the Countess of Huntingdon, one of the most remarkably gracious women that ever lived—a mother in Israel. Her conversion was to a great degree caused by this: she was a gay and worldly lady of noble rank, excellent and amiable, and all that, but she had no thought of the things of God. She was at a ball, and the amusements of the evening were engrossing all attention, and suddenly the answer to the first question of the assembly's catechism, which she appears to have learnt when she was a child, came forcibly into her mind, "The chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy Him for ever." She thought to herself, "Why, here am I, a butterfly among a lot of butterflies. All our chief end is to enjoy ourselves, to spend the evening merrily make ourselves agreeable, and so on." She went away smitten in her soul with that thought, "The end that God made me for I am not answering." Now there are some minds that have sufficient in them to think of such a thing as that, and I shall leave that to fall into some honest and good ground. Perhaps some young man will say, "Well, after all, I am not serving my Creator as I should." You remember the conversion of Colonel Gardiner. He had lived a wild soldier's life, and he had appointed that very night of his conversion to perpetrate a gross sin. He was waiting an hour before he went to his appointment, and he thought he saw, I think upon the wall, the Saviour on the cross, and underneath the representation of the Crucified he read these words:—

> "I have done this for thee;
> What hast thou done for Me?"

He never kept that sinful appointment. He became a soldier of the cross. Oh! I wish that some here might feel something of nobility within them that would make them feel, "It is mean to act so unjustly to God, as to prefer the trivial things of time to the weighty matters of eternity."

The next stimulus I would offer is one of *hope.* "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." "Oh!" says one, "if I could find Him, I would seek Him." When persons go to South Africa, they search for diamonds; but if any man could be assured that he would find a Koh-i-noor, I warrant you he would be one of the hardest workers there. Oh! there are some here to-night that little dream it, that will yet before long be telling to others what eternal love has done for them. They are very ready to sneer at it, perhaps, at this moment. They think it is impossible. The Lord doeth great marvels; He bringeth down the mighty from their seat, and exalteth them of low degree. O! soul, the gate may not open at the first knock to thee, it may be, but it will open. Let me encourage thee. Thou shalt yet rejoice. Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty, for there is a harp in heaven that no finger shall ever play on but yours, and there is a crown there that will fit no head but yours, and a throne on which no one must sit but you; the Lord hath chosen thee, and, therefore, this night He calls thee. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Go thou, poor soul, to Christ, and thou shalt find it so.

But if that doth not move thee, let me give thee another stimulant, and that is the opposite one, of *fear.* Suppose thou shouldest never seek thy Lord; suppose thou shouldest die without a Saviour; what then? "I shall die," sayest thou; "my soul will go before God." What then? Why, it must be

condemned, and by-and-by thy body shall rise up—from the grave shall thy body spring, and thou in body and soul shalt stand before the bar of that great Saviour whom thou dost to-night despise. Beware, for the books will be opened, and thy rejection of Christ written there shall be read before the assembled world; and then when the earth doth rock and reel and the ungodly in their terrors ask for the mountains to cover them—when the stars fall like withered figs from the trees, and all Creation gathers up her skirts to flee away from the face of Him that comes in terror, oh! what will you do? What will you do? Expire, you cannot; be extinguished, you must not; live on, you must; and in anguish that shall never abate, in despair that never shall be enlightened with a hope. "Turn ye, turn ye! Why will ye die?" Why will ye reject Him? "If ye seek Him, He will be found of you." Oh! do seek Him; reject Him not. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Oh! who shall give me tears? Who shall teach me to speak with pathos? How shall I reach your consciences and stir your hearts? Eternal Spirit, do Thou this mighty work, and win this night to Thyself. O Jesu, save many a heart by this testimony of Thy grace, which again and again we reiterate, "If we seek Him—if thou seek Him—He will be found of thee." God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

GOD'S HANDWRITING UPON DAVID

"All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern."—1 Chronicles xxviii. 19.

THE temple was not to be built according to the designs of David, or Solomon, or any other man. It was to be built according to a pattern which God Himself had formed. In the things of God, we are not left to follow our own judgments and devices; but we are to look to the law and to the testimony for our instructions. To God's Word we must always come for our orders. What God has commanded, is binding upon us in His Church; what He has not commanded, we may safely leave undone.

You will notice that David here says that he received the designs and the details of the temple from God, who wrote them, not on tables of stone, but on His servant's heart by His own hand. Now, it was very necessary that everything should be arranged and planned for the temple, and that it should be built according to a pattern; for it was to be a type, an eminent type of Christ, and also a type of His Church, which is a temple for God's own indwelling. Now, no man knew what God meant to teach by that temple; and, consequently, if the building had been left to human judgment, it would not have been a true type; for who can make a type if he knows not what it is to typify? God alone knew what He intended to teach by this building, so the temple, that it might convey divine teaching, must be arranged according to divine command.

Moreover, the temple was for God's own dwelling. Should not the Most High have a house after His own mind? If He was to be the Tenant, should it not be built to suit Him? And who knows what God requires in a habitation but God Himself? The best that can be built is too poor for Him. Stephen said, "Solomon built him an house. Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Yet, if even in type it was to be the dwelling-place of God, it must be built according to God's own requirements.

Besides, the temple was to be the throne of the great King; and if the very principle on which that throne was built was the will-worship of man's own judgment, there would have been a violation of the great principle of obedience at the fountain-head. I take it that, in the Church of God, I have no right to decree anything, nor John Wesley, nor John Calvin, nor any greater than they. God is alone supreme. Christ is the one Head of His Church; and we must, in all that we do in the building of His Church, consult with Him, or else we act upon lawless principles, and cast off the authority of the Church's true King and Head, and we come under some other law. This would be, at the very centre of our holy service, setting an example of lawlessness and rebellion against God. That must never be; His temple must be built according to a pattern of His own drawing; and His Church and all holy work must be carried on according to His direction if we are to expect a blessing.

The point to which I call your attention is this, that God gave the directions to David by impressing them upon his mind, upon his heart, by His own hand. He did not so much draw a plan, and hand it to David, and say to him, "Build the temple according to that design," but He made him think carefully and prayerfully over the whole matter. Perhaps, in the visions of the night, and often, as he turned the subject over in his thoughts by day, God's Spirit came, and revealed to David what he needed to know as to how this house was to be built: "All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern."

I shall, to-night, first, call your attention to *the singular instructions given to David;* then, coming home to ourselves, I shall speak upon *the spiritual tuition of the saints in the truth of God,* which is very similar to this instruction given to David; and, before I close, I shall have a word or two to say as to *the duty of the transmission of what we have received.* If God has taught us, we are bound to do what David did, commit the same to faithful men, that, before we go hence, we may have started others in work for the Lord, and not ourselves retire leaving God's work undone.

I. First, then, dear friends, I call your attention to THE SINGULAR INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO DAVID.

David received his instructions by the writing of God upon his heart with God's own hand. Note this, *David did not receive them by consultation with others.* David did not send to Hiram, king of Tyre, to ask his judgment; nor did he call in a Bezaleel, or some other skilful man, to give him advice. God Himself taught him. This reminds me of what Paul said, "I consulted not with flesh and blood." "The

gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Depend upon it, if you learn anything aright, you will have to learn it of God; and, although consultation with others may often be very serviceable upon some points, yet you must not take them into consultation on the question whether you shall believe God's Word or not. That is to have supreme authority; and, albeit there are some who are deeply taught in the things of God, who may at times be helpful to you, you must not defer to what they say so as to miss the instructions that the Lord Himself gives you. No man's voice is to be sovereign to you; but only the voice of God the Holy Spirit, speaking out of this Book, which contains all things that you need for life and godliness. May God the Holy Ghost give you grace to fetch all your instructions from it! David did not consult with others about building the temple; and we are not to obtain our creed by consultation with other men, but to go to God Himself, and to pray Him to write it upon our heart with His own hand.

Observe, also, that *David did not slavishly follow the former model.* In the wilderness, Israel had a tent covered with skins as the meeting-place between Jehovah and the people. It was a simple structure, easily moved; but now the tabernacle was to be swallowed up in the temple; and, albeit that the general shape of the temple reminds you strongly of the tabernacle, yet David had a fresh revelation, and fresh guidance in what he had done. I like to see a man keep to the old things; but even in doing so he may make a mistake, for there may be old things that can be supplanted by newer and better things. Keep your eye lifted up to God, with whom nothing is old, and nothing is new. Wait at His footstool; submit your heart, like a tablet, for Him to write upon it all His instructions; and then do as He hath said.

According to the context, *God gave to David instructions about the details of the work.* I commend the reading of this chapter to you; it may at first seem to have little in it; but the more you study it, the more will it teach you. Among other things, God revealed to David "the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy-seat." God will teach you, if you will wait upon Him, the details of your work, the details of His gospel, the detailed explanation of your experience. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." As one said to me, the other day, and I thought very wisely, "God directs His servants' steps, and also His servants' stops when they are not able to take any steps, but feel bound to stand still." God directs them in not acting as well as in acting. You may go to Him for detailed guidance, and especially in the matter of His service. If you would know what is His mind, yield yourself to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and consult this Book, for it will tell you everything about the porches, and the houses, and the treasuries, and the upper chambers, and the inner parlours, and the place of the mercy-seat, and everything else that you need to know.

Further, *the directions given were extremely minute.* You noticed, in our reading, that there was gold by weight for the lampstands, and for the lamps which stood upon them. Now, no man, unless he had made a candelabrum or lampstand of the kind before, could tell how much gold it would take; the most skilful tradesman here, though himself a dealer in such things, would not readily know exactly the weight of gold required; but if the one who needs the knowledge has never made such things, if he has been a king used to the sword, how can he know how much silver is wanted for a candlestick, how much gold is needed for a seven-branched lampstand, and how much for the lamps to stand thereon? It is a wonderful instance of what inspiration can do, how the Spirit of God could teach His servant David all the little ins and outs of this wonderful making of the vessels for the house of the Lord, even down to the basons: "for the golden basons He gave gold by weight for every bason; and likewise silver by weight for every bason of silver." All was arranged exactly. If we will follow the Word of God closely, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we shall find that it enters into the details of our private life, into the details of our church life, into the details of our troubles, our wants, and our joys. God will direct you in everything if you are willing to be directed. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle"; but be willing to be directed by God; and you shall not be without direction even in the smallest matter.

And, yet again, *the innermost things were laid bare to David.* Nobody saw the cherubim; I speak broadly, for once in a year the high priest went into the holy place, but then he scarcely saw the cherubim, for, with the smoke of the incense which went up around him before the mercy-seat, everything in that place must have become dim. They were almost unseen objects; yet David had seen them in his mind's eye. He had had a representation of them written on his heart by the hand of God, for so we read; "and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord." There was a pattern of this printed on the understanding and heart of David. Oh! yes; the Lord will let you see everything that can be seen; there is no stint in his revelation to the man who is willing to see. There are unspeakable words; yet Paul heard them, though he could never tell them; it was not lawful for him to utter them. There are secrets of the Lord, but they are "with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." There are things that are within the veil so far as most men are concerned; but to the man who is in Christ, the veil is rent, and the veil which was on his own heart and mind has been taken away by the Spirit of God, and he can see the things of God, and rejoice therein, even as David did.

Now, we are told in the text, and I must come back to the very words of it, "The Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me." *David not only knew the details; but he understood them.* He had a clear insight into what God meant by the instructions given. Now, dear friends, the hardest thing in the world is to give a man understanding. It is our duty, in our preaching and teaching to make things very clear to the understanding; but if people have not any understanding, we cannot give it to them; but God can. When the understanding itself is darkened, and ceases to be an understanding, God can so renew it that it shall be all clear and bright,

and it shall be able to comprehend the things of God. "The Lord made me understand." Oh, what a privilege! Not merely, "made me hear," but "made me understand." And how did the Lord do it? "In writing," says David, "by His hand upon me." The writing was written on David's own mind; he had not to go upstairs to fetch it; he had not to say, "I cannot always carry it about with me"; but he did always carry it about with him wherever he went; for God had written upon David himself.

And it was *written there by the hand of God.* Now, I am coming to my chief point. "The Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me." God writes His law in the Bible; but we do not understand it; God writes it on our hearts, and then we do understand it. There it lies in the letter, and we may be dull of understanding, and not comprehend it; but if it comes here in the spirit of it, our hearts are no longer dull, but being quickened of God, it receives the things of the Spirit of God. The carnal mind cannot know spiritual things; but God gives us a spiritual mind, and then we begin to understand spiritual things. "The Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me." We learn much from the gifts of God's hand; but not so much as from the hand itself. Sometimes God lays His hand upon His child very heavily. You can forget His gifts; but you cannot forget the pressure of that hand. At times, He will press His hand upon us till He seems to crush us to the very heart, till we stagger, and anguish breaks our spirit. There is no writing like that which God writes with a steel pen right into the soul; and sometimes He makes very heavy downstrokes, and very sharp, cutting up-strokes, when He writes upon the fleshy tablets of the heart His mind and will, as He wrote upon the heart of David all the details about the building of the temple at Jerusalem.

II. That brings me, then, to my second point, which is this, THE SPIRITUAL TUITION OF THE SAINTS IN THE TRUTH OF GOD.

I remark, first, that *God still writes upon the hearts of men.* He prefers fleshy tablets and His own Spirit to any paper and ink. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." God makes a new heart to write upon; and when He has made a new heart, then He takes His pen, and writes there the law of His house. Have *you* ever had God's Word written on your hearts? I know that some of you have; but I am afraid that some of you have not, because I know how easy it is to hear a sermon, and to read the Bible, and say, "Oh, that is wonderful!" and then to go out into the world, and act clean contrary to what you heard from the preacher, or found written in the Word of God.

Now, let me show you a little in detail *how God writes the great truths of His Word on our hearts.* We come to this blessed Book, and we find that man is fallen, that man is ruined by sin. Did you ever feel that it was so with you? You remember a time when you knew that you were fallen, when you could see your heart to be corrupt, and felt yourself to be lost ruined, and undone. Ah! then the Lord made you understand in writing by His hand upon you. This Book tells us that, without Christ, we can do nothing; we are dead; we are without strength. Did you never find it so? Why, when you began to seek the Lord, some of you, you found that your boasted strength had all evaporated! You could not feel aright, nor think aright, nor act aright; and, though you tried hard, yet you were like Samson when his hair was shorn, you were too feeble to accomplish any good thing. Then you learned a doctrine in this way. I may have preached it to your ears; but God laid it on your heart. You knew that it was so; for the Lord had taught it to you by His Spirit; and nobody can ever beat it out of you now. Then there came a time when you read in the Scriptures that Christ is the Saviour of His people, and that whosoever looks to Him shall live. You believed that to be true as you heard it preached, and read it in the Book, and you did look; you looked to Christ you gazed upon Him as He hung upon the accursed tree for you. Now, tell me, did you not, when you looked, find immediate and glorious salvation? Did not the burden roll from your shoulders? Did not the disease depart from your heart? Can you not say to-night,—

> "Happy day, happy day,
> When Jesus washed my sins away"?

And then the doctrine of the atoning sacrifice, the doctrine that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin, that also you were made to understand in writing by the hand of the Lord upon you; and no power on earth or in hell can take that doctrine from you. Since then, you have learned other doctrines, possibly the five points of Calvinism, or the fifty points of any other system; but you never learned them from merely reading them in the Scriptures, you never really knew them till the pen of God began to move up and down upon your inward nature, and your heart received the impression the Lord intended to convey to it. It may be that there are more truths to be written on your heart yet; but we shall not know them all until we get home to our Father's house. Meanwhile, let us keep on reading more of God's Word, and making more of its truths our own; but, depend upon it, this is the main thing, to get by real personal experience what we perceive to be written by the revelation of God. "The Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me." The Lord make it to be so with every minister of Christ here, and every Sunday-school teacher, and every Christian worker of every kind! May we know what is written in the Book by what is written on our hearts!

Now I believe that *the Lord does this with regard to our great Pattern:* "even all the works of this pattern." We have one great Pattern whom we are all to imitate. You know who it is to whom we sing very often,—

> "Be Thou my Pattern; make me bear
> More of Thy gracious image here!"

May the Lord Himself write upon us according to that glorious Pattern! Who but the Holy Spirit can work in us the humility of Christ, the courage of Christ, the self-denial of Christ, and full obedience to the Father's will such as He rendered? Who can give us all this but the Christ to whom we sing,—

> "Cold mountains, and the midnight air
> Witness'd the fervour of Thy prayer;
> The desert Thy temptation knew,
> Thy conflict and Thy victory, too"?

Let none of us think that we cannot be like Christ. Let nobody say, "The Pattern is too difficult for us to copy." No, no, my brother; let us weep our eyes out that we fall so short of it, and let us strive after it according to His striving, who worketh in us mightily, and never be content till we are indeed like Him. What did the Psalmist say? "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." We shall never be satisfied till then; therefore let us sit in the light of Christ till He is photographed upon us, and we go forth as living portraits of the divine Pattern.

I want, for a minute or so, to show you how the Lord can reveal to you, His servants who love and fear Him, everything you need to know about the great work of salvation In the Word of God we have a model of salvation; and you who want to teach others had better conform all your teaching to this model. The Lord can teach you and will teach you all things that you need to know about His Church and the temple of His salvation. Read the eleventh verse of this chapter again: "Then David gave to Solomon his son *the pattern of the porch.*" Oh you young men, who are going to be ministers, mind that you get a good clear view of the pattern of the porch! Tell the sinner to come to Christ just as he is; do not begin setting up some fine porch of feelings or preparations. Set up the pattern of the porch, the wicket gate, with the light shining through it, and these words written over it, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Preach a full Christ to empty sinners, and tell them that all the fitness He requires of them is that they should feel their need of Him, and tell them that He gives them even that; they are not to look within themselves for it. If they do not feel their need, they must come to Him to get the feeling of their need, for from the very beginning it is all of grace, and all of Christ. So, my brethren, get a clear view of "the pattern of the porch."

"*And of the houses thereof,*" the places where the priests and Levites dwelt. Get a clear view of the houses that Christ gives His people to dwell in; how they dwell in Him, how they abide in Him, and go no more out for ever. I cannot enlarge on this; but you can think it out for yourselves, and explain it to your hearers and scholars. Think of those mansions of present joy and future bliss which they shall have who come in by the true and living way, even by Christ Jesus, who is the one way of entrance into the temple of salvation.

"*And of the treasuries thereof.*" Notice that when you preach Christ, pray to have written upon your heart, as well as in this Book something about the treasuries of God's house. Oh, the infinite riches of the covenant of grace! Oh, the all-sufficiency of Christ Jesus, our Lord! Oh, the fulness of power that is to be found in the Holy Ghost! Oh, the heaps of blessedness which are stored away for believers in the person of their divine Lord and Master! Get in your own heart a good clear view of the treasuries of the temple of salvation, and then go and preach about them to others.

And what next? "*And of the upper chambers thereof.*" Have you ever been in those upper chambers, where you get a view of the glory yet to be revealed? Then you have been near to heaven, and near to your God. Perhaps you have not attained to that height yet. If not, may the Lord write on your heart the plan of the upper chambers

"*And of the inner parlours thereof.*" I thought, as I read this over, and tried to look deeply into it, that I did know a little about the inner parlours thereof. Oh, there are sweet fellowships, there are communings which nobody knows but the man who has dwelt where Jesus is, and who continues to abide in Him! He shall ask what he will, and it shall be given him; and he shall continually joy in God through Jesus Christ. Get a good view of the inner parlours thereof. May the pattern of them be written on your own heart, and then go and tell others about them.

And here is one thing more: "*And of the place of the mercy seat.*" You often sing,—

> "There is a place where Jesus sheds
> The oil of gladness o'er our heads!
> A place, than all beside more sweet,
> It is the blood-stained mercy-seat."

May you have written on your heart the pattern "of the place of the mercy seat!" It was inside the veil you know, above the ark of the covenant, and under the wings of the cherubim, the place where God met with Moses and Aaron, and shone forth in the light of the Shekinah, making glad their willing eyes. God grant that you may know by daily experience the power of prayer, at the place of the mercy seat! Then go and tell poor sinners about it, and tell poor saints about it, too, according as the Spirit of God has written it with His own hand upon your heart.

III. But now the time has almost gone, so I must briefly finish with my third point, that is, THE DUTY OF THE TRANSMISSION TO OTHERS OF ANYTHING THAT GOD WRITES ON YOUR HEARTS. Tell others what God has told you. Our Lord said to His disciples, "What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house tops." He says the same to us. "To whom shall I go?" say you. Well, take David as your example.

First, *David told Solomon all about it.* "Ah!" you say, "My boy is no Solomon." That is all the more reason why you should teach him. Perhaps David might have been excused from teaching Solomon, as he was already so wise; but the fact that he did instruct him teaches us that the wisest child needs to be taught the things of God. If your boy is not a Solomon, you will need to teach him twice over, or many times, if need be. Teach him nineteen times over; and, if necessary, teach him twenty times over. If anybody asks, "Why do you teach him twenty times?" say that it is because you found that nineteen times did not bring him salvation, and you meant to keep on till he was saved. Tell Solomon about it. Say to him, "My son, come here, and listen to what your father has tasted and handled of the good Word of the Lord. Hear what your father has experienced of divine grace."

Well, perhaps you say, "Yes, I will talk to my boys about the Saviour; shall I speak to anyone else?" Next, dear friend, *talk about Christ to chosen companions.* I count it a high privilege if I can get a little personal conversation with a choice young man, one who has great ability, and one whom we have reason to believe God has called to do a great work for Him. David knew that God had chosen Solomon to build the temple, and therefore he was very particular to give him the details that he had received from the Lord. Perhaps a Christian woman here says, "You would not have me talk to a young minister, would you?" Well, my dear sister, you know what we read about Priscilla and her husband Aquila. They were not very great people, they were simply tent-makers, but they talked to Apollos in such a way

that he was for the rest of his life indebted to that humble man and woman. Some of those whom God has used, and will yet use still more, will tell you that they owe a great deal to humble people who have talked to them about Christ. The godly women, who sat spinning and darning stockings in the sunshine at Bedford, talked with one another about the things of God, and John Bunyan stopped and listened to what they said, and he profited all the rest of his days by their holy talk. If you have the opportunity, and come across any choice young minds, be sure to tell them what God has told you about His great plan of salvation.

Then, lastly, *David gathered all the people together, and told them about the temple.* In the next chapter, we read, "Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God." They soon began to give the gold, and the silver, and the brass, and the wood, and the precious stones for the temple. See that you tell out to all you can what God has told you. I am afraid that some here have not yet found out their life-work. We get into the habit of wanting so much "talent" in preachers. May "talent" be thrown into the bottomless pit! It has done more hurt to the Church of God than it ever did good. If plain Christian men would begin to talk about Christ wherever they have opportunity, it would usher in a golden age. Perhaps there has come in here a troubled sinner wanting to find a Saviour. Try to speak to him. "Oh!" you say, "he might be offended." So he might; but that would not kill you. Tell him about Jesus Christ, and if he gets to heaven through what you tell him, he will forgive you for not having given him a handsome card with your name on it to introduce yourself. If you get a soul to heaven, the rudeness of an impromptu address will never occur to that soul. God help us to be up and doing, telling out what He has written in our hearts, and unto His name shall be the praise!

Perhaps you have never had anything written on your heart, my dear hearer. Then, lay your heart before the Lord to-night with this simple prayer, "Lord, write on it!" And if He writes on it that one word "Jesus," it will be all that you can want. God bless you, every one, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

A KING SENT IN LOVE

"Then Huram, the king of Tyre, answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon, Because the Lord hath loved His people, He hath made thee king over them."—2 Chronicles ii. 11.

I THINK that you must have been struck with the deeply religious tone of the communications which passed between Solomon and Huram. I am inclined to think that Huram must have been a proselyte to the faith of Israel. At any rate, the despatches between these two neighbouring kings contain very gracious references to Jehovah and His dealings with His ancient people. Not that I recommend that the despatches which are sent now between kings should be of a similar character, for that would be a piece of beggarly hypocrisy. What has God to do with the most of them; and what has He to do with the transactions of modern times, in which the invasion of countries by the more powerful is perpetually being justified by the laws of politics which seem to be the very reverse of the laws of God? Oh, that better times might come, when kings would rule in righteousness! One almost despairs of them; but, at any rate, there is a King coming who will rule in righteousness. Make no tarrying, O our God!

In the letter which was written by Huram, we note that he declares his belief that Solomon was of such a character that his reign was a special blessing from God to His people. That is the meaning of our text: "Because the Lord hath loved His people, He hath made thee king over them." Such was the character of Solomon, in those early days before he began to decline from the splendour of his first estate, that even this heathen monarch could see that he was bound to be a blessing to the people. I wish that your life and mine, dear friends, might always have that about it which should make even the worldling say, "That young man is likely to be a blessing to his family; that woman is sure to be a blessing to her husband, and to her children." I would to God that our character were so transparent, so true, and pure, and good, that all who knew us might feel that we were a blessing to those among whom we dwell.

I want you to notice, also, that Huram here distinctly recognizes that every blessing comes from God. If Solomon is a blessing to his subjects, Huram attributes that to the fact of God having placed him where he was. Now, if one, who had been a heathen, could thus trace a blessing back to God as its source, what heathen must those be who never do anything of the sort, but trace it to what they call "good luck," or to "chance," or to anything rather than to God! O beloved, whenever there is aught of good, aught of excellence, aught of happiness, that comes to our door, let us praise and bless the God who gave it. We are all too apt to complain of Him when we suffer, and ready enough to attribute our afflictions to Him. Surely, then, when mercies come to us plentifully, we should magnify and glorify the name of the Lord our God from whom they come. We should say of every mercy, in somewhat similar fashion to that of Huram when he wrote to Solomon, "Because the Lord hath loved His people, therefore hath He done this and that for them."

I purpose, however, to take our text right away from Solomon; for, true as it was in his case, it is more emphatically true in reference to our King. It is still true, as was said in Thessalonica in Paul's day, "There is another King, one Jesus;" and many here present, I am thankful to know, are His loyal subjects. King of kings is He to us, and our soul loves to worship and adore Him. Well, now, God has been pleased to make Christ our King, so my text shall run thus: "Because the Lord hath loved His people, He hath made Jesus to be King over them."

I. That shall be our first division,—THE LOVE OF GOD HAS MADE JESUS TO BE OUR KING.

If we believe that, does it not prove that *we do not regard the dominion of Jesus Christ as any burden whatsoever?* It is a proof that, in our esteem, His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Those who look on from the outside say, "We would rather be perfectly free,—free thinkers and free livers"; and when they hear any one of us say, with the psalmist, "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds;" they feel that they do not want to share any such servitude with us. But we are living and truthful witnesses to the fact that we do not look upon the rule of Christ over us as any hardship. On the contrary, we take delight in it; we trace it to the love of God, not to His anger; not even to His justice, or to any necessity that may constrain Him, but to His infinite love, and to His gracious thought that He could not do any better thing for us than to give us Jesus Christ to be our King; and we devoutly thank and bless the Lord, this day, that He hath set Him over us, to rule us, and to have dominion over our spirit, soul, and body, henceforth and for ever.

But, beloved, *there was an urgent necessity that we should have Jesus as our King.* We are such poor creatures that we cannot live without some form of rule and government. Men have tried to live in anarchy, but their experiment has proved to be a disastrous failure. Think of the French Revolution, at the end of the eighteenth century, and see what awful abominations resulted from it. A den of tigers, all let loose upon one another, would be peacefulness itself compared with a mass of men living without any law or order. We are such creatures that we need to be under authority of some kind. God has frequently compared us to sheep; but what can sheep do without a shepherd? I do not know that there has ever been a discovery made of really wild sheep anywhere. There are certain wild animals that are somewhat like sheep; but sheep like those with which we are familiar,—what shiftless, hopeless, helpless, defenceless creatures they would be without a shepherd! They would soon die out altogether if it were not for man. The rule, and leadership, and the kingly shepherdry of man are good for sheep; and Christ's rule is absolutely necessary for His sheep. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture, if we have believed in Him; and we as much need Jesus, our Shepherd-King, as the sheep need their shepherd. If you demur to that figure, let us think of ourselves under a higher aspect. As many of us as have been born again are the children of God. Now, a family without rule,—I venture to say very boldly, is not a happy family. Children, who are always allowed to do just as they like, will very soon be exceedingly unhappy. A father's gentle sway over the various members of the household, which is, I take it, the first type of kingship, is absolutely necessary for their good; for disorder soon breeds unhappiness, envy, strife, malice, and all kinds of evil. Every house needs to have a "*house-band*" to keep it together. Every family needs to have someone as its head; every thinking person feels that it must be so; and, therefore, how thankful we ought to be that our glorious God, seeing that His own brightness unveiled might have been too much for our feebleness, hath given us His Son, "whom He hath appointed Heir of all things," and made Him to be the firstborn among many brethren, that He might sweetly rule the whole household! Because the Lord loved His people, therefore He gave Jesus to be King over them.

Further, *this fact tends greatly to our happiness.* It is not merely a matter of necessity; but, over and above that, it makes us exceedingly happy to have such a King as Jesus is. Just suppose, for a moment, that we, the people of God, were left without any law or ruler. Well, my brethren, in such a case as that, we should not know what to do; we might wish to do what was right, but we should not know what right was. I am sure we must all desire to be guided by God, for we feel unable to guide ourselves, and we dare not trust the best earthly guide. So it is a mercy that we have a King to whom we can refer all difficult cases, and who will guide us with His eye. Why, even if I were conscious of having done right, yet, if I had no Ruler and Law-giver, whose infallible Word would assure me that I had done so, I should always be in a fidget about it. I should be anxious to know whether I had made a wise choice, or not,—whether I might not, after all, have put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. When a man is his own ruler, he has all the responsibility of what he does; but when we implicitly obey Christ's command, we are not responsible for the result of our actions; that rests with Him who gave us the command. If, in doing right, we meet with trouble,—if we have to suffer persecution,—if the reward of virtue does not reach us in the present, yet we have the comfort that we did what Jesus told us to do. We did what our King commanded, so the responsibility of it must rest with Him. This is ever a sweet feeling, and much to the ease of such poor minds as ours are.

"Well," says one, "I like to be my own master." Yes, and that involves two things; first, you have a very bad master; and, next, your master has a fool for his servant. But he who takes the Lord Jesus Christ as his Master will be rightly and wisely guided, and hence arises the comfort of such a relationship.

But, to my mind, the bliss of being under the dominion of Christ lies *in the character of Christ.* As I must have a master, let me have the Christ of Bethlehem,—the Christ of Nazareth,—the Christ of Calvary,—the Christ of Heaven. If I must submit my mind and will to another,—and surely I must do so, or else I must submit it to the imperious domination of my own lusts and passions, which is the worst slavery in the whole world,—if I must have a king, let it be Jesus Christ, whose head was once crowned with thorns.

For, my brethren, in Him we have all the wisdom of Solomon, and infinitely more. He will rule and guide us wisely. To err, is human; yet He never makes any mistakes, His rule and guidance are infallible.

There is also, united with this wisdom, unlimited power; for, where Christ rules, He is able to protect. He can put forth the might of omnipotence; His decrees and proclamations shall never be wasted words. All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth. Though He sometimes leaves His subjects to suffer in this world, (they must have tribulation, for they have to carry the cross after Him,) yet He could deliver them in a moment if He pleased; for there is nobody, above or below the sky, who can successfully withstand the almighty power of the Christ of God. Happy are the people who have so wise and strong a King as He is.

But, then, with this wisdom and strength, He is also so gentle. Was there ever such a gentle man, and such a gentleman, as He was? Who would not gladly serve Him who suffered the little children to come unto Him, and would not let His disciples forbid them to come? Who would not willingly serve Him who sat upon the well at Sychar to talk with the poor sinful woman till He had won her soul, and made her into a zealous and successful home missionary? Who would not freely serve Him to whom publicans and sinners drew near, that He might woo them, with tenderest love, to forsake their sins? He is truly and divinely royal; but He is also, as the children are taught to say,—

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,"—

so affable, generous, humane, benevolent, gracious, Godlike,—that, to be enlisted beneath His banner is to serve One who is indeed a Standard-Bearer among ten thousand; yea, He is altogether lovely. We are not ashamed to be the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. There have been some kings and princes whom a man might well be ashamed to serve; to have anything to do with such loathsome creatures as some despots are, would make a stain upon anyone's character; but, to come beneath the blessed servitude of Christ, is to be honoured indeed. The meanest scullion in His royal kitchen hath more real glory than all the peers of the realm put together if they have not entered the service of our gracious King.

Further, this blessed King not only commends Himself to us by His character, but also *by His relationship to us.* Surely it was because the Lord loved His people that He made Him to be King over them who is their Brother, for Jesus is our Brother. He was in all things made like unto His brethren; and, while upon the earth, He was tempted in all points like as we are; but—

"Now, though He reigns exalted high,"—

He is still our Brother, and He is not ashamed, even in heaven, to call His people His "brethren."

"Though now ascended up on high,
He bends on earth a brother's eye;
Partaker of the human name,
He knows the frailty of our frame.

"Our fellow sufferer yet retains
A fellow feeling of our pains,
And still remembers in the skies,
His tears, and agonies, and cries."

He also comes, if possible, nearer than that, for He is our Husband,—married to every believing heart, united with us in a conjugal union which never can be broken by divorce. Christ is the heavenly Bridegroom, and each believing soul is His bride, as the whole Church of the redeemed is the bride, the Lamb's wife. I may say, to each believer, in the words of the forty-fifth Psalm, "So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." He not only reigns over us, but He loves us with such love that He even died for us; what other monarch ever did that for his subjects? You have seen the portraits of kings holding the globe and the sceptre in their hands, and wearing a crown, perhaps adorned with a wreath in token of their victories; but when our King puts on His royal regalia, when He comes forth in His coronation robes, I will tell you what are the chief ensigns of His sovereignty, the tokens of His universal dominion. They are the wounds in His hands, and in His feet, and in His side. He deserves to be our King, and we delight to say to Him,—

"Thou hast redeem'd our souls with blood,
Hast set the prisoners free;
Hast made us kings and priests to God,
And we shall reign with Thee."

Truly, none who really know our Lord Jesus Christ can refuse to rejoice that the Father hath so loved His people as to set the Saviour, who did redeem them, to be King over them henceforth and for ever.

I think I have said enough upon that point, so I will now turn to another side of the subject. Just to refresh your memories, I remind you that the first division was, that the love of God has made Jesus our King.

II. Now we will shake the kaleidoscope, and then we shall see the same truth presented to us under another aspect;—IT IS THE LOVE OF GOD WHICH HAS MADE US TO BE THE SUBJECTS OF KING JESUS.

There is love in the selection of the King who has been chosen for us, and *there is love also in the choice of His subjects.* It was certainly divine love which made a choice of Israel to be the subjects of Solomon, because, if God meant to make a great king, and a wise king, with wide dominions and vast influence, it was a very singular thing that He should choose the land of Israel to be the country over which Solomon should rule in such glory. Palestine was a poor, miserable, little country, a very small district to be the centre of so much splendour. And the people were not very numerous, and they were very poor. Only a little while before, they had been downtrodden by the Philistines. David, Solomon's father, had only just rescued them by the skin of their teeth from being slaves to the Philistines; and, before that, they had been perpetually harried by all the neighbouring nations, so that they never had any settled peace; yet it was this little paltry nation that God chose to be ruled over by Solomon, to give it a name, and make it a leading nation on the face of the earth.

Well, now, beloved, what are we who have been chosen to be God's people? What are we that ever Christ should rule over us? Surely, if He wanted to exercise dominion, He might have chosen the kings and queens, and lords, and dukes, and the fine folk of earth; but you know how it is written, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." Not even to the wise and prudent hath He revealed the truths of His kingdom; but He has revealed them unto babes. "Even so, Father," said Christ, "for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Surely it was because the Lord loved us that ever He put us under the dominion of Christ, that He might rule over us!

More than that, these people of Israel began with Solomon by a rebellion. You know how, all through the reign of David, they were continually kicking against his rule. He had saved them from the Philistines; yet, at one time, they set up Absalom in opposition to him; and, at another time, another pretender would come forth, and they would follow

him, for they seemed to wish to get rid of their best friend and deliverer. Even when David was nigh unto death, and Adonijah proclaimed himself king, Joab, and Abiathar, and many of the people followed him, so that Solomon's reign began with rebellion, yet he was set up as king over these traitorous and disloyal people; and what a mercy it is for us, who used to be rebels against our King, that the Lord Jesus Christ ever admitted us under the sway of His sceptre! I need not go into the details of what we used to be; it will bring tears to the eyes of some of us if we only think of what we once were. Lord, what a rebellious wretch was I! Many here had to fight against conscience, to fight against everything that was good, in order to remain as they were; yet they did remain as they were until the Lord so loved them that He subdued them by His grace, and brought them to His feet. With love almighty He came to them, broke down all their opposition, and made them willing in the day of His power. I am sure that, if any of you are rejoicing in being Christ's subjects, you will ascribe it to the love of God, and not to your own will, or to your own goodness, that ever you came to bow at Jesu's feet, for no man ever cometh there of himself. They are drawn by grace divine, and then they run; but never doth a soul crouch at the feet of Jesus, crying for mercy, and taking Him to be its King, except by an act of almighty grace which leads the sinner to that happy and blessed decision. So let us give all the praise to God if we belong to the kingdom of Jesus, for it is love, amazing love, that has put us under such gracious sovereignty as that.

Now, brethren, are we happy indeed; for it is with us as it was with Israel. For, *after Solomon was once settled on the throne, there was no more rebellion.* In his God-given wisdom, he so ruled the nation that all was quiet and peaceable. After he had once climbed up into the saddle, he could not be thrown out of it again; and after King Jesus once gets into the throne of our heart, stubborn wills and rebellious passions must lie still; for Jesus knows how to rule. What wonderful order Solomon set up! What remarkable peace the people enjoyed! What extraordinary prosperity they had! For "the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones."

And, beloved, Christ has made us to be so rich, so happy, so contented, so blessed, that we have no wish to escape from His dominion, but rather does each one of us cry, "O Jesus, subdue me more completely! Drive out all my old enemies! Root out my sins! Hunt them down like traitors, and hang them up to die; and do Thou alone rule and reign over me absolutely. In the entire kingdom of my nature, over my whole spirit, soul, and body, be Thou the supreme and only Lord, and let no rebellion be so much as thought of." But it must be the love of God that will effect this; we cannot do it of ourselves. It is the grace of God—the mighty love of God in Christ Jesus—that will subdue our spirit to the dominion of Christ; and in so far as He has already done it, let us praise and bless Him; and, in any respect in which the gracious work is not yet fully accomplished, let us cry to Him to complete it.

III. I conclude my discourse with the third point, which is simply another view of the same truth, —OUR LOVE TO GOD NOW MAKES THE REIGN OF CHRIST OVER US TO BE VERY BLESSED INDEED. Since we have been taught to love the Lord Jesus Christ, it has become a great delight to us to be under His dominion.

First, brethren, *the courts of Christ are our home.* In this house of prayer, the Lord has often revealed Himself to us. Some of us feel that, when we get into our places here, and join in holy worship, it is the best spot beneath the sun. I know that it is so by the way in which you strive to get here on Monday evenings and Thursday nights. Many of you are glad then, as well as on the Sabbath day, to steal away for a little while out of the world, and even, perhaps, out of the worry of the household; and because our Lord Jesus Christ here manifests Himself to you, this place becomes to you the very palace of the great King, and you love to be here. There are some hearers, who must have a very grand place of worship, and a very soft seat in it, and very eloquent preaching, and even then they soon drop off to sleep; but a true child of God, who loves his Saviour with all his heart, says, "I can stand anywhere; I do not mind being squeezed up in a corner so long as I can hear about Jesus.

> "'Sweeter sounds than music knows
> Charm me in Immanuel's name.'"

That is right, man! Keep on playing that tune! Praise the name of Jesus; let that be the theme of all your music! Ring again, and again, and again, those sweet silvery bells that sound out—

> "Free grace and dying love."

You may hold me by the ears, and by the heart, too, as long as you play such music as that. Even though there be no eloquence in the speaker, and he only talks straight on, and tells out what he knows of Jesus in his own heart, I will sit, or I will stand, anywhere, if I may but hear the strains of that blessed melody; and I know that many of you say the same. I can tell that you do by the look on your faces, and I also know how I feel myself when, now and then, it is my privilege to listen to a sermon full of Christ. That is what causes tears of joy to flow, and makes me feel, "I know that I am the Lord's, for I do rejoice in the music of His charming name." Yes, he is such a King to us that His courts are the place of our highest delight, and we are never happier than when we are among even the meanest of those who gather within His palace gate; yea, often do we feel that we would rather be doorkeepers in the house of our God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

We also realize that it is God's love that made Jesus to be our King, for *His service has come to be our best recreation.* I heard a young man say, in a railway carriage, "I do not like the English mode of spending Sunday. I think Sunday ought to be devoted to recreation; everybody needs recreation." An old gentleman, who sat opposite to the one who made this remark, spared me the trouble of replying to him by saying, "I think, my dear sir, it is very likely that you need recreation, too." "Yes," answered the young man, "I certainly do." "Ah!" said the other, "but perhaps you do not quite understand the word I used,—*re-creation;* that is, being created anew, so as to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus. If you were created again, the recreation that you would then desire would be of a different kind from that which you are now advocating." That was quite true; but even using the word "recreation" in the ordinary meaning of the term, we have found the service of God to be really a

recreation to us. When you, my brother, get a little spare time, I know that you feel it a pleasure to spend it in some form of service for Christ. Someone might say to you, "Well, I should think that you had had enough work with that quill-driving, or standing behind the counter, or toiling in that factory; and that, when you get an hour to spare, you would go to bed, or take your ease in some form or other." "No, I do not," you reply; "I go and gather my class together, or call on my scholars in their homes, and try to find out whether they have really given their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ." "Well," says the enquirer, "do you mean to say that you get recreation out of such work as that?" "Yes," you reply, "I do;" and he says, "Then, you must be an odd fish!" Well, perhaps we are odd fish; but that is one of our highest sources of recreation. We find the service of Christ to be so blessed to us that we take our rest in it; and if, sometimes, we get wearied *in* it, we can truly say that we do not get wearied *of* it. Our whole soul delights in it, and we are resolved that we will serve our Saviour as long as we have life and breath.

More than that, it has now become such a joy to us to serve our King that *His revenue has become our riches.* Solomon's subjects were very heavily taxed, yet their very taxes were a proof of their prosperity. They worked at a high pressure in order to produce wealth. They were a poor people to begin with, but they grew rich under the plan which Solomon adopted. It was an expensive plan; but, then, if they paid much in the way of taxation, it was because they had so much the more coming in year by year. Silver and gold had become so plentiful that it was not at all a hardship that the people should help to pay for the efficient maintenance of the king's postal service, and all the other arrangements by which they were themselves enriched. Now, our King has a great revenue, with which we have nothing to do except to draw from it all that we need. Unbounded riches of grace are stored up in Christ Jesus, and He gives us liberty to take all that we require. As to anything that we present to Him, what little we can give we count it our highest riches to offer to Him; and, whenever we do give anything to the Lord, we find that He multiplies whatever we have left in our basket and store. But, if He did not do so, we should still delight to lay at His dear feet anything that we can, and we do not want Him to give it back to us. It is a delight and joy to us to have an opportunity of doing anything in His blessed service; it is no task to us, it is never irksome. Some of us—I do not know whether each one of us—can sing, with Dr. Watts,—

"All that I am, and all I have,
Shall be for ever Thine;
Whate'er my duty bids me give,
My cheerful hands resign.

"Yet if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great,
That I should give Him all."

So, brethren, I hope it has come to this with many of us, that *Christ's cross is our crown.* We have fallen in love with it, and we gladly bear it for His sake. The very hardships that we endure, in connection with Christ's kingdom, have become a joy to us; while, as for His glory, that is now our honour; and, as for Himself, He is our heaven.

Thus have I spoken, all too feebly, concerning the King given to us by God in love. If there are any here who are not under the rule of Christ, I wish that they would, at any rate, give heed to my testimony that the service of Christ is the best service in the whole world; there is no other that is worthy to be compared with it for a single moment. If you resolve to serve yourself, or to serve the world, or to serve pleasure, or to serve the devil, you will rue the day, you may depend upon it. There is one remarkable thing about the service of Christ, which ought to have great weight with impartial observers. Many, who have lived to serve the world, have repented of their folly on their deathbeds; but there never yet was heard of even one instance of a Christian saying, when he was dying, "I am sorry that I have served Christ." There never has been, since the foundation of Christ's kingdom, one of His subjects who, when he was dying, said, "I am sorry that I did so much for Christ, that I was so earnest in His service, or so generous to His cause." No, there never has been such a case, and there never will be one. I always say that it is the sign of a man having a good master when he tries to introduce his sons into the service of his employer. A man is not likely to complain of his master when he comes to him, and says, "I should be much obliged to you, sir, if you would take my two sons into your service." It looks as if he had a good master when he talks like that. Well, that is my own case; it is my intense delight to see my two sons actively engaged in the service of my Master. He has been a good Master to me. I often wonder that He has not turned me off; yet I should have wondered still more if He had done so, because He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He has borne with my ill manners, and put up with many imperfections in my service, all this while. I wonder that He is not tired of me, yet I have His own word for it that He will not turn me adrift, for He has said, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." I must love Him; I must praise Him; and I wish that everyone else would enter the service of my blessed Lord and Master. If you would only give Him a trial, (by God's grace, may you be led to do so!) you would never repent of it. Ask any man, who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, whether he has ever regretted having done so; you will never find one who will say that he has.

Well, then, if we can all speak so well for our King, we think that common reason, if it were really reasonable, would lead men to say, "Can we not enter into this service, too?" I pray that God's grace may enable many of you to say this. Will you not seek to become His servant this very hour? The way into His service is by yourself becoming nothing, and letting Him be your All-in-all. Any soldier can tell you how he gets into his sovereign's service. What does he give in order that he may become a soldier? Give? Why, he gives nothing at all; he takes a shilling from the recruiting officer, and that seals the act. That is the way to become a Christian; take the Lord Jesus Christ as your own. He gives you Himself; so trust Him and take Him, for thus you become His soldier, enlisted for ever. He will teach you your drill, He will show you how to behave yourself aright in His service, and He will give you a rich reward at the end of it. So may He bless each one of you, for His dear name's sake! Amen.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER AND PARDON

"Whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be: then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all Thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house: then hear Thou from heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart Thou knowest (for Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men)."—2 Chronicles vi. 28–30.

THE temple was intended to be the centre of prayer for all the children of Israel. Those who could do so, went up to it a certain number of times every year. Others, who were too far away to go, prayed with their window open towards Jerusalem; for there was the mercy-seat, and beneath the wings of the overshadowing cherubim there dwelt that bright light of the Shekinah which was the index of the presence of God in the midst of His people. It is not therefore to be wondered at that, when Solomon dedicated to the Lord the temple which he had built, his great petition was that God would hear every prayer that should be offered in that place or toward that place. He wished the temple always to be to Israel the token that God's memorial is that He hears prayer. Solomon therefore presented a wonderfully comprehensive series of supplications, in which he appears to have included all the sorrowful conditions of the nation, and all the troubles that were likely to fall upon the chosen people. But this part of his prayer, which we are now to consider, seems as though it were intended to gather up anything that the suppliant might possibly have left out. We always think that we are among the great things—that we are out upon the deep seas—when we can get among the "whatsoevers." "Whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be: then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all Thy people Israel, . . . then hear Thou from heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive." It is a sort of miscellaneous sentence, taking up all the stragglers,—the lots that are out of the catalogue,—those that could not be placed under any distinct head; and they are here put under the general description of the "whatsoevers," that every man whatsoever, who should know his own sore and his own grief, and the plague of his own heart, should turn his eye and his prayer toward Jerusalem, and that God should then hear him, and forgive him.

We have no sacred spot now, beloved friends, towards which we turn when we pray. The Ritualists talk a great deal about the importance of "the eastward position;" but I believe that any other position in the world,—westward, southward, or northward,—is just as good, and that we may pray to God with equal acceptance whichever way we turn. Cowper truly sings,—

> "Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,
> There they behold Thy mercy-seat:
> Where'er they seek Thee, Thou art found,
> And every place is hallow'd ground."

Yet we have a Temple into which they cannot enter who think the mere materialistic building is the all-important matter, just as we have an altar to which they have no right to approach so long as they are content with the visible and the external. Our Temple is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ: "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." When we pray, we turn our faces toward Him. He said to the Pharisees, "In this place is One greater than the temple"; and so He is. Though He is to us of the same use as the temple was to Israel, yet is He infinitely more precious and far greater than the temple; and whosoever, whatsoever his trouble shall be, shall pray unto God with his face towards Jesus, looking to the matchless wounds by which He has redeemed us, or the glorified person in which He represents us, and makes intercession for us before the throne of God on high, he shall be helped, he shall be forgiven, whatever his trouble or whatever his sin.

I. So, coming to the text, I shall have, first of all, to deal with the fact that EACH MAN HAS, OR WILL HAVE, SOME KIND OF GRIEF AND SORROW.

I may have some, in this congregation, who can say, "We have no grief; we have no trouble." Well, if that is the case, I am not sure that I can congratulate you, though I am very glad when all God's children are happy in the Lord, and can joy and rejoice in His name. I pray that they may always do so, for I recollect how Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord alway." Surely that was enough, yet he added, "and again I say, Rejoice." You cannot be too happy in the Lord; and whenever you meet others who are of a doubtful or troubled spirit, do not imitate them, though, I pray you, do not despise them. They may be, on the whole, in a better spiritual state than you are, although they are not better than you are as to their present difficulty. "The joy of the Lord is your strength," and it is an excellent thing for a child of God to be happy and joyful in his Saviour. Yet I should not wonder, dear friend, that the day may come when you, whose eyes are brightest, and whose steps are most elastic, will yet find that you shall have trouble in the flesh, and perhaps trouble in the spirit, too, even as it was with those to whom the apostle Peter wrote, "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations," or trials. Not only do we have manifold trials, but we get into heaviness through them. It does happen to many of the best of God's servants that they have their sorrow and grief. Just lately, I have seen several persons who, I am persuaded, love the Lord, and the Lord loves them; they are very precious to Him,—humble, gentle, gracious people; but they have come into deep trouble, or some heavy cloud rests upon them. It is to them especially that I am now speaking.

Dear troubled friend, you may have *a grief or sorrow that is not known to anybody but yourself.* You would not like to reveal it to anyone, you would not whisper it in the ear of the dearest confidant that you have on earth. You keep it to yourself, and perhaps that is the very reason why it becomes so bitter to you. The communicating of it to some Christian friend might be a real help to you. You know what a relief it is to be able to shed tears when you are in great anguish; if you can have a good cry, you can get over the trouble more easily; but, sometimes, you cannot find expression for the

grief, and so the pent-up flame becomes more fierce than otherwise it would have been.

Well, there are children of God of that sort, just like Hannah, the woman of a sorrowful spirit, whose adversary sorely vexed her to make her fret; and even when she went up to the house of the Lord, it was in bitterness of soul that she stood there, and prayed unto the Most High. I do not think that she could have told anybody, except possibly her husband, what the great grief of her heart was; and, dear friend, if you have a grief that you cannot tell to any human being, let my text affectionately invite you to look towards Jesus, the Temple of this dispensation, and tell the Lord all about your sorrow, and ask Him to give you help in this your time of need.

It may be that *your trouble, though it is known to others, is misunderstood.* It is a very grievous thing when the affliction of God's people is misread, and misinterpreted, and others say, "Oh, nonsense! There is nothing in it"; or else they say, "You are only making a rod for your own back; you might help yourself if you liked, and get out of that sad state of mind." You know how the exhortation to "make an effort" is often given when all possibility of effort from within has long since passed away; and it is a very grievous thing when those whom we love utterly misunderstand us. They seem to read our words backwards. So far from having any sympathy with us, they are not able to enter into our secret sorrow. Alas! for the child of God who is in that sad condition! But if you are thus troubled,—if you know the plague of your own heart, but nobody else knows why you are so plagued,—if you feel your own sore, but nobody else can see it, go you to Jesus, and tell Him of your inward grief; open the door to your heart, and let Him inspect all your being, and ask Him for the gracious forgiveness which is the sweetest balm for your wounds, and then for a visitation of His blessed Spirit as the Comforter, that your heart may rejoice and be glad in Him.

Possibly, dear friend, I may be speaking to you who have a grief which is not only unknown, or if known, is misunderstood, but to you who are *lonesome in your sorrow.* As far as you can tell, nobody ever before went the way which you are now treading. When I have preached, sometimes, to the despondent and the despairing, I have been thankful when, afterwards, persons have come to me, and said that my sermon was the first ray of comfort they had ever received. I therefore try to practise Mr. Wesley's plan of firing low. He meant by it, speaking plainly, so as to hit the groundlings; but while I endorse that view of the expression, I mean also another,—not to shoot high, where only some soaring professors may be, but to fire low, where the poor and needy are lying on their faces before God. I want so to preach that those who are ready to perish may come to Christ, and that those who never had a hope before may begin to hope in Him. My dear friend, if you are the only one who ever travelled along that rough road, and if you even think that you have no equal in your misery, but sit alone in your sorrow, yet are you bidden to turn your face towards Christ, your Temple, and whatsoever may be your case, to tell it all out before Him; and as Jesus lives, He will hear and answer you, and you shall yet go your way in peace. I do not know what may be the peculiarities of your case. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." There are depths and there are heights where we must be solitary. There are some griefs that we must keep to ourselves, as there are some raptures and experiences of the which, if we were to tell them, men would say that we were fanatical, and suspect that we were out of our mind. Do not be surprised, therefore, if you have sometimes to sail alone, so far as any human beings are concerned. If Christ be in the vessel with you, you cannot want any better company.

This grief of yours, my dear friend, *may be connected with some sin,* or if not actually so, you may think it is so. You may have lost the light of God's countenance by some omission, or by walking at a distance from Him. It may be that you have been negligent in prayer. Or, possibly, there may have been some sin of commission; perhaps you have yielded to temptation, and therefore it is that you are made to walk in the dark. Well, if it be so, do not let even that sad state prevent your coming to Jesus with your burden, for He has not only come to help us in our troubles, but to save us from our sins. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins." Do not, therefore, think that, when you have sinned, you are shut out from the Saviour. Nay, but there is "a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness," open on purpose to cleanse them from sin and impurity. Paul wrote to the Galatians that our Lord Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins," upon which passage, Martin Luther observes that Christ never gave Himself for our righteousness. There was never enough of that to be worth His doing so, but He gave Himself for our sins, that He might put them away from us for ever. Come, then, though a sense of guilt should put a sting into thy sorrow which otherwise it would not possess; and though thou mayest truly say, "I brought all this misery upon myself, I know I did; I played the fool exceedingly, and now the mischief is done, and cannot be undone"; yet remember that there is One who can lift the load off thy spirit, and say to thee, "Go in peace; thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." Look thou toward the Temple, even to Christ in whom God dwells, and from whom God shines; tell Him thy grief, and thou shalt yet rejoice in the peace which He delights to bestow.

"Ah!" says one, "I am glad to hear this good news, for the sake of others; but my case is a peculiarly trying one, for I have been in this sad state of mind for many years." Yes; and how long was that daughter of Abraham bowed down so that she could by no means lift up herself? Was it not eighteen years; yet how long did it take Christ to make her upright? Why, not a moment! He spoke, and she became straight at once, and able to walk like other women. You recollect, also, that the impotent man had been waiting at the pool of Bethesda thirty-eight years, and the high doctrine folk of that day told him to keep on waiting at the pool; but when Jesus Christ came round that way, He did not tell him to wait a minute, but He said, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk"; and he did so in an instant. You, poor troubled soul, need not continue to lie at the pool; you need not wait there a single moment. Trust thou in Christ, who comes to thee in all thy inability, in all thy sinfulness, in all thy depression of spirit, and in all thy despair,

and who says to thee, "Live. I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." These are glorious words of grace; may the Lord speak them home to your heart even now! The devil himself cannot hold a man in captivity when once Christ gives him liberty. Though his feet be made fast in the stocks, and it is the dead hour of midnight, yet shall he begin to sing praises unto God; and his fellow-prisoners shall hear him when Jesus of Nazareth passes by, and gives him the gracious word which makes him free. Christ crucified is your only hope; therefore, turn your eyes to Him; by faith, look to those dear wounds of His; from your inmost soul, breathe your penitent prayer to Him, and He will grant you the desire of your heart, even life for evermore.

II. Secondly, IF WE HAVE A GRIEF OR SORROW, IT IS WELL TO KNOW IT, for Solomon here speaks "of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief."

In visiting the sick, lately, I have been struck with the different ways in which the children of men are afflicted. There is one of our beloved brethren who is covered with sore blains from head to foot. Another is lying in a critical condition through congestion of the lungs. There is another gradually melting away with consumption, while cancer is eating out the very life of yet another friend. Now, just as it is with the pangs of the body, so is it with the diseases of the mind and the soul. They are of various kinds; and though they may be arranged under different heads, there is no one spiritual sore or sorrow exactly like another; and, hence, it is well for every man to know his own sore and his own grief. My faults are not exactly the same as yours; and yours, probably, are not quite like mine; that which greatly grieves me might never trouble you if you had it, while that which worries and troubles you might be a thing which I could laugh at if it came to me. We must never judge one another, nor may we wish to have other people's sorrows and griefs, but we must try, as far as we can, to know every man his own sore and his own grief.

For, first, *sometimes, to know your grief, is to get rid of it.* It is the unknown that is often the most terrible. Belshazzar, when his knees knocked together was frightened because he saw the part of the hand that wrote upon the wall, but he did not see the form of the writer, nor could he tell what was written. It was the mystery of the thing that troubled him; and, sometimes, when you do not know what your trouble is, it is more of a trial to you than when you can get it into a definite shape. It is a grand thing to be able to look at it, to measure it, to take stock of it, to write down, in black and white, what it is that is worrying you. If you do that, you will probably say to yourself, "How foolish I am to let this be a trouble to me at all!" And sometimes, on the other hand, you will find yourself foolish in another sense. After Christian and Hopeful had been shut up in the dungeon in Giant Despair's Castle, for several days and nights, Christian said to his companion, "What a fool am I thus to lie in a stinking dungeon when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." We may find ourselves saying just the same thing; we shall look at our trouble till we shall exclaim, "Why, blessed be God, there is a promise in His Word which exactly meets this difficulty! God the Holy Ghost has left on record the message that is just adapted to this very trial; therefore, why do I lie moaning and groaning, in this dungeon, when I might at once walk out into gospel liberty?" So I say to you, beloved, seek to know what your sore or your grief really is, for it is the unknown that is usually girt with terrors.

It is, too, *the undiscovered, often, that is the most dangerous.* As I have already said, our sorrows are oftentimes connected with our sins. It is a terrible thing to have a sin festering in your soul, and not to know it. If a man tells me that he has no sin, I ask him to look within, or even to look without upon his own life; but if he thinks that he is perfect there, let him keep on looking within; and if he does not discover something evil there, it must be because an awful blindness has fallen upon him. Often, there is sin connected with our trouble, and it is most important for us to see it and to know it. I think it was St. Francis de Sales who said that, among all those who came to him confessing their sins, not one ever confessed to being covetous; and it is a curious thing that, as a rule, no covetous man ever believes that he is covetous. Covetousness is a most deceitful thing; pray God to point it out to you if it is within your heart, lest it should destroy you. A man may be in such a state of soul that the scarlet fever of pride may be killing him, and yet, all the while, he may be thinking, "What a humble person I am!" For pride is another of the most deceptive sins. Every man should try to know what his own weakness is. Perhaps the very point in which you think you are the strongest is that in which you are really weakest; and the thing which does not trouble you in the least may, after all, be that which ought to cause the greatest searching of heart. Do pray the Lord, each one of you, to cause you to know your own sore and your own grief.

Remember that, if there be sin mixed with our sorrow, *it ought not only to be known, but to be so known as to be confessed.* Oh, what an easement to the soul it is when you can confess your sin unto the Lord! I would have you do it distinctly in the plainest words possible. Do not attempt to cloak the matter before God, for you cannot really hide anything from Him. Recollect how David, at last, prayed to God to deliver him from bloodguiltiness. He was on the right road to getting rest in his soul when he could confess his great crime like that. I have heard of one who was a child of God, but he was grievously overtaken when in company, and he drank too much. He could not get any peace of mind for months until he said, "Lord, I was drunk"; and after he had put it in that way, he found forgiveness, and peace, and rest. No doubt, before that, he had said, "I am afraid I was a little imprudent," or used some of those pretty phrases which people employ as a cloak for their wrong-doing, when they will not confess the evil in all its nakedness and deformity. Away with the fig leaves! God abhors them. It is He who must clothe you, and He will do so with the righteousness of His Son; but, if He is to accept you, there must be no attempt to palliate

your guilt. Let sin be called sin ; and in the presence of Christ,—

" Sin doth like itself appear."

and the sinner sees its heinousness, and learns to hate it. So, then, each man must know his own sore, and his own grief, and especially his own sin ; that he may confess it unto God.

What does all this come to, then, dear brother, dear sister ? You have, perhaps, been coming to see me, or to see one of the elders, about your trouble. We cannot help you much, though we will gladly do what we can for you ; but, now, do try to make it clear to your own mind what all the trouble is about ; get it down in black and white if you can, and then come with it to the Lord. There is, often, far too much indistinctness in our prayers. We really do not know what we are aiming at ; and, consequently, we miss the mark. We have not a clear idea what it is that we are seeking of the Lord, and therefore we do not get it. But if we really know our grief, and know our sore, and know our sin, and know the plague of our own heart, and then go before the Lord with it all, and say, " That is my trouble, Lord ; I confess it before Thee with a broken heart and a contrite spirit " ; it will not be long before the Lord in mercy shall give us peace.

III. Now, thirdly, and briefly, while it is well to know our grief, IT IS BETTER STILL TO PRAY ABOUT IT. I have been hammering away at this truth, but now I want to give a few blows right upon the head of the nail.

Dear troubled friend, *there is no relief for you like prayer ;* and if you are almost in despair, permit me to put the matter to you very gently ; I will try to push in the thin edge of the wedge first. Perhaps, if you go to God, and pray about your trouble, you will get deliverance from it. I say, " Perhaps." Put it so, to begin with. You cannot lose anything, can you, by praying to God ? Suppose you go to the Lord with your grief, you cannot be any worse off than you are already, can you ? You are now in such a sad condition, so much bowed down that, if you confess your sin and your sorrow at His dear feet, and leave them there, you cannot be in a sadder plight than you are now, can you ? Well, then, say, with the poet,—

" I'll to the gracious King approach,
Whose sceptre pardon gives :
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.

" Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer ;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.

" I can but perish if I go ;
I am resolved to try ;
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die."

It may be that the Lord will deliver you. There is many a man who has gone to God on the strength of a " may be," and yet that " may be " has been enough to land him in heaven at last. You remember how the whole of the people of Nineveh had nothing to rely upon except that question of their king, " Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not ? " That was a very tiny thread, " Who can tell ? " But, relying on it, they went and humbled themselves before God, and we know what followed : " And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way ; and God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them ; and He did it not." Sister, I would like to whisper that question in your ear, " Who can tell ? " Brother, I would like to take your hand, and say to you, " Come now, do not despair. Who can tell ? It may be that the Lord will be gracious also unto you. Go and cast yourself at His feet, and determine to lie there, and to perish there, if you must perish. But you shall not perish if you come unto Him."

Recollect, again, that *there is One who is quite ready to give you a full hearing, whatever your trouble and your sin may be,* for the Lord Jesus Christ already knows all about your trouble.

" Our fellow-sufferer yet retains
A fellow-feeling of our pains,
And still remembers in the skies,
His tears, and agonies, and cries.

" In every pang that rends the heart,
The Man of Sorrows has a part ;
He sympathizes in our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief."

If you come to me, I shall try to sympathize with you as fully as I can ; but, peradventure, I shall fail, for you may be so deep in the bog that I may never have gone quite as low down as that ; but if you go to the Lord Jesus Christ, you never can be as deep in sorrow as He was when His agony forced from Him great drops of blood, and His soul was " exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." And, as for your sin, black as it is, it is not too black for Him to remove. Bring out the sin that is more than a match for Christ, if you can. Remember His great declaration, " All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Oh, it is you, poor woman, is it ? Are you like the one of whom we were reading just now ? Do you feel yourself as great a sinner as she was, or are you actually a woman of the very vilest class ? And are your accusers near, who, if you were to deny your guilt, would stand up and witness against you ? Jesus says to you, " Go, and sin no more." O poor sinful soul, go you to Jesus even if you have all the sins that are unmentionable piled upon you ! And if you are a man who has committed as much sin as all the rest of the world put together, yet come along ; my Lord, who bore upon His shoulders the sin of the world, is fully able to put your sin away.

" If all the sins that men have done,
In thought, or word, or deed,
Since worlds were made, or time began,
Were heaped on one poor sinner's head,"—

yet could the blood of Jesus Christ blot them all out in a single moment, so that though they were sought for, they should never be found again. Oh, that you would but come, and trust the Lord Jesus Christ !

" Ah ! says one, " that is just my difficulty ; I cannot trust Him." If you talk like that, you and I will fall out directly. If you tell me that you cannot trust my father, I shall say, " My father is a man of truth and honour ; he pays his debts, and he never lies ; and I will not have you say, ' I cannot trust him.' " But whatever you call my father, I shall not be half so indignant as when you tell me that

you cannot trust my Saviour. When did He lie, pray? When was He ever false? When did He ever fail? You say you cannot trust Him? Why, I feel that, if I had all your souls in one, I could trust Him with the whole of them; aye, if I could get into this body of mine all the souls that God ever made, I would trust Him with the whole bulk, for I am persuaded that He never was trusted too much. You never yet could believe of Christ a thing so good that it was not true. Suppose that you believe that He can forgive you; He will do it. He will never let your belief go beyond what He will do. If you believe that He will wash you so that you shall be whiter than snow, He will do it. Faith and Christ often run a race, but Christ always wins; for, if faith flies like the wind, Christ flashes like the lightning, and He outstrips it. You cannot possibly believe too good a thing of Him; just try now whether you can do so. Should not that truth tend to cheer you, poor downcast one?

The best thing that you can do is to remember that there is an open door to every soul who lives. Then, draw near to God; there is no barrier in the way, and there is a blessed text, at the end of this Book, which says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." I saw a man once, in a court of justice, who was called up to the witness-box, but he could not press through the crowd. So the judge spoke to the usher, and the usher said to the people, "Let him come; let him come; let him come"; and after he had said that, there began to be a little narrow lane made for him and so he squeezed his way up. Now there is a poor sinner over there, and there are a thousand devils between him and Christ; but when Christ says to them, "Let him come; let him come; let him come," they must make a lane for him. When our Lord Jesus Christ was upon the earth, on the great day of the feast, He stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." Who will say to Him, "Lord, I am that man; I am thirsting, and Thou sayest, 'Let him come'"? If you say that, who is there to stop you from coming to Him? Why, if the arch-fiend should set himself right in your way, yet, if Jesus Christ says, "Let him come," you shall come.

Did not He say, long ago, "Let there be light"? and the primeval darkness, which had lasted throughout many an age, was gone in an instant. So, if the Lord says, "Let him come," then all that oppose you, and try to keep you back, must be overthrown, for you shall come. Trust Jesus, dear friend; trust in the name of the Lord of love and mercy, who is looking upon you, a poor, bruised, broken, manacled mass of misery. I beseech you, turn your eye towards Christ. O you poor smoking flax, if you have not anything about you but just a smoke, and that smoke is not very sweet, yet Jesus Christ says that He will not quench you! O you poor bruised reed, out of which there can come no music as you are, I tell you that He will get music out of you yet! Only look to Him, poor troubled one, for He knows how to bind up the broken in heart, and to heal their wounds, and thereby to glorify Himself. Oh, for another prayer, even though it were your last! Do breathe it. I know that Satan will try hard to stop you; he will say, "It is no use; you have been praying for months; you have been praying for years." Aye, but, this time, pray as you never prayed before. Perhaps you have been lifting up your eyes to a priest, or to a man, or to a doctrine, or to a creed; now just look right away to Jesus Christ. That is the way that prayer was heard in the olden days, when they looked toward the temple; and your prayer shall be heard when you look to the Saviour. "Oh, but just look at me!" you say. No, I do not want to look at you; I want you to look to Christ. "Oh, but, sir, I am dreadfully wicked! I confess it with shame." Yes, and you are probably a hundred times worse than you think you are; you are a good-for-nothing sort of person; you are an out-of-the-way sinner; but that is the very reason why I want you to believe in Him "who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way."

I want you to look to Him who came to earth on purpose that He might wash these blackamoors white, and take the spots out of these leopards, and make them to become like lambs. My Lord did not come into the world to be a doctor who only cures finger-aches and small complaints; He came to cleanse the lepers, to cast out demons, to raise the dead,—even Lazarus, who had begun to putrefy. Oh, He is such a glorious Saviour that I cannot speak His praises loudly enough, though speaking of Him warms my own heart! My voice was hoarse when I began my sermon, and I thought I could hardly get through the discourse; but, with such a theme as this, I forget all weakness and pain. Yea, raise me even when I am dying, that I may sit up in bed, and begin to praise Him. There never was a sinner half as big as Christ is as a Saviour. Come and measure the sinner, if you like, from head to foot, and all round; make him out to be an elephantine sinner, yet there is room for him in the ark Christ Jesus. There is room in the heart of Jesus for the vilest of the vile. Oh, that you would turn your eyes to Him, and pray to Him from your very heart, and trust in Him with your whole soul!

I finish up by saying that *those who do this shall find rest unto their souls.* Solomon's petition was, that they should be forgiven: "Then hear Thou from heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive." Yes, and everything else that a sinner needs is ready for him when he comes to Christ. I do not know—I cannot tell—all that you need; but I do know that all you ever can want between here and heaven is laid up for you in Christ Jesus. I have before used this illustration. Here is a poor little babe that we have picked up in the streets; what shall we do with it? What does this child want? Well, it wants washing; see how filthy it is, for it has been lying in the gutter. It wants food, poor little creature; see how emaciated it is. It wants proper clothes; look at its rags. I should have to keep on a long time, and you mothers who are listening to me might say, "He does not know much about what the babe wants." But I will show you that I do, because in one single sentence I will tell you what that child wants; *it wants its* MOTHER; and when it gets its mother, it has got everything. When its mother finds it, then it is provided for; and what you want, dear soul, is pardon, cleansing, clothing, training, sanctifying; but I will not go over it all, *what you want is, your* SAVIOUR. You need Jesus; and if you get Jesus, you never shall have a want that is outside of Christ, you shall never have a necessity that is not comprised within the matchless circle of His unspeakable all-sufficiency. Oh, take Christ to your heart, and your fortune is made! You have

all you need for time and for eternity, when once the Lord Jesus Christ is yours. Oh, that you would make a dash for this great blessing!

"I am afraid to come," says one. Well, come all trembling and fearing; only do come. "But I am afraid I shall be cast out if I do come." Oh, but you must not indulge that fear, for He has said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "But suppose I should not happen to be one of the right sort?" Come all the same, whether you are or not, for Christ will not cast you out if you do but come to Him. When a man is very hungry, if he takes bread that is not his own, and eats it, no one will ever take it away from him, for he has it too securely. So, if you come and take the Lord Jesus Christ into your very soul, there is no one who can take Him away from you. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good," and he that really feeds upon Him has so received Him that he shall never lose Him. Oh, that all who are strangers to Him might do so even now! The Lord bless you all, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

SERVITUDE OR SERVICE—WHICH?

"Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries."—2 Chronicles xii. 8.

THE people of God had left their God, and He had left them, so that Shishak, the king of Egypt, came against them; and though the Lord had respect to their humble prayer, and would not suffer Shishak to destroy Jerusalem, yet He brought them into subjection to the Egyptian king. Our text tells us the reason for this servitude: "They shall be his servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries."

Beloved friends, the children of Israel were bound to the service of God. Jehovah had chosen them out of all the nations of the world to be His people. He had committed the holy oracles to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; they were from before the foundation of the world set apart in the eternal purpose to be the Lord's. That highly honourable and gracious choice ought to have bound them to His service. In addition to this, they were called out by His own voice. Their father Abraham was fetched out from Ur of the Chaldees, where he served other gods; and he was led to know Jehovah, and to follow Him. He walked with God, and God was very familiar with him, so that He spoke with him as a man speaketh with his friend. All along the ages, God called His people out from the world; especially did He call them out of Egypt, delivering them out of the house of bondage with a high hand and with an outstretched arm. He led them through the wilderness, and fed them with manna, and instructed them; and in this way He separated them to be His own peculiar portion beyond all the sons of men. By their calling, then, as well as by their election, they were bound to keep close to the one living and true God.

And above this, as if to make them doubly His own, He entered into a covenant with them. It was first made with Abraham; then it was renewed with Isaac and with Jacob. The covenant was still further ratified in the wilderness, where the Lord promised that, when they came into Canaan, He would be their God, and He would bless them; but He stipulated that they must obey His voice, and cling to Him, and have Him only to be their God, His Word and His law to be the rule and guide of their life. This covenant God always kept, but the people broke it very soon, so that Moses shattered the tables of stone, a fit symbol of the way in which Israel broke the Law of God.

Is it not very sad to think that the great God, who made the heavens and the earth, should have but one nation out of all the inhabitants of the world, and these His by choice, by calling, and by covenant, and yet that they should continually grow weary of Him? Other peoples did not change their gods. It was a rare thing for a nation to cast away its idols in those days; but Israel, which alone had the true God, while the rest had gods that were only idols, quitted the living and true God to set up in His place the gods of the heathen, which could do them no good.

Now, this phenomenon of human nature, this going after idols, and leaving the true God, is constantly being renewed. We have the same thing even in the Church of God, which never seems to be satisfied with chaste love for Christ, but continually goes after one strange lover and another. Thus Christ's pure truth is left for some brilliant error, and His simple worship is deserted for some invention of man. Even when God spoke by His servant Shemaiah the prophet, the men of Judah were itching to be after their idols, and panting to get away from God; and the Lord said, "Inasmuch as they have forsaken me, I have left them in the hand of Shishak, and they shall be His servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries."

I. In considering these words to-night, I shall say, first, that THERE ARE SOME WHO HAVE ALREADY CHOSEN THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOMS OF THE COUNTRIES.

We have many round about us who have deliberately chosen not to serve God, but to serve other Masters. O beloved, if you have chosen to serve God, it is because God has chosen you! If I am speaking to-night to any of you whose one object in life is God's glory, who can truly say that you live as in the fear of God, and before Him, endeavouring to please Him, that is evidence of a work of grace within your heart. You are very grateful that such a work of grace has been wrought upon you; but how many there are of our fellow-men who have chosen some other god and some other way of living!

Some choose to be *the slaves of open sin.* Hardly, I think, would they choose such slavery if they really knew all that it included; but they have chosen it practically. How many there are who are the devotees

of drunkenness! Ah, me! what can they see in Bacchus that they should worship him? Others are the slaves of licentiousness. I need not mention the forms of uncleanness in which so many wallow in this foul city of ours, where the temptation to sin is in every street. The forms of evil are many; I need not mention them, for, if I did, I might omit some one; and then, perhaps, the person who is under its influence might fancy that I did not think it to be a sin. But if you choose to live for sinful pleasure, let me tell you that you have entered upon a servitude compared with which the service of God is light and pleasant indeed. Whatever the strictest form of religion may require of you, it will never demand of you so much as vicious pleasure will do. I could stand here, and tell of cases that have come under my own notice, of men and women who, in pursuit of sin, have brought themselves to beggary. Have I not seen the son of honest and godly parents clothed in rags, and covered with vermin, so that, when I spoke to him, I could not, with the utmost sympathy, dare to come within an arm's length of him? Have I not seen the same sort of person, through drunkenness, full of disease, bloated and sure soon to die? And when other sins have been added to these, have we not sometimes been in a hospital where, talking with a wretched man upon his bed, who brought upon himself the whole of his disease, we could not but feel that a martyr, when he died at the stake, did not endure for God such awful agony as this poor fool endured in the pursuit of his lusts? I tell you, and I defy the world to doubt the statement, that the service of sin is the most horrible of slaveries; and that, when men give themselves to it, and their passions become dominant, the worse serfdom that there ever was upon the face of the earth is freedom compared with the bondage of a man's own passions. If you want to know the truth about this matter, I would not advise you to learn it by experience; but I would recommend you to go to someone who has run his evil course, and has come to the end of it, and ask him if it be not true that the wages of sin is death. Then go to the dying Christian, like one of our brethren who has passed away this week, a man who spent his Sabbaths preaching the Word, and earned his bread in the week-days. When he came to die, with an internal cancer, those who saw him said that nobody could be happier, nobody could be more full of triumph than he in the prospect of soon being with his Saviour. Oh, let me serve God! Let me not serve my lusts! Young men, young women, God help you, by His grace, to make that wise and happy choice at once!

There are many persons who are not the worshippers of vice, but they are *the votaries of money-making.* They are the slaves of the thirst for wealth. This is a very common evil; and I invite you to look upon those who have made gain the one object of life. Some have carried it out very resolutely. The miser lives poor that he may die rich. He scrapes money together that his heir may fling it away again. I do think that his god is a very poor one, and that the service he renders to his god is a very wretched business; for when he succeeds in gathering money, then there is the care of keeping it, and with some it is a very great care indeed. I will not mention the name of one of the richest men of this period; but I believe it is true that, when one congratulated him upon his great wealth, he said, "Oh, do not talk in that way! Here is a fellow who has just written to me, saying that I must give him £200, or else he will blow my brains out; and, wherever I am, I am always being persecuted for money. Money brings no happiness to people who possess it." He is one who ought to know, for he has more than most men. You will find that persons who rise in what are called the ranks of society, do not have more happiness; they only have a heavier load to carry. I find one stick to be a great help to me when I go out walking; but if I had a bundle of twenty sticks, I suppose I should find it quite a load to carry; and those who accumulate so much wealth, often have to confess that the game is not worth the candle; they have only acquired that which they cannot enjoy. A man cannot wear more than one suit of clothes at a time, after all; and let him do what he likes, he cannot eat seven dinners in a day, and he cannot enjoy ten times more than anyone else. While the poor man always has a stomach for his meat, and his only trouble is to get meat for his stomach, this poor rich man can find no appetite to enjoy his dainties. Ah, the votary of money-making is employed in a hard service! I have seen him even when he is getting old, and when he has made sufficient, with his nose still on the grind-stone; he must be always at the office, he must be always sticking to his post like the worst-paid clerk in the place; and he is still as penurious as ever. He has buried himself beneath a hill of gold. Live for God, my dear sir; He will give you the things of this life; He will show you how to get as much as shall be truly useful to you; but if you make gold your god, you will serve a hard master.

There are some others who do not try to get much money, but they are *lovers of fashion, lovers of society, admirers of the world.* I will not say much about these ladies and gentlemen; I do not think that I have enough respect for them to speak about their special form of slavery. They must go away from London when "society" goes; they would be ashamed to stop at home when fashionable people go out of town. They must go to such-and-such a place, not because they care to go there, but because it is the fashion. They have to do just this much; and they must not do that much. Poor slaves, I should like to snap every link of their chains! It does seem such a dreadful piece of slavery for men and women that they dare not do what is right, and what they would like to do but must do what other people do; etiquette binds them hand and foot. Oh, that they had but the will and the strength to, break these fetters! The man who dresses for fashion and lives for fashion, ceases to be a man; I know what they call such creatures, but I will not repeat the term of contempt which is applied to them. The woman who lives only to be fashionable ceases to be a woman. I will say no more about her. This idol of fashion is a hard and silly god, for it requires its devotees to make themselves into fools, if not into something worse.

There is another cult that has lately come up, which some have chosen, so that they have become *the devotees of "culture."* How many have forsaken the simple gospel, and turned away from the belief in their Bible which their mother had, and in which their father died, because they want to be considered very thoughtful and clever and superior persons! Now, I have noticed that, whenever a person gives up his belief in the Word of God because it requires that he should believe a good deal, his unbelief

requires him to believe a great deal more. If there be any difficulties in the faith of Christ, they are not one-tenth as great as the absurdities in any system of unbelief which seeks to take its place. I do not hesitate to say that the whole doctrine of evolution with which many men are fascinated to-day, is ten thousand times more absurd than the most ridiculous travesty of what is taught in the Word of God, and that it requires more faith, and also far greater gullibility than to believe any doctrine which is deduced from Holy Scripture. You will find great demands made upon your faith by Shishak, if you become his servants. He will tax you, and take all you have; whereas, to believe what God has said is, after all, but a reasonable service. The man who goes in for the new ideas in religion, the man of "progress," who is so wise and learned, must confess that he loses that sweet rest of heart that he has seen in Christian people, which was enjoyed by the godly woman described by Cowper,—

> "Who knows, and knows no more, her Bible true,
> A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew."

There is a safe anchorage for us here; but there is no anchorage out on the sea of personal infallibility. "Oh!" says one, "I never claimed that." No, my dear sir; but there must be infallibility somewhere, and if you are the judge of the Word of God, you have shifted the infallibility from the Word to yourself, and you are really the claimant of it; in your own heart of hearts, you think so. Where will you ever get rest with such a delusion as that? He who resteth on himself resteth on a very frail foundation indeed. I believe this night that upon which I can pray, that upon which I can live, that upon which I can die. My faith is fixed in the revealed Word of God; and I find that it sustains me in the hour of bitter bodily pain, with which I am too well acquainted; and in the hour of deep depression of spirit, with which I am all too familiar; and in the time of cruel desertion, for I have had some of the best friends fail me; and in the time of slander, for who has had anything worse spoken of him than they have uttered against me? I can fall back upon the eternal verities; they are the hills from which my help cometh, and they never fail me. Can any man say the same of his "culture" and "progress," and of his "advanced thought?" Can he live or die on such stuff as that? Why, he cannot even live on it; for, by his own admission, he cannot write out his creed, because he believes one thing to-day, but he may believe quite another thing to-morrow, and the next day he will in all probability have shifted his ground again. Oh, this Shishak, this new god, lately come up, his service is unspeakably harder than the service of the eternal truth, and there is no wage to be won from it!

I will only refer to one more class of those who have chosen the service of the kingdoms; these are *the seekers of self-righteousness.* This is an old-fashioned and very respectable deity whom many still worship. They are seeking to be saved by their own works, by their charitableness, by their religiousness, by sacraments, by priests, by their own feelings, by something of their own. It is a hard way, in which a man never has any rest or assurance. It is a way in which he runs, because of the crack of the whip behind him,—"This do, and thou shalt live; do not this, and thou shalt perish." How infinitely superior is the way of simply trusting Christ, and then obeying Him out of gratitude; not working for life, but from life; not seeking to serve Christ in order to be saved, but because you are saved, and wish to work out that which God has worked in you, to will and to do of His own good pleasure!

Surveying these different masters, I venture to say, once for all, and then I leave this part of my subject, that those who have chosen the service of the kingdoms have made a very foolish and evil choice, and that those who have chosen the service of God may for ever bless the Lord with all their hearts.

II. Here is our second point. SOME SEEM TO BE PINING TO GIVE UP THE SERVICE OF GOD, AND TO GO TO THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOMS.

It is a strange thing; but this evil is always breaking out even among the people of God. Some want to change out of *sheer love of change.* That you should want to change ministers, I do not at all wonder at; my voice must have become very monotonous to some of you; but that you should want to change gospels, that does distress me. That there should be any man who grows weary of the everlasting chimes of the glorious notes of free grace and dying love, does appal me. No, no; let me hear the voice of God through eternity, for it has a perpetual freshness and novelty about it. I can bear with the monotony of the preacher, if the monotone be still full of Jesus and His love. But there are some people who cannot be constant to anything. They are like the moon. You could not measure the moon for a suit of clothes with the hope of ever fitting it; and so you cannot tell what these men are or where they are; for they are ever on the change.

Some want to be off to their idols, because of *the outward aspect of the new thing.* It looks grand to them to go in for the "culture" ideas, and it seems a fine thing to live for the world. Men of the world seem so grand as they roll along in their carriages, why should not we be as great as they? Then there is something very tangible about minding the main chance; for, after all, if you do not get the £ s. d., where are you? The world will not think much of you. "Oh!" says one; "I like the thought of this following after Christ; but He is a root out of a dry ground, and His people are generally poor, common sort of folk. I should like to get in amongst the uppermost people." When men begin to run down the people of God, I always find that they are not worth much themselves. When any man is ashamed of a child of God because he is poor, he must be a very poor creature himself; but that is often a reason for turning away from the service of God to the service of the kingdoms.

Sometimes men turn aside because of their *loss of joy in the service of God.* They are not serving the Lord as they used to do; they are doing but little for Him. Now, a little religion is a very bitter thing. If you have only a little of it, you will find that there is no sweetness in it. It is like the boys that go to bathe in the river in the early morning. One just dips his foot in the water. "Ugh!" he cries. It shivers him right through; but he who takes a header, and plunges in, glows all over in a moment. I wish that some religious people would just take a header. If they did, they would feel the joy of the Lord thrill through them, and there would be no fear that they would ever want to leave His service. Beware of a little godliness. To say, "I want just as much religion as will take me into heaven, just as much godliness as will save my bacon," is dishonouring to

Christ, and essentially mean. When the joy is gone out of religion, we do not wonder that men want to get away from it.

Then, there are many who are led to want a change from the service of God by *the flagging of others.* They meet with many who say, "Well, really you are not going to keep to that old style of things, are you?" Another says, "I have found something very brilliant and fresh." They listen to these tempting voices, and they think to themselves, "One cannot always go against the stream." If they would really think, they would remember that live fish swim against the stream; it is the dead fish that go floating down with the tide. I like the man who says, "I am not going to take my religion from my companions. If they do not intend to go to heaven, I am sorry for them; but as for myself, I know what I am at. My heart is fixed, Almighty God, fixed on Thee, believing in Thy dear Son, resting in His precious blood! I am resolved, come fair or foul, to keep my face towards the celestial city till I behold the King in His beauty, and reign with Him for ever and ever." God give you that fixed and firm resolution! Many cannot do anything contrary to their surroundings; they must do as other people do, poor creatures that they are.

There are some who turn aside because religion now has brought them to a point where *it entails some extra self-sacrifice.* I have known some who have said, "Well, I am prepared for many things in the cause of God; but we must draw a line somewhere. One may buy gold too dearly. I could not, for instance, give up my situation. If my employer commanded me to do a wrong thing, I think that I should stretch my conscience a little, and do it. I could not lose my situation." Another says, "Well I could not enter a protest against such-and-such an error. If I did, I should have all my friends down upon me, and they would call me bigoted and narrow-minded." And that would break your heart, would it? It would be a very soft heart if it would. "Oh, but really, I am not the man to stand out by myself!" Are you not? Remember that text, "The fearful"—that is, the cowardly—"and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." God grant you may not have that for your portion! Oh, that you may follow Christ at all hazards! Be this your word—

> "Through floods and flames, if Jesus lead,
> I'll follow where He goes;
> 'Hinder me not,' shall be my cry,
> Though earth and hell oppose."

III. I am going to finish with this point. THERE IS A GREAT CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SERVICE OF GOD AND ANY OTHER SERVICE.

The service of God is delightful. Remember, young man, if you are about to engage in the service of God, *there is nothing demanded of you that will harm you.* There is no commandment of God which, if you keep it, will injure either your body or your soul. There is nothing asked of you but what will be for your benefit; nothing that will really be to your loss. If it should seem to involve a present loss, yet it shall be turned to future gain; for God will overrule it for your permanent good.

Next, notice, that *there is nothing denied you, in the service of God, that would be a blessing to you.* The promise is, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." You shall neither have less pleasure, nor less strength, nor less real honour, if you obey the commands of God. You may seem sometimes to give up what appears to be pleasant to you; but God denies His children nothing that would be really for their advantage. The service of God is, after all, such a service that, if we lived selfishly, we might wish to live as God bids us live. If a man were infinitely wise, and could fashion a life which, upon the whole, would be best for himself, he could not do better than to fashion it according to the commands of God, and the example of Christ; and you cannot say that of any of the servitudes of which I have spoken.

Once more, observe, that *in the service of God strength will always be given according to your day.* When you serve the Lord, if He sends you out upon a tough piece of work, He will give you extra grace; and if He calls you to great suffering, He will give you greater patience. He does not require of you more than He is prepared to give you. He will do for you exceeding abundantly above what you ask or even think. What a service is this in which we are never sent to warfare at our own charges! Shishak, the king of Egypt, and all the Egyptian kings built pyramids and dug canals. You have often wondered how they made them. In the reign of one of them, nearly the third of a million of people were forced to go and dig a canal; and they were not only never paid a penny, but they never had even a piece of bread given to them, nor were they even furnished with tools. The bulk of them had to dig out the canals with their own fingers, and they perished by thousands. That is your Shishak, king of Egypt; that is the devil's service all over. There is no reward given, and no help whatever. You are left to do the best you can; and that best brings you no reward, either in this life or in that which is to come.

Here, again, is a further beauty about the service of God, that *there is no threat made to hang upon it.* You are saved if you are a believer in Christ; that matter is done with; Christ has saved you. You do not go out to work for God with any idea of winning heaven, or of escaping hell by what you can do; you are saved, and you serve the Lord with a higher, purer, grander motive, namely, that of unselfish gratitude, loving Him because He first loved you. You serve God after a very different fashion from the servitude of sin. The servitude of a slave is bitter; but the service of a son is sweet, and to that we are called.

And all the while that you are the servant of God, *you have a sweet peace in reflecting upon what you have done.* Did you ever go out for a day, or for an evening, with friends, spending a merry time in gaiety, perhaps not altogether censurable, but still, not entirely commendable? When you have gone upstairs to bed, have you not thought, "Well, somehow, I do not feel quite happy"? When you went to pray, did you not feel as if you had broken your knee; and when you awoke in the night, and thought over what seemed so very nice at the time, was it not honey in your mouth, but gall in your bowels? Did you ever spend a whole day in the service of God? When you have gone to bed at night, how have you felt? Very tired, perhaps; but oh, so thankful that you could look upon it all without regret! You could chew the cud of that service. There was something in the recollection that soothed you in the night. As George Herbert said, when he helped a poor woman with her load, and men wondered

that the parson of the parish should carry a poor woman's basket for her, "The memory of this will make the bells ring in my heart at night," so the service of God makes the bells ring in our hearts.

Lastly, there is above all this *a hope of the eternal reward which is so soon to come.* I spoke, the other day on board ship with a brother in Christ, and as we talked together, I said, "Well, you know, I may be in heaven in a quarter of an hour. If the ship went down, I do not believe that it would make any difference to me," and he said, "Nor to me." I believe that we were the happiest men on board that steamer. How sweet it is to feel that you are not your own, but that you belong to God! If you really belong to God, He will not lose you. He has never yet lost anything that was truly His. He puts the broad arrow or the bleeding heart on you to show that you belong to the King. The devil himself dare not run away with you. God will call for you in that day when the inventory of the divine possessions shall be read. You shall be known as marked by the King, and you shall be His for ever and ever. Oh, let us try to live so that we can die in the same style as we are living! It is well to be walking in such a way that you can walk right straight on though a grave should be in your way; and walk right straight through it, and out at the other side. Young man, are you going the way that you would like to keep on going for ever and ever? The train is starting; you are taking your seat; which way do you want to go, to the realm of brightness, or the land of eternal darkness? Take your seat in that carriage which will go right through to the better land; and taking your seat, feel, "Now the train may go right on to the terminus; for this purpose did I enter it, that I might go to the end of the journey." Many want to go as far as they can down the dark valley, and then they hope that they will get out at some station or other, and change their track. Be not so unwise; but, to-night, enter the right train. Lay hold on eternal life. Put your trust in Jesus; and may we meet in heaven without having had to know by bitter experience the awful difference between the service of God and the service of the kingdom of darkness!

God bless you, dear friends, for Christ's sake! Amen.

REHOBOAM THE UNREADY

"And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."—2 Chronicles xii. 14.

YOU have probably noticed that, as a general rule, the sacred historians, at the end of each king's reign, sum up the character of the monarch, and describe him as either doing evil in the sight of the Lord, or doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord. They give a summary of his whole life in one or other of these sentences; and there will come a day when there will be a summary of your life and mine; and when it is given, it will run on this wise. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord," or else on this blessed fashion, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." There is no other course beside these two; these characters comprehend all of us, and the summary given in our case, as it was in the case of Rehoboam, will be given with great accuracy. It will be infallible, and it will be irreversible.

This man Rehoboam was not half as bad as some other kings; still, the inspired historian was compelled to say, "He did evil." He was not such an obstinate and outrageous sinner as some were. He was not an Ahab; he was not even a Manasseh, he did not live as that king did in his evil time; yet "he did evil." That is the summary of his whole career. There were some good points about him, as I shall try to show you presently; he did good sometimes: still, when it is all added up, this is the total of it, "He did evil"; and the reason why he did evil is given. One reason, I should think was, that he had a bad mother; observe how it is written, just before the summary of his life, "His mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess,"—one of Solomon's numerous wives,—one whom he favoured most of all; but she was an idolatrous woman, "an Ammonitess." And there is little wonder that, when the father was no better than he should have been, and when the mother was exceedingly bad, the summary of the son's life should be, "He did evil." This makes marriage a most important step, though it is often taken without a single serious thought. See how a woman's life projects itself, and either casts a ray of brightness over her children's characters, or a cloud of shame over their entire being. What some of us owe to our mothers, we shall never be able to tell. If we had to write down the choicest mercies that God has bestowed upon us, we should have to mention first the mother who prayed for us, and taught us to trust in Jesus, by the Holy Spirit's blessing upon the sweet way in which she spoke to us about the Saviour. But a mother, trained in the school of Satan, and who has become a mistress in the art of sin, is a terrible source of evil to her children. May God have mercy upon any of you mothers who have sons growing up to follow the evil example which you are setting them! Mothers, by the love you bear your children,—and there is no stronger love, I think, on earth,—if you will not think of your own soul's best interest, I do pray you, for your children's sake, consider your ways, and seek the Lord with the purpose in your heart that your children may, if possible, live in the presence of God.

But the Scripture does not give this as the reason why Rehoboam did evil. It does not say that he did evil because he had a bad mother, nor because his father had not walked with God as he ought to have done. No; the reason was, "because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." The Hebrew proverb was, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"; but the Lord said to His ancient people, through the prophet Ezekiel, "Ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. . . . The soul that sinneth, it shall die." God will judge each one according to his own deeds; and if you should, unhappily, have been born of the most ungodly parents who ever lived, there is no reason why God's grace should not begin to work

in your family with you. If all your training has been adverse to godliness, the sovereign grace, that takes one of a city, and two of a family, and brings them to Zion may select you as its object. I know several brethren here, who have each one said to me, with great sorrow, "I am the only one out of my family, so far as I can judge, that knows the Lord. Looking back, I can trace no pedigree of saints; and looking around me, neither brother, nor sister, nor uncle, nor cousin, seems to have any fear of God." Ah, my dear friend! if you have been so distinguished by the grace of God, you ought to love Him much, and praise Him much; and as you will be sure to be watched, and pecked at, like a speckled bird, mind how you live. May your light so shine before men that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven. No; though Rehoboam walks in an evil way, it is not set down to the examples of his father and mother; but it is written, "He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."

What does this expression mean? I am going to try to find out because I feel sure that the same reason is operating upon a good many other people. It does not say that Rehoboam did evil because he was of a vicious temperament, or because he had strong passions, or because he was a downright thoroughly bad fellow. No, he was not quite that; but he did evil because of something which he did not do.

> "Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do";—

and as Rehoboam "prepared not his heart to seek the Lord," Satan found him evil to do, and he did it.

I. So I judge that this expression means, first, that HE DID NOT BEGIN LIFE WITH SEEKING THE LORD.

His father Solomon did; when he found himself lifted up to the throne of Israel while he was yet a young man, Solomon spread his case before the Lord, and asked for wisdom and, in consequence, taking it as a whole, his reign was a grand one, and his kingdom attained to a high state of prosperity. He was faithful to the worship of Jehovah, in the main, though there was a sad turning aside to idols, and he acted wisely in most of his ways, so that the wisdom of Solomon became proverbial. That result was due to the fact that God gave to him "wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore." He asked of God wisdom, and God gave it to him; but this foolish son of his asked not for wisdom. The sceptre was there, so he grasped it; there was an empty throne, so he sat down upon it. I daresay he fancied it was a very fine thing to be king over Israel, and his thoughts did not go much beyond the mere external pomp and splendour of royalty. He did not intend any ill, and he was not very determined upon doing that which was right; and probably he never thought of commencing his career by asking the blessing of God upon it. I hope no one, whom I am addressing would really resolve to lead a bad life; but mind you, it may happen to you, as it did to Rehoboam, that the summary of your life will be, "He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." So much in life depends upon how we begin that I could wish that no boy ever left his home to go to school—that no boy ever left school to go to a clerkship, or to serve his apprenticeship to a business,—without stopping a while, and praying the Lord to guide him in every step so that he might act wisely. And I might add that it would be well if older men would do the same; and, in beginning anything fresh, prepare their hearts to seek the Lord.

This young man Rehoboam felt that he needed some kind of guidance, yet he did not seek the Lord, but *he called together a number of counsellors.* Now, it is quite right to seek counsel of men who are wiser than we ourselves are; but he who trusts to earthly counsellors, instead of to God, is guilty of great provocation against Him who is full of wisdom, and who ought to be the Guide of our youth and of our whole lives. Calling his father's wise counsellors together, at the beginning of his reign, Rehoboam submitted the people's grievances to them; but, like the fool that he was, he rejected their counsel, and followed the foolish advice of the younger men like himself, the fops about the court, the swells, the gilded youths of the period, and so committed a gross act of folly.

It usually happens that, when men will not ask counsel of God, if they go to other sources for guidance, *they generally accept the very worst form of advice.* When men trust in men, it is strange how often they trust in the worst and not in the best of men. Yet I know not that it is strange, for that same infatuation, which leads a man to reject his God, almost necessarily leads him to despise those upon whom God has bestowed any measure of light and wisdom. So this young prince asked counsel of others, who were as foolish as he himself was, and the result of following their advice was that ten tribes out of the twelve were rent away from him, and formed into an independent kingdom. What a different life there might have been, not only for himself, but for those who were dependent upon him, if he had but humbly waited upon God for guidance, and had given the people a gentle reply to their very reasonable demands, and had ruled them, not with a rod of iron, but with gentleness and kindness! There might have been two Solomons succeeding each other; which, perhaps, is too much to expect among kings and princes, for Solomons are rather scarce in that direction. However, so it was, because he did not begin by seeking the Lord, he made a fool of himself, and a failure of his life.

Perhaps some of you young people say, "Well, we are not going to give our hearts to God, yet we shall not be fools." Ah, but you are fools already, or else you would not talk like that; and the probability is that, before long, in the plentitude of your self-sufficient wisdom, you will take a step, which seems plain enough to you, but which will lead you into a world of sorrow, and to no end of trouble. Blessed is that young man who says, "My Father, Thou shalt be the Guide of my youth,"—who gets God on board the vessel of his life at the start, with His hand on the rudder, to steer the vessel through a safe and prosperous voyage till he reaches the Fair Havens, and casts anchor in the Port of Peace.

This, then, was the folly of Rehoboam, that he did not begin life by seeking God, and therefore he began it foolishly.

II. But our text means more than that; it means next, that REHOBOAM SHOWED NO HEART IN DOING WHAT WAS RIGHT.

He did what was right at the first, but he had no heart in doing it. The prophet came to him when he had mustered his forces, and forbade him to go to war with the followers of Jeroboam, and he disbanded all his troops. That was, truly, a most worthy thing to

do; and you and I, looking on at the scene, would have said, "That is a noble young prince; if he obeys the voice of a prophet like that, surely he fears God." But he did not.

He did right because, *from the training his father had given him, he had a high esteem for prophets of God.* He had seen his father entertain prophets with great honour, and he did not like to despise them. There is many a young man, nowadays, who has great regard for God's ministers, though he is not himself a Christian. He recollects the times when they used to be at his father's house, when they slept in the prophet's chamber. He remembers many happy evenings he had, as a boy, when they were guests at his home, and he could not bring his mind to despise them, and to make a jest of what they say. Nay, to some extent, he gives heed to what they have to say, and he tries to shape his moral character according to their teaching, yet he does not yield himself to Christ, so nothing comes of it all.

If it had been a prophet of Baal who had come to him, I am afraid that Rehoboam would have done just what he told him to do, and there are many young men now, who appear to be excellent, simply because they are in good hands; but if they had been under the influence of evil men, they would have been as bad as could be, for they have no individuality, they have no heart in doing the right thing. It is well to come to the house of God, my dear friends, but I like to see people come because they want to come. I observe some people, even on the Sabbath, walking along to their place of worship, with their books under their arm in a most solemn manner, and all the while looking as if they were going to be flogged; and when they come out, they look just as if they had passed through that experience. I like to see people go tripping to God's house with sacred joy, as if it was the merriest place in all the world. When I come into the Tabernacle, I often repeat those lines by Dr. Watts,—

"Peace be within this sacred place,
And joy a constant guest!
With holy gifts, and heavenly grace,
Be her attendants blest!

"My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends, my kindred, dwell,
There God my Saviour reigns."

It is well to worship the Lord heartily, with a zest, with holy fervour, to do it because you like to do it, and take a delight in it. It is one thing to be right in appearance, and another thing to be right in your soul. "But," says one, "I thought it was best to do right when you do not like to do it; I thought there was something very meritorious if a person was religious though he could not endure it." No; that is hypocrisy, and nothing else. When a person puts on the garb of religion, all the while feeling that he would gladly take it off if he could,—pretending to be a Christian, when, if he could have his own way, he would have a Continental Sabbath, he is nothing but a hypocrite. When he does get his own way, he manages to have his Continental Sabbath, and he just amuses himself all that he possibly can do on God's holy day. No matter what the foreigners do, he is among them in the very thick of it, and he thinks they have a very blessed kind of Sunday. When he is at home, he does not do such naughty things;—oh, no, certainly not! And this hypocrisy is what you think is virtue? Because you do not like true godliness, you think it must be good for you to pretend to imitate it; but that will never do. The psalmist rightly says, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways of them." He is the man who runs in the way of God's commandments with intense delight; but this Rehoboam did not do so. When he was doing right, he did it because he felt some respect for the prophet, but that was all.

It was soon evident that his heart was not right towards God, for *he imitated his father Solomon in his faults.* His father's great fault was the multiplication of wives, and into this evil Rehoboam fell. And, moreover, all the strength of Rehoboam's heart and soul went in what was a very proper direction in itself; namely, in the building of cities, and the storing of them with provisions, and fencing and garrisoning the towns; yet that direction was a very bad one because it took him away from God. I like to see a young man, whatever he does, throw his whole soul into it; but not so act that he throws his soul away from God by it. There was some force in what the first of the Rothschilds is reported to have said, when he had been making money. Someone said to him, "You are bringing up your sons to make money, I suppose?" He answered, "Of course I am; what should they do else?" "But, still," said the other, "I am sure that you must wish them to look to something higher, and something better." "No," he replied, "I do nothing of the kind. If a man wants to make money, he must give his heart and his soul to it; and that is what these young men have to do, and they must not have their minds distracted from the one pursuit they have in life, namely, to make money, or else they will never succeed at it." I have no doubt there is much truth in that remark, which applies also to higher things. There is such a little real force in man, at his best, that he must put all of it into one thing if he is to have success in it. So this Rehoboam put his whole soul into one thing; and, therefore, "he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord;" but prepared his heart to seek after other things.

"But," someone asks, "may not a man be attentive to business?" He ought to be; he should be diligent in business, but ever with this higher motive outreaching everything else, that he may win Christ, and be found in Him,—that his life may bring glory to the God who made him, and to the Christ who redeemed him with His precious blood. But, oh, young man, if you do not prepare your heart to seek the Lord, if what you do, that is good, is done in a happy-go-lucky style, if you are good because you happen to be in a good connection, and you keep right because Christian people round about you keep you right, and you would not like to grieve your father, and vex your friend, then there is nothing in it at all. You will go to the bad, one of these days, when you get into other circumstances, and meet with new temptations. A man ought not to live depending upon somebody else's backbone; he should have one of his own; and if he has not, one of these days he will be crushed. If you profess to be a Christian, throw your whole soul into it, and say, "Let others do as they will, as for me, I will serve the Lord, and not feel it a bondage, but take a delight in it, and I will serve Him with all my heart."

" Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone,
Dare to have a purpose firm,
Dare to make it known."

III. There is a third point about Rehoboam, contained in the words of our text, " He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord ; " that is, HE WAS NOT FIXED AND PERSEVERING IN HIS RELIGION. The original bears that sense.

He began well, and in the first three years of his reign, the nation worshipped God. I do not suppose that he really did so himself ; but, still, he was on that side. He was one of the Evangelical party ; he was one of the God-fearing party, and therefore he prospered. His apparent reverence for God brought the Levites to live in his dominions, and brought others of the best people of Israel to come there, and to strengthen his hands. Thus he prospered ; and you might have thought that, as his religion brought him prosperity, he would stick to it. Not he ; there was no " stick to it " in him.

As soon as ever he prospered, *he began to grow proud.* He was a fine fellow, he had a splendid kingdom, a very attractive dominion ; did not the good people all come there ? So, growing proud, he began to forsake the Lord ; and the people, following his evil example, worshipped in groves instead of coming to the temple at Jerusalem. Worse than that, they set up graven images and idolatrous pillars, and their heart went aside from God, and they practised the most accursed sin that ever stained and defiled the face of the earth. You know the sin for which God sent the judgment of fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah ; and there were some of these people who thus sinned, making an act of worship out of the most bestial crime. Yet Rehoboam did not trouble himself about that. When the people feared God, he was willing that they should do so ; and now, if they followed Ashtaroth, they might do as they liked. He was, after all, but a young ruler, who thought that the principal business of a king was to enjoy himself ; so he let things go just as they could. He was king ; but, still,—well, if God was good, it was proper for good people to reverence Him ; but if other people did not, he did not trouble his head much about that matter, it sat very lightly upon him.

In consequence of this, *God brought up Shishak from Egypt,* with multitudes of chariots and horsemen, and an innumerable host of people. Then were the Jews in a state of great alarm ; and Rehoboam, who went to be moulded any way,—for he had a sort of india-rubber heart,—humbled himself, and the princes of Israel humbled themselves. God knew that these other people were sincere in humbling themselves, so he allowed their sincerity to season the whole bulk, and He therefore accepted the humiliation of king and people, and delivered them.

Your see how readily Rehoboam went, first towards God, then towards idols, and then back again towards God ; *he was always ready to shift and change.* He wrought no great reforms in the land ; we do not read that he held a great passover, as Hezekiah did, or that the high places were taken away ; but, as soon as Shishak was gone, he felt perfectly content. There was not anything real and permanent in his religion ; it did not hold him. He held it sometimes, but it never held him.

O dear friends, is not this Rehoboam a specimen of a great many people who are living now ? They get into a warm-hearted meeting, and they feel the power of it ; they meet a friend, and he takes them into different society altogether, where there are merry songs and plentiful jokes, and they feel the power of that. They hold with the hare, and they run with the hounds. They are " everything by starts, and nothing long ; " and the result is that they do evil ; for, when a man is not fixed in his resolve to do good,—when he does not take his stand, in the name of God, with a life and death determination, it is not doubtful which way he will go.

IV. The last point involved in this description of Rehoboam is this, HE HAD NO CARE ABOUT SERVING GOD.

He did not care whether he served the Lord or not ; and as to serving Him in a right spirit, that never entered into his head. He never " prepared his heart." If he went to a service,—well, he was there, but that was all. Some people, who have come here to-night, never thought of breathing a prayer before they came, nor after they entered the building. They would even venture, if we allowed them, to partake of the communion at the Lord's table without self-examination and without prayer ; they do everything without any preparation of the heart.

But look you, sirs, *if there is no care about making the heart go right, it must go wrong,* because the natural tendency of our mind is toward evil. If you leave your heart to follow its own natural impulse, it is impossible that it should seek the Lord. It is only when it is prepared to seek the Lord that it ever seeks Him, and that preparation of the heart is from God ; so that, if we do not ask the Lord to prepare our hearts to seek Him, we shall never seek His face at all.

And look ye yet again, *all the current in which we are found runs the wrong way ;* so that, if there is no preparation of the heart, we know which way it will go. Company will draw it, not towards right, but towards wrong ; and the set of the age—the general current of the period—is not towards God, but away from Him. If you put a barge in the middle of the river, I know which way it will go ; it will go with the tide. It is only by adjusting the rudder, and by wise steering, and hard rowing, that it could be made to go against it. So, if your heart is not prepared to seek the Lord, it will not seek Him, it is sure to go in the other direction.

What is preparing the heart to seek the Lord ? I should say that it is something like this.

First, *to feel any need of God.* What can I, a creature, do without my Creator ? What can I do without a Father in heaven ? I have offended Him, I have sinned against Him, I have gone far away from Him ; but I want Him to forgive me, and to save me. We must be conscious of this need ; may the Spirit of God prepare us to seek the Lord by giving us a deep sense of our desperate need of God's mercy !

The next thing is, *to cry unto God for help :* " Lord, save me ! God be merciful to me a sinner ! Renew my heart, change my nature, subdue my stubborn will, and make me Thy child ! " Prayer prepares the heart to seek the Lord, and you will never seek Him if you do not pray to Him. In fact, prayer is an essential exercise in seeking the Lord.

Then, further, if we would be prepared to seek the Lord, there must be *a submission of ourselves to His guidance,*—a coming to Him, and saying, " Here I am, Lord ; make me what I ought to be. I agree

to Thy commandments; I delight in them, help me to run in them. I yield my proud selfhood, and lay down at Thy feet my prejudices and my wilfulness, and ask Thee now to guide me in the right way."

There must also be *the acceptance of God's plan of salvation*. He who would live the right kind of life must come to God, and say, "My God, Thou savest them that believe; help me to believe. Thou givest eternal life to as many as believe in Jesus Christ, Thy Son. Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." This is the true way of preparing the heart to seek the Lord.

And even when that faith is given, the right preparation is *to serve God always with thoughtfulness and care;*—not to go blundering on anyhow, hit or miss, as some do. It is a terribly sad thing to pretend to serve God without thought, without watchfulness, without care, for God is not such an One that we may rush into His presence whenever we like, without premeditation, solemnity, or reverence. If you were to go to visit a king, you must be prepared to enter the royal presence under court regulations, and to behave yourself in a seemly manner; and much more is this necessary when we seek the Lord. Every holy duty ought to be thought over carefully. Every prayer, every almsgiving, every attempt to serve God, should be done with due consideration, and with holy anxiety to do it in the right manner, at the right time, and in the right spirit.

Now, because Rehoboam did not act thus, and did not, indeed, care to trouble his brain about such things as this, "he did evil." And if any man here says, "Well, I do not trouble about religion; I believe I shall be all right. I cannot be always sitting down, and pulling a long face, and reading the Bible, and trying to find out how I am to live. I just take the first chance that comes, and do the best I can." If you talk like that, you will do evil as surely as you are a man, for he who devotes not his whole soul to fighting the battle of life will certainly lose it. To go to heaven is not such an easy matter that every fool may do it before breakfast. It is a thing which, as it needed the blood of the Son of God to pave the way, and needed the eternal Spirit Himself to give us life to run in that way, is a matter of serious import and of solemn moment; and the whole heart, and soul, and strength must be set upon the attainment of eternal life, or we shall not secure it. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." So, may God the Holy Ghost help you to think seriously about divine things, or else you will do evil because you prepared not your heart to seek the Lord.

Now I want just two or three minutes more in order to make an application of my subject; and, first, dear friends, is it not possible—I want to whisper this round among the members of this church,—is it not quite possible that there may be some nominal professors who come under the description in the text? Their conduct appears to be admirable, and hitherto probably has been so; but they have never prepared their heart to seek the Lord. I fear that, in all our churches, there are people who are called Christians simply because they were brought up among Christians. They need to be brought down, to be converted, regenerated, born again, for they have only been born after the flesh.

There was an Ishmael in the household of Abraham, so we need not wonder if there are such people in all our churches. They have never prepared their hearts to seek the Lord; it has not been heart-work with them. Perhaps conscience sometimes says to them, "Is it not a pity that you ever joined the church?" Now I know who will take this question home, and fret over it; it is you good creatures for whom I do not mean it; but those to whom it specially applies will say, "Oh, he cannot mean me!" There are, alas! many such people; and they are hardly likely to be converted now, because they entered the church before they were converted; and, consequently, whatever is said, they think, "He cannot mean me." But, my dear friend, we do mean the very person who says, "He cannot mean me;" and we do not mean some of those who take home those searching questions, and are troubled by them. Whenever anybody says to me, "Oh, I am afraid I am a hypocrite!" I do not think he really is one. I never knew one, who was really a hypocrite, who was afraid he was one; those who are so truly, usually have no such fear. Still, it will be well for each of us to ask these questions, "Is my heart prepared to seek the Lord? Is my heart in my religion? Do I try to serve God with all my heart? Do I make it a matter of serious thought, or is my religion all upon the outside?" If it be so, the probability is that, one of these days, there will come a sudden temptation to you, and over you will go. I have known ministers, deacons, and elders,—grey old men,—fall into sins which one would have thought only silly boys would fall into: and we can only think, when we see such men apostatize, that they never prepared their heart to seek the Lord. Their religion was only skin-deep; it was not that true Christianity which has its root in the soul by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.

Now another question. Are there any young men here, who are very hopeful and promising characters, who like religious gatherings, and attend to everything that is of good repute, and yet have not sought and found the Lord? Shall I tell you what troubled me before I gave my heart to Christ? It was something which had great influence upon me in bringing me to decision. There was a boy at school, who was some few years older than I was; and he was a very excellent lad. My father (you know that fathers speak thus sometimes,) used to tell me he wished I was half as good as that boy was; he was a kind of pattern lad. Well, he grew up, and came to London to a drapery establishment. He wrote home most delightful letters to his mother, telling her that he was going to hear such-and-such a minister on Sunday morning, and such another one on Sunday evening; and I used to hear what a good lad he was. All of a sudden he came home; he could not be kept in the establishment, there was money missing, and he was suspected of stealing it. He had not been to those places of worship at all; he had spent his Sundays—well, Satan knew where; he had been as bad as bad could be all the while he was there. My father never mentioned him to me any more, but I distinctly recollect feeling just this, "Well, if So-and-so, whom I thought and believed, and who seemed to be such a good lad, to whom I used to look up, has turned out such a downright scamp, may not I do the same?" It seemed to me that, if I did not begin in a better way than he did, by really getting a new heart and a right spirit, I might come morally to the same sort of smash as he did. And I may further tell you that, among the things that led me to Christ, was the doctrine of the final perseverance

of the saints. I heard that He would keep the feet of His saints, and I said to myself, "Then if I give myself to Him, He will ensure the preservation of my character, and He will keep me to the end." And the only bargain I ever made with Him, when I gave myself up to Him, was that He would ever have me in His holy keeping. O young men, I can recommend that plan to you! I earnestly entreat you not to commence life even with the best moral resolutions. Go straight away to the Lord Jesus, and ask Him to grant you grace that you may give yourself up wholly to Him. You cannot keep yourself, but He can keep you, and He will keep you even unto the end, for He hath said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

Lastly, do I address anyone,—old or young, it is no matter,—who, like Rehoboam, has not sought the Lord, and like Rehoboam has got into a world of trouble through it? Have you lost the ten tribes? Has Shishak come against you? You did wrong, you know you did, for you forsook your God; and now, after that, do you still refuse to seek Him? For, mark you, Rehoboam did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord even after he had been attacked by the king of Egypt. Chastisements are lost upon some people; there is someone of Rehoboam's sort here to-night; it is the first time he has been out since his serious illness. Blessed be God that you did not die then, my friend. You know what the angels heard you say when you were lying on your bed. "Please God, if I am ever raised up from this illness, I will seek the Lord." That is partly the reason why you are here, and I am very glad to see you; but you must not think that coming here will save you. It is no use seeking the Tabernacle; you must seek the Lord. Oh, do not, I pray you, let this warning be neglected, nor let the vow that was registered in heaven be forgotten; but do seek the Saviour with all your heart! And you, my friend, over yonder, were in a shipwreck; there were many lives lost, and you had been a swearing fellow, but you said, "Please God if I get ashore, I will turn over a new leaf." Well, I do not think the new leaf is much improvement on the old one. That was not what you meant, was it? It was that you would become a better man if you were saved from the jaws of hell. You were saved from the watery grave, yet you have not prepared your heart to seek the Lord. O my dear friend, God does not send Shishak many times, you know! After He has sent him once, and there is no softening of the heart, or girding up of the loins to seek Him, He will send another messenger, and it will be written of you, as it was of Rehoboam, "He slept with his fathers, and his son reigned in his stead." But where was Rehoboam? He never sought the Lord; so, perhaps, when he had passed out of this world, where he had shilly-shallied and vacillated, where he had been pliable and plastic to every influence,—when he passed into the next world, there was realized by him the terror of that dreadful curse, "Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find Me." Then was fulfilled to him that other terrible prophecy, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." Think of God's laughing and mocking at a soul that has passed into eternity without Him; it is a most dreadful thing, whatever it may mean, and it will be fulfilled in you,—you hopeful people, you plausible people, you undecided people, unless you prepare your heart to seek the Lord. It may be that some of you are standing, at this moment, on the very verge of everlasting life; and if the devil can keep you there he will be perfectly satisfied, for you will perish if you remain there. Do not satisfy him, I implore you O mighty grace, come upon them now, and make them each one say, "I will stand here no longer; I will cross the line; I will give myself up once for all to Jesus." That is right, young man, cross the river, burn the bridges, sink your boats, and say,—

> "'Tis done, the great transaction's done,
> I am my Lord's, and He is mine;
> He drew me, and I follow'd on,
> Charm'd to confess the voice divine."

The Lord make it so, for Christ's sake! Amen.

A LESSON FROM THE LIFE OF KING ASA

"Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars."—2 Chronicles xvi. 9.

OUR text leads us to speak upon historical matters, and for this I shall by no means apologize, although I have sometimes heard very foolish professors speak slightingly of the historical part of Scripture. Remember that the historical books were almost the only Scripture possessed by the early saints; and from those they learned the mind of God. David sang the blessedness of the man who delighted in the law of the Lord, yet he had only the first five books, and, perhaps, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, all books of history, in which to meditate day and night. The psalmist himself spoke most lovingly of these books, which were the only statutes and testimonies of the Lord to him, with, perhaps, the addition of the Book of Job. Other saints delighted in the histories of the word before the more spiritual books came in their way at all. If rightly viewed, the histories of the Old Testament are full of instruction. They supply us both with warnings and examples in the realm of practical morals; and hidden within their letter, like pearls in oyster shells, lie grand spiritual truths couched in allegory and metaphor. I may say of the least important of all the books what our Lord said of children, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." To take away from Holy Writ involves a curse upon the daring deed; may we never incur the penalty! All Scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable; be it ours to gain the profit. Let us see whether we cannot get a lesson from the life of King Asa.

We will commence by noticing *who he was. and*

what he had done in his better days, for this will help to understand more clearly the fault into which he fell. He was a man of whom it is said that his heart was perfect before God all his days. It is a great thing to have said of any one; indeed, it is the greatest commendation which can be pronounced upon mortal man. When the heart, the intention, the master-affection is right, the man is reckoned a good man before the Lord, notwithstanding that there may be a thousand things which are not commendable—yea, and some things which are censurable in the man's outward career. Asa is noticeable in the early part of his life for the fact that he set up the worship of God; and carried it out with great diligence, though his mother was an idolator, and his father, Abijah, was little better. He had enjoyed no training as a youth that could lead him aright, but quite the contrary; yet he was very decided, even in the first days of his reign, for the Lord his God, and acted in all things with an earnest desire to glorify Jehovah, and to lead his people away from all idols to the worship of the true God. Now, a life may begin well, and yet may be clouded ere its close; the verdure of earnestness may fade into the sere and yellow leaf of backsliding. We may have the grace of God in our earliest days, but unless we have day by day fresh help from on high, dead flies may pollute the ointment and spoil the sweet odour of our lives. We shall need to watch against temptation so long as we are in this wilderness of sin. Only in heaven are we out of gunshot of the devil. Though we may have been kept in the ways of the Lord, as Asa was, for fifty or sixty years, yet if left by the Master for a single moment we shall bring discredit upon His holy name.

In the middle of his reign Asa was put to the test by a very serious trial. He was attacked by the Ethiopians, and they came against him in mighty swarms. What a host to be arrayed against poor little Judah—an army of a million footmen and three hundred thousand chariots! All the host that Asa could muster—and he did his best—was but small compared to this mighty band; and it appeared as if the whole land would be eaten up, for the people seemed sufficient to carry away Judea by handfuls. But Asa believed in God, and therefore when he had mustered his little band he committed the battle to the Lord his God. Read attentively that earnest believing prayer which he offered. "And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee." How grandly he threw all his burden upon God! He declared that he rested in the Most High, and believed that God could as well achieve the victory by a few and feeble folk as by a vast army; after this prayer he marched to the battle with holy confidence, and God gave him the victory. The power of Ethiopia was broken before him, and Judah's armies returned laden with the spoil. You would not have thought that a man who could perform that grand action would become, a little after, full of unbelief; but the greatest faith of yesterday will not give us confidence for to-day, unless the fresh springs which are in God shall overflow again. Even Abraham who at one time staggered not at the promise through unbelief, yet did stagger some time afterwards about a far less difficult matter. The greatest of God's servants, if their Lord hides His face, soon sink even below the least; all the strength of the strongest lies in Him.

After Asa had thus by divine strength won a great victory, he did not, as some do, grow proud of it, but he set to work, in obedience to a prophetic warning, to purge his country by a thorough reformation; he did it, and did it well. He did not show any partiality towards the rich and great in his country who were guilty of the worship of false gods, for the queen-mother was a great fosterer of idolatry, and she had a grove of her own with a temple in it, in which was her own peculiar idol; but the king put her away from her eminent position, took her idol, and not merely broke it, but stamped upon it and burned it, with every sign of contempt, at the brook Kidron, into which ran the sewage of the temple, to let the people know that, whether in high places or amongst the poor, there should be nothing left to provoke the Lord throughout the land. This was well done. Oh that such a reformation might happen in this land, for the country is beginning to be covered with idols and mass-houses! Everywhere they are setting up the altars of their breaden deity, shrines to the queen of heaven, the crucifix and the saints, while the spiritual worship of God is put aside to make room for vain shows and spiritual masquerades. The God of the Reformation—how much is He forgotten now-a-days! Oh for a return of the days of Knox, and his covenanting brethren! Asa was for a root and branch reform, and he went through with it bravely. You would not have thought that a man so thorough—a man who, like Levi of old, knew not his own mother when it came to the matter of serving God, but made "through stitch" with it, as the old writers used to say—you would not have supposed that he would be the man who, when he came into another trial, would be running after an idolator and cringing before him and praying him to give him his help. Alas, the best of men are men at the best! God alone is unchangeable. He alone is good always, or indeed at all. "There is none good save one, that is God." We are only good as he makes us good; and if His hand be withdrawn even for a moment, we start aside like a deceitful bow, or a broken bone which has been badly set. Alas, how soon are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war broken, if the Lord uphold not! Asa, who could do marvels, and who walked so well and thoroughly before his God, yet nevertheless came to do foolishly and bring upon himself lifelong chastisement.

I have thus brought before you his character, because it was most fitting to start with this; it was due to his memory, and due to ourselves; for we must remember that, whatever we shall have to say against him, he was assuredly a child of God. His heart was right; he was a sincere, genuine, gracious believer. If any object that he had grievous faults, and therefore could not be a child of God, I shall be obliged to answer that they must first of all produce a faultless child of God this side heaven before they will have sufficient ground for such an objection. I find that the holiest of men in Scripture had their imperfections, with the sole exception of our Master, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, in whom was no sin. His garments were whiter than any fuller could make them, but all His servants had their spots. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, but we, with all the brightness His grace has given us, are poor dim lamps at best. I make no exception even of those who claim perfection, for I have no more faith in their perfection

than in the Pope's infallibility. There is enough of the earthen vessel left about the best of the Lord's servants to show that they are earthen, and that the excellency of the heavenly treasure of divine grace which is put within them may be clearly seen to be of God and not of them.

Now, we shall turn to notice the GRAVE ERROR INTO WHICH ASA FELL—the foolishness for which the prophet rebuked him. He was threatened by Baasha, the king of the neighbouring territory of Israel; he was not directly assailed by war, but Baasha began to build a fortress which would command the passages between the two countries, and prevent the people of Israel from coming to settle in the land of Judah, or make their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Now, one would naturally have expected, from Asa's former conduct, that he would either have thought very little of Baasha, or else that he would have taken the case before God, as he did before in the matter of the Ethiopians. But this was a smaller trouble altogether, and somehow, I fancy, it was because it was a smaller trouble Asa thought that he could manage it very well himself by the help of an arm of flesh. In the case of the invasion by countless hordes of Ethiopians, Asa must have felt that it was of no use calling in Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, or asking any of the nations to help him, for with all their help he would not have been equal to the tremendous struggle. Therefore he was driven to God. But this being a smaller trial, he does not seem to have been so thoroughly divorced from confidence in man; but he looked about him, and thought that Ben-hadad, the heathen king of Syria, might be led to attack the king of Israel, and so draw him away from building the new fort, divide his attention, cripple his resources, and give Judah a fine opportunity of attacking him. Believers frequently behave worse in little trials than in great ones. I have known some children of God who have borne with equanimity the loss of almost everything they had, who have been disturbed and distracted and led into all sorts of doubt and mistrust by troubles that were scarcely worth the mentioning. How is it that vessels which bear a hurricane may, nevertheless, be driven upon a sandbank when there is but a capful of wind—that ships which have navigated the broad ocean have yet foundered in a narrow stream? It only proves this, that it is not the severity of the trial, it is the having or not having of God's presence that is the main thing; for in the great trial with the Ethiopians God's grace gave Asa faith, but in the little trial about Baasha, king of Israel, Asa had no faith, and began to look about him for help from men.

Observe that Asa went off to Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, who was a worshipper of a false god, with whom he ought to have had no connection or alliance whatever; and, what was worse, he induced Ben-hadad to break his league with Baasha. Here was a child of God teaching the ungodly to be untrue—a man of God becoming an instructor for Satan, teaching a heathen to be false to his promise. This was policy. This is the kind of thing which the kings of the earth practise towards one another; they are always ready to break treaties, though bound by the most solemn pledges. They make but light of covenants. The great matter with ambassador's even now-a-days is to see which can entangle the other, for, as a statesman once said, "An ambassador is a person who is sent abroad to lie for the good of his country." Oh, the tricks, plots, deceptions, equivocations, and intrigues of diplomacy! No chapter in human history shows up our fallen nature in more mournful colours. Asa, I have no doubt, thought that all was fair in war. He took the common rule, the common standard of mankind, and went upon that; whereas, as a child of God, he ought to have scorned anything that was dishonourable or untrue; and as to saying to a heathen king, "Break thy league with Baasha, and make a league with me"—why, if he had been in a right state of heart, he would sooner have lost his tongue than have uttered such disgraceful words. But, child of God as he was, when he once got off the plain simple way of believing in God, and taking his trouble to God, there was no telling what he would do. When you set the helm of your vessel towards the point to which you mean to steer, and steer right on, whatever comes in your way, then your course will be well enough if you have a motive power within independent of wind and tide; but when you take to tacking this way, then you will have in due time to tack the other way; and when policy makes you do this wrong thing, policy will lead you to do another wrong thing, and so on, to a most lamentable degree. When our walk is with the Lord, it is a safe, holy, honourable walk, but the way of the flesh is evil, and ends in shame. If you follow the way of the world, though always a crowded way, it will turn out before long to be a miserable, pettifogging, cringing, humiliating, wretched way, dishonourable to the true-born heir of heaven. Dust shall be the serpent's meat, and if we practise the crawling, twisting, slimy arts of the serpent, we shall have to eat the dust too. Should a child of God degrade himself in that fashion? If he acts as he should act, he acts like a nobleman, nay, like a prince of the blood imperial of heaven, for is he not a son of God, one of heaven's true aristocracy? But when he degenerates to acting as worldlings do, then, alas! he stains his garments in the mire. I charge you, my dear brethren and sisters, to look well to this. Perhaps I may be speaking as God's mouth to some of you who are now entering upon a testing time, a trouble in the family, a trial in business, or a difficulty in reference to a contemplated marriage, and you are asking, "What course shall I take?" You know what a man of the world would do, and it has been suggested to you that such a course is the right one for you to follow. My dear brother, remember you are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world; mind you act accordingly. If you are a worldly man, and do as worldly men do, why I must leave you, for them that are without God judgeth; but if you are a man of God, and an heir of heaven, I beseech you, do not follow custom, or do a wrong thing because others would do it, or do a little evil for the sake of a great good, but in your confidence possess your soul, and abide faithful to conscience and to the eternal law of rectitude. Let others do as they please, but as for you, set the Lord always before you, and let integrity and uprightness preserve you. Ask the Lord to help you. Is it not written that He will with the temptation make a way of escape? "Cast thy burden upon the Lord: He will sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved." Do not put forth your hand to iniquity. You may, in order to help yourself, do in five minutes what you cannot undo in fifty years; and you may bring upon yourself a lifelong series of trial by one single unbelieving action. Beware of staying yourself on Egypt and sending for help to Assyria, for these will distress you, but help you not. Cry, "Lord, increase our

faith ! " That is what you greatly need in the trying hour, lest you should, like Asa, first of all turn from confidence in God, and then, looking to an arm of flesh, should be tempted to use illegitimate means in order to induce the creature to let you rely upon it.

Asa, having advanced so far in the wrong path, did worse still, if worse could be ; for he took of the gold and silver which belonged to the house of the Lord, in order to purchase therewith the alliance of the Syrian monarch. I will say nothing about what belonged to his own house. He might do as he liked with that so long as he did not spend it upon sin, but he took of the treasure that belonged to the house of the Lord, and gave it to Ben-hadad to bribe him to break his league with Baasha, and be in league with himself. Thus God was robbed that the unbelieving king might find help in an arm of flesh. And, " Will a man rob God ? " Yet a Christian never doubts God, and looks to the creature, without robbing Him. If you rob Him of nothing else, you rob Him of His honour. Shall a father find his child trusting a stranger rather than his own sire ? Shall the husband see his wife putting confidence in his enemy ? Will not that rob him of that which is far more precious than gold ? Is it not a breach of that undivided affection, and that complete confidence, which ought to exist in the conjugal relationship ? And shall I mistrust my heavenly Father, my Almighty Helper and put confidence in a poor, broken reed ? Shall I cast my burden upon a poor fellow-sinner, and forget to rest in my Saviour ? Shall the Well-beloved of my soul be only trusted in fair weather ? and shall I have such a sorry opinion of Him that, when it comes to a little storm, I run to someone else and ask him to be my refuge ? Beloved, let it not be so with us, or we shall surely grieve the Lord and bring ourselves into much perplexity. Have we not been guilty of this enough already ? Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy ? Are we bent upon grieving His Holy Spirit ? Can we not take warning from Asa ? Need we run upon this rock when we can see the wrecks of others all around ? The Lord grant we may take heed, according to His word !

So this good man, by his want of faith, fell into many sins ; for I am compelled to add that he had to bear the blame of the consequences of his conduct, for when Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, came up and attacked Israel, he did not content himself with a battle or two, but he fell to plundering the Israelites and murdering them by wholesale, so that great sorrows were brought upon the people of Israel. And who was to blame for these sorrows but the king of Judah, who had hired the Syrians for that very purpose ? He who ought to have been a brother to the Israelites became their destroyer, and every time the cruel sword of the Syrians slew the women and children of Israel, the poor afflicted people had Asa to thank for it. The beginning of sin is like the letting out of waters ; none can foresee what devastation the floods may cause. Brethren, we can never tell what may be the consequences of one wrong action ; we may kindle a fire in the forest, merely to warm our own hands, but where the sparks may fly, and how many leagues the conflagration may spread, an angel cannot prophesy. Let us jealously keep away from every doubtful deed, lest we bring evil consequences upon others as well as ourselves. If we carry no matches, we shall cause no explosions. Oh, for a holy jealousy, a deep conscientiousness, and, above all, a solemn conscientiousness on the point of faith ! To rest in the Lord—that is our business ; to stay ourselves only upon Him—that is our sole concern. " My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him." Unbelief is in itself idolatry ; unbelief leads us to look to the creature, which is folly ; and to look to the creature is, in effect to worship the creature, to put it into God's place, and so to grieve God, and set up a rival in the holy place.

I want you to listen yet a little while longer to this story of Asa. It came to pass that Asa's hiring Ben-hadad turned out to be a fine thing for him, and, in the judgment of everybody who looked on, I dare say it was said that it was a fortunate stroke of business. According to God's mind, the king's course was evil, but it did not turn out badly for him politically. Now, many people in the world judge actions by their immediate results. If a Christian does a wrong thing, and it prospers, then at once they conclude he was justified in doing it ; but, ah ! brethren, this is a poor, blind way of judging the actions of men and the providence of God. Do you not know that there are devil's providences as well as God's providences ? I mean this. Jonah wanted to go to Tarshish to flee from God, and he went down to Joppa ; and what ? Why, he found a ship just going to Tarshish. What a providence ! What a providence ! Are you so foolish as to view it in that light ? I do not think Jonah was of that mind when he cried unto God out of the deeps. When the chief priests and Pharisees would take Jesus, they found Judas ready to betray Him. Was this also a providence ? May not Satan have some hand in the arrangement which lays a weapon so near a murderer's hand, or renders robbery and fraud so easy ? Do you think it an instance of divine goodness that the tares often grow plentifully when the wheat suffers from drought. Often have we observed people who wanted to do wrong, and things have just happened rightly to help them ; and they have therefore said, " What a providence ! " Ah, but a providence that was meant to test and try, not a providence that was intended to aid and abet in the doing of a wrong thing : a providence not to rejoice in, but concerning which we are taught to pray, " Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." A wrong is a wrong, whatever comes of it. If by uttering one falsehood you could become a rich man for ever, it would not change the nature of the falsehood. If by doing one wrong transaction you could rid yourself from all liabilities in business, and be henceforth in competent circumstances, that would not, before God, take off the edge of the evil, nay, not a single jot. God was pleased, for wise reasons, to allow the policy of his erring servant Asa to prosper, but now you will see that Asa was put in a worse place than ever because of it.

The trial of Asa's spirit, the testing of his unswerving faithfulness, whether he would walk before God or not, became more severe than before, for God sent His servant the prophet to him, and he said to him, " When you came to God, and trusted Him about the Ethiopians, did not God prosper you ? Though there were so many of them, did not the Lord give you the victory ? And now you have gone away from your faith, you have lost a great blessing by it ; for if you had trusted in God, you would have gone to war against Baasha and Ben-hadad, and you would have beaten them both, and your own kingdom would have grown strong by the putting down of these rival kingdoms. But you have lost that ; you have acted very

foolishly, and God means to chasten you for it, for from this very day you will have no more peace, but you will have war so long as you are a king." Now, observe, if king Asa had met with a trouble when he acted unjustifiably, he would have been humble, I have no doubt. Then he would have seen how wrong he was, and he would have repented; but inasmuch as what he had done did not bring disaster with it, and God did not chasten him, the king's heart grew proud, and he said, "Who is this fellow that he should come to tell his king his duty? Does he think I do not know, as well as he can tell me, what is right and what is wrong? Put the arrogant intruder in prison." When a prophet came to Rehoboam, who was a bad king, Rehoboam did not put him in prison; he respected and reverenced the word of the Lord. A bad man may do better than a good man on some one particular occasion; and so Rehoboam did better in that matter than Asa did. But Asa was now all wrong, he was in a high hectoring spirit; and this was but what we might have expected, for whenever a man will cringe before his fellow-men, you may be sure he is beginning to walk proudly before God. In his haughtiness of heart he put the prophet in prison. Instead of weeping and humbling himself for what he had done, he imprisoned his reprover; and then, being in an irritable temper and a domineering humour, he began to oppress certain of his people. I do not know who they may have been, but probably they were godly persons who sympathised with the prophet, and said, "We shall surely meet with a terrible judgment for dealing thus with God's servant." Perhaps they spoke freely about it; and so he put them in prison too. Thus God's own child had become the persecutor of God's servant, and of other faithful ones. Oh, it was very sad, very sad! Well might God then resolve that the angry king should smart for his faults very severely, that the rod should come home to his bone and his flesh, and render his remaining days exceeding sorrowful. O beloved friends, among your most earnest prayers pray God never to let your sins prosper; for if they do, they will breed a gangrene in your spirit, which will lead on to yet more dangerous diseases of soul, and will inevitably entail upon you a dreary inheritance of affliction. God does not always whip His children the next minute after they do wrong; sometimes He tells them that the rod will come, and so makes them smart in apprehension before they smart in actual experience, for they are thinking of what it will be, and that may be even a worse trial to them than the trial itself. But as surely as they are His own peculiar people, they must and shall be taught that sin is an exceeding great evil, and they shall have no joy of their dalliance with it.

Thus I have shown you who Asa was, and what faults he fell into, and how this led to other faults; and now we have to show you *what God did with him when He came to a close reckoning.* "Now," He seemed to say, "I will take you in hand Myself," and He sent him a disease in his feet—a very painful disease too. He had to suffer night and day; he was tormented with it, and found no rest. God's own hand was heavy upon him; and some of us know to our cost that disease in the feet can become a very grievous affliction, second indeed to none, unless it be a malady of the brain. Nor did the king learn that embroidered slippers give no ease to gouty feet, and that sleep flies when disease bears rule. This should have driven Asa to repentance, but, to show that afflictions of themselves will not set a man right, Asa had fallen into such an unbelieving spirit that, instead of sending to God for help, and crying for relief to Him who sent the disease, he sent for the physicians. It is not wrong to send for physicians, it is quite right; but it is very wrong to send for physicians in place of crying to God, thus putting the human agency before the divine; besides, it is very probable that these physicians were only heathenish conjurors, necromancers, and pretenders to magical arts, and could not be consulted without implicating the patient in their evil practices. Though Asa would not approve of their heathenism, yet he might think, "Well, they are famous for their cures, and who they may be is not so much my concern; I will put up with that; if they can cure me they may come." So his unbelief deprived him of the cure which God could readily enough have given him, and he had his physicians and their physic, but they were miserable comforters to him, giving him no relief, and probably causing him to suffer more than he would have suffered without them. They were physicians of no value, and their medicines were a delusion. How often it is so when we persist in looking away from God. He who has God has all, but he who has all besides God has really nothing at all.

Asa's life after that period was a life of war and pain. His evening was clouded, and his sun set in tempest. Have you never noticed the career of David? What a happy life David's was up to one point! In his youth he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, but he was very merry. What joyful psalms he used to sing when he was a humble shedherd-boy! And when afterwards he was an exile in the caves of Engedi, how gloriously he poured out notes of gratitude and joy! He was at that period, and for years after, one of the happiest of men. But that hour when he walked on the roof of his house, and saw Bathsheba, and gave way to his unholy desires, put an end to the happy days of David; and though he was a child of God, and God never cast him away, yet his heavenly Father never ceased to chasten him. From that day his life teems with trouble—troubles from his own children one after another, ingratitude from his subjects, and annoyance from his enemies. Afflictions sprang up for him as plenteously as hemlock in the furrows. He became a weeping monarch instead of a rejoicing one. The whole tenor of his life is changed; a sombre shade is cast over his entire image. You recognise him as the same man, but his voice is broken; his music is deep bass, he cannot reach the high notes of the scale. From the hour in which he sinned he began to sorrow more and more. So will it be with us if we are not watchful. We may have led very happy lives in Christ up to this moment, and we know the Lord will not cast us away, for He doth not cast away His people whom He did foreknow; but if we begin to walk distrustfully, and adopt wrong actions, and dishonour His name, He may from this moment say, "You only have I known of all the people of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities. Because I love you I will chasten you, for I chasten every son whom I love. And now, because you have thus gone astray, you shall be filled with your own backslidings. Your own vanities shall become your vexation throughout the rest of your days." Asa does not appear to have had any peace until at last he fell asleep, and then, I trust, his dying bed was as sweetly perfumed with penitence and pardon as his funeral couch was odori-

ferous with fragrant spices. The sweet spices of forgiving love and reviving faith were there; and he died rejoicing in his God, through the great sacrifice; brought back after a time of wandering, the cloudy day at last ending in a calm, bright evening. But who wishes to go so far astray, even if he be at length restored? O brethren, we do not merely want to go to heaven, but we desire to enjoy a heaven on the road to heaven. We would like not only to come up from the wilderness, but to come up from the wilderness leaning on our Beloved. We would not wish to be saved "so as by fire," but to have an abundant entrance administered to us into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Asa's character was well known among the people, and they loved and respected him. The mistake he had made grieved many of the godly, I do not doubt; but for all that, they felt that one fault must not blot out the recollection of nearly forty years of devoted service to God; so they loved him and they honoured him with a funeral worthy of a king, a funeral by which they expressed both their sorrow and their esteem. But may it never be said of you and of me, "He led a good life; he was eminent in the service of God, and did much; but there was an unhappy day in which the weakness of the flesh mastered the inner life." O dear sister, if you have brought up your children and have seen your family about you, and they have been proofs to all the world of the way in which you have walked with God, and of your care to discharge your duties, do not let your old age be given up to petulance and murmuring and complaining, so that your friends will have to say of you, "At the last she was not the happy Christian woman that she used to be." My dear brother, you have been a merchant, and you have resisted a great many temptations, and you have been noted for your honourable character, do not now in a moment of extreme trial begin to doubt your God. May the Holy Ghost preserve you from so great an ill. In the time of your need you will find the Lord to be Jehovah-jireh. He is no fair weather friend, but He is a shelter from the storm, a covert from the tempest. Stand, fast in your faith in Him. Do not question your God, and do questionable things in consequence, for, if you do, it will be said by those who come after you, and perhaps even while you live by those who love you, "He was a good man, but there was a sad period of weakness and inconsistency, and though he was deeply penitent, yet from that unhappy day he went limping to his tomb."

What a precious Christ we have, who saves such sinners as we are at all! What a dear and blessed Lord we have, who does not cast us away, notwithstanding all our slips and falls and shameful wanderings. Beloved, let us not be so base as wantonly to grieve Him:—

> "We have no fear that Thou shouldst lose
> One whom eternal love could choose;
> But we would ne'er this grace abuse
> Let us not fall. Let us not fall."

With such a warning as this of Asa before us now, do not let us relax our watchfulness and insensibly turn aside. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." That is your model; that is the promise which Scripture sets before you. Plead it, and try to realise it. Let us go from strength to strength. Let us ask to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If we have wanted props hitherto—outward and visible props—and have not been able altogether to rely upon God, may the Lord help us to grow stronger, so that we may have done with Ready-to-Halt's crutches. May we walk uprightly before the Lord, because we rely upon Him, trusting ever in His sure faithfulness, and in the power which guarantees that His promise shall be fulfilled.

I do not know to whom I may be speaking a needful word, except that I know it is needful for myself. Peradventure there are some here to whom it may be just the word that is wanted. Dear brother, the life of faith, is a blessed one; a believer's course is a tried one, it is a warfare; but, for all that, all the sorrows of faith put together do not equal in bitterness one drop of the sorrow of sin, or one grain of the misery of unbelief. The king's highway may be rough, but By-path Meadow in the long run is the rougher way of the two. It looks very pleasant to walk on the green turf, but, remember, it is only in appearance that By-path Meadow is smooth. The ways of Christ are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace, as compared with any other paths in the world; and if they were not—if to serve the Lord led us only into sorrow and trouble—I trust the loyal hearts here, the virgin souls whom Christ has chosen, would resolve through floods or flames, if Jesus led the way, to follow still. O beloved, may ye cleave to the Lord by a simple faith! May ye cleave to Him when the many turn aside! May ye witness that He has the living Word, and none upon earth beside! Because your hearts are frail and feeble, ask Him now to cast the bands of His love about you, and the cords of a man, to bind you fast to His altar, that you may not go away from it; for except He hold you fast, ye must, ye will decline, and prove apostates after all. But He will hold you; He will keep the feet of His saints. Only trust not in yourselves. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." If any man say, "I stand," let him take heed lest he fall. Beware of that self-confidence, and spiritual boasting, which is becoming common among Christians, aye, and among some of the better sort, who can even brag of their attainments; when, if they did but know themselves, they would confess that they are nothing better, even at the best, than poor, naked, miserable sinners, and have need to look to Jesus, for they are nothing but empty boasters apart from Him, since only in Christ are we anything. "When I am weak, then am I strong," but at no other time. When I think I have whereof to glory, then am I indeed despicable; I know not myself, and am become purblind, so as only to see what my own pride makes me think I see. May the Holy Ghost keep us humble—keep us at the cross-foot—keep us flat on the promise, resting on the eternal rock, and crying, "Nothing am I, Lord—nothing; but Thou art all in all. I am all emptiness: come and fill me. I am all nakedness: come and clothe me. I am all weakness: come and glorify Thy power, by making use of me!"

God bless you, dear friends, and if there be any among you who have not a God to trust in, or a Saviour to love, may you seek Jesus now! If you seek Him He will be found of you; for whosoever believeth in Him is saved, whosoever trusts Christ is saved. Pardon and salvation belong to every soul that hangs its hope upon the Cross. May God bless you richly, for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE SINGING ARMY

"And Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord."—2 Chronicles xx. 4.

JERUSALEM was startled by sudden news. There had for a great while been quiet preparations made in the distant countries beyond Jordan. Upon its mountains Edom had been getting ready: the workshops of Petra had been ringing with the hammer; the enemies of Israel had been beating their pruning hooks into spears and swords, and they were now coming down in hordes. There were three great nations, and these were assisted by the odds and ends of all the nations round about, so that a great company eager for plunder was drawn up in battle. They had heard about the riches of the temple at Jerusalem; they knew that the people of Judea had for years been flourishing, and they were now coming to kill and to destroy and to sack and to plunder. They were like the grasshoppers or the locusts for multitude. What were the people of God to do? How were these poor Judeans to defend themselves? Their immediate resort was to their God. They do not appear to have looked up their armour and their swords with any particular anxiety. The fact was, the case was so altogether hopeless as far as they were concerned, that it was no use looking to anything beneath the skies, and as they were driven from all manifest earthly resorts they were compelled to lift up their eyes to God; and their godly king Jehoshaphat aided them in so doing. A general fast was proclaimed, and the preparation to meet the hosts of Moab, Ammon and Edom was prayer. No doubt if the Ammonites had heard of it they would have laughed, Edom would have scoffed at it, and Moab would have cursed those that made supplication. "What! do they suppose that their prayers can defeat us?" would have been the sneer of their adversaries. Yet this was Israel's artillery: this was their eighty-one ton gun: when it was ready it would throw one bolt, and only one, and that would crush three nations at once. God's people resorted only to the arm invisible—the arm omnipotent—and they did well and wisely.

Now, if the Lord shall teach us to imitate them, and by His grace enable us in doing it, we shall have learnt a great lesson. The preacher needs to learn it as much as anybody, and he prays that each one of you may be also scholars in the school of faith, and become very proficient in the divine art of prayer and praise.

I. First, then, HOW THEY ASKED HELP? They asked their help, as you know, by a general fast and prayer, but I mean, what was the style of that prayer in which they approached the Lord?

And the reply is, first, *they asked help, expressing their confidence,* "O Lord God of our fathers, art not Thou God in heaven? and rulest not Thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in Thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?" If we begin by doubting, our prayer will limp. Faith is the tendon of Achilles, and if that be cut it is not possible for us to wrestle with God, but as long as we have that strong sinew, that mighty tendon unhurt, we can prevail with God in prayer. It is a rule of the kingdom, though God often goes beyond it, "According to thy faith be it done unto thee." I have known Him give us a hundred times as much as our faith, but, brethren, I have never known Him give us less. That could not possibly be. This is His minimum rule, I may say, "According to thy faith be it unto thee." When, therefore, in time of trouble you ask help of God, ask it believing that He is able to give it; ask it expecting that He will bestow it. Do not grieve the Spirit of God by unworthy doubts and mistrusts; these things will be like fiery arrows in your own soul and drink up the very life of your strength. However hard the struggle and difficult the trial, if thou seekest the Lord, seek Him in the confidence He deserves.

Then *they sought God, pleading His past acts.* This is a fashion of prayer which has been very common among the saints, and it has proved to be very potent. "Art not Thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever?" Remember what God has done for you, and then say, as a sweet refrain, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." When you are praying, recollect what He was yesterday if you cannot see that He is comfortable towards you to-day. If there be no present manifestations of divine favour, recall the former days—the days of old—the years of the right hand of the Most High. He has been gracious unto you; can you tell how gracious? He has abounded towards you in loving-kindness, and tenderness, and faithfulness; He has never been a wilderness or a land of drought unto you. Well, then, if in six troubles He has delivered thee, wilt thou not trust Him for seven? If you get to sixty troubles, cannot you trust Him for sixty-one? You have been carried, some of you, I see, till grey hairs are on your head. How long do you expect to live? Do you think you have got an odd ten years left? Well, do you think that the Lord who has blest you seventy years will not keep you the other ten. We say that we ought always to trust a man until he deceives us. We reckon a man honest, till we find him otherwise. Let it be so with God, I beseech you. Since we have found Him good, faithful, true, kind, tender, let us not think hardly of Him now that we have come into straits, but let us come to Him thus, and say, "Art not Thou our God? Didst not Thou bring us up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay? Didst Thou not bring us up out of the Egypt of our sin? Surely Thou hast not brought us into the wilderness to destroy us? Wilt Thou leave us now? True, we are unworthy, but so we always were, and if Thou didst want a reason for leaving us Thou hast had ten thousand reasons long ago. Lord, do not be wroth very sore with Thy servants, and cast us not away." That is the style of pleading which prevails. Imitate these men of old, who asked help by recalling the past.

Proceeding a little farther in their prayer, we see that *they pleaded the promise of God,* which promise was made at the time when Solomon dedicated the temple. "That if, when evil cometh upon us, we

cry unto Thee in our affliction, then Thou, wilt hear and help." He that getteth the promise of God and graspeth God with the promise—he does, and must prevail. I have known sometimes a man unable to grasp anything; the object has slipped away, his hand has been slippery too, and I have seen him as he has taken up some sand in his hand, and then he has been able to get a grip. I like to plunge my hand into the promises, and then I find myself able to grasp with a grip of determination the mighty faithfulness of God. An omnipotent plea with God is: "Do as Thou hast said." You know how a man nails you when he brings your very words before you. "There," says he, "that is what you said you would do. Of your own free will you pledged yourself to do this." Why then you cannot get away from it, for it is the way with the saints that if they swear to their own hurt they change not; they must be true to the words they speak even if it be to their own damage. Of the saints' Master it is always true. "Hath He said and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?" Here then is a mighty instrument to be used in prayer, "Lord, Thou hast said this or that, Thou hast said it, now do as Thou hast said. Thou hast said, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.' Thou hast said, 'He shall deliver thee in six troubles, and in seven there shall no evil touch thee.' Thou hast said, 'Surely in blessing I will bless thee.' Thou hast said, 'The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.' Thou hast said, 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be.' Lord, there is Thy promise for it." With such a plea you must prevail with a faithful God.

Again, as these people asked for help *they confessed their own unhappy condition.* There is a great power in that. One of the strongest pleas with generosity is the urgency of poverty, and one of the most prevailing arguments to be used in prayer with God is a truthful statement of our condition—a confession of our sad estate. So they said to the Lord these words, "O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee." They had no might, and they had no plan. "We have no might, neither know we what to do." Sometimes even if you cannot do the thing, it is a little comfort to know how it might be done if you had the power, but these perplexed people neither could do it, nor knew how to do it. They were nonplussed. A little nation like Judah, surrounded by these powerful enemies, truly had no might. Their weakness and ignorance were great pleas: the logic was divine. "Neither know we what to do: therefore our eyes are unto Thee." It was as if they had said, "If we could do it ourselves, well, Thou mightest very well say, 'Go and do it. What did I give you the strength for, but that you could use the strength in doing it?' But when we have got no strength, neither know we what to do, we come and just lay the case down at Thy feet and say, 'There it is; our eyes are upon Thee.'" Perhaps you think that is not praying. I tell you it is the most powerful form of prayer, just to set your case before God, just to lay bare all your sorrow and all your needs, and then say, "Lord, there it is." You know a man must not beg in the streets of London; the police will not have it, and I daresay that is a very wise regulation. But what does the needy man do? Have not you seen him? He is dressed like a countryman, and looks half-starved, and his knees can be seen through an old pair of corduroys as he stoops. He does not beg, not he: he only sits down at the corner of the road. He knows quite well that the very sight of his condition is enough. There are one or two persons about the streets of London whose faces are a fortune to them; pale, and thin, and woebegone, they appeal more eloquently than words. I was going to say that there is a man who comes to the Tabernacle, who is just of the same sort. I could point him out, but I do not see him now; but he does come here, and the very way in which he shivers, the remarkable manner in which he looks ill, though he is not ill, takes in people who are continually being duped by his appearance. All the world knows that it is the look of the thing, the very appearance and show of sorrow, that prevails with people more than any words that are used. Now, when you cannot pray in words, go and lay bare your sorrow before God; just go and show your soul. Tell God what it is that burdens and distresses you, and you will prevail with the bounteous heart of our God, who is not moved by eloquence of words, and oratory of tongue, but is swift to answer the true oratory, the true eloquence, of real distress, and who is as wise to detect sham misery as to succour real sorrow.

I wonder whether I recall to some of you any particular times of trial. To myself I do. If I do not to you, at any rate, there is one common affliction which has overwhelmed us all, that is the great affliction of sin. When sin, with its multitudinous host of offences, becomes manifest to us under conviction, and we do not know how to meet one single sin or to answer one of a thousand of the charges that might be brought against us; when we feel that we have no might whatever, and perhaps we realise that through sin we have brought ourselves into such peculiar circumstances that we do not know how to get out of it, though we feel that we must get out somehow: when we go to the right that seems blocked up, and the left seems equally closed to us; to go back we dare not: to go forward we cannot—then how wonderfully God clears the way! In what a marvellous manner we find our enemies all dead that we thought were going to kill us! and as for those that were going to rob us, we are enriched by them. Instead of taking us for a spoil, there they fall and their spoil becomes our right and we take it home with us rejoicing. Oh, what wonders God can do! He loves us to state the difficulty we are in, on purpose that when He gets us out of it we may remember that we were in such a condition. It was a real disaster and a time of real trial, and yet the Lord redeemed us from it.

What did they do after asking help, after pleading the promise and confessing their condition? Why, *they expressed their confidence in God.* They said, "Our eyes are upon Thee." What did they mean by that? They meant, "Lord, if help does come, it must come from Thee. We are looking to Thee for it. It cannot come from anywhere else, so we look to Thee. But we believe it will come, men will not look for that which they know will not come. We feel sure it will come, but we do not know how, so we are looking; we do not know when, but we are looking. We do not know what Thou wouldest have us to do, but, as the servant looks to her mistress, so are we looking to Thee, Lord. Lord, we are

looking." It is a grand posture that. Do you not know that is the way you are saved—by looking unto Jesus? And that is the way you have got to be saved, all the way between here and heaven. Whatever trouble comes, looking is to save you. Looking, often waiting, looking like the weary watcher from the tower when he wants to see the grey tints of the coming morning, when the night is long and he is weary, but still looking. "Our eyes are upon Thee." They are full of tears, but still they are upon Thee; they are getting hazy, too, with sleep, but still they are upon Thee—such eyes as we have got. We do look to Thee. I have sometimes blessed the Lord that He has not said, "See Jesus—see Me and be saved." What He has said is, "Look." Sometimes if you cannot see you have done your part if you have looked—looked into the darkness. Lord, that cross of Thine, it would give me such joy if I could see it, I cannot quite see it, it looms very indistinctly on my gaze, but I do look. It is looking, you know, that saves, for as we look the eyes get stronger, and we are enlightened. And so in this case they looked, and they found deliverance. God help us, brothers and sisters, to do the same.

That is how they asked help.

II. Now, secondly, HOW THEY RECEIVED HELP.

Their help came to them, first, by a message from God. *They received a fresh assurance of God's goodness.* A new prophet was raised up, and he spoke with new words. "Be not afraid, nor dismayed," he said, "by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's." Now, in our case, we shall not have a new promise, that would not be possible.

> "What more can He say than to you He hath said,
> You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled."

But you will have that promise sweetly laid home to your soul, and the Spirit of God will bear witness with that promise, and so strengthen and comfort you, that you will get deliverance even before deliverance comes, because it often happens that to be saved from the fear of the trouble is the main business. To be quieted, and calmed, and assured, is really to be saved from the sting of trial; the trial itself is nothing if it does not bring a sting to your soul. If your heart is not troubled, then there is not much trouble in anything else. All the poverty and all the pain in the world would prevail nothing if the evil of it did not enter into the soul and vex it. So, in this emergency, God began to answer His people by quieting them. "Be not afraid nor dismayed, for the battle is not yours but God's: the Lord will be with you."

As that gracious promise calmed their fears so that they were able without fear to face the impending attack, then *they received distinct direction what to do on the morrow,* which was to be the day of the assault: that direction was, "Go out to meet the foe." How often has God given His people deliverance by quieting them as to their course of action. Already the step they have taken has delivered them before they know it. The Israelites, by then marching out to meet the foe, and marching out with songs and hosannas, as we shall see, were doing the best possible thing to rout their foes. As we have already said, there is no doubt that their enemies were unable to comprehend such a defence as this: they must have supposed that there was some treachery or ambush intended, and so they began to slay each other, and Israel had nothing to do but to keep on singing.

Then came the real providence: *they received actual deliverance.* When the people of Judah came to their foes they found there were no foes. There they lay all stark and dead; none of the men of might could raise their hands against those whom God had favoured. After this fashion will God deliver you, brethren; in answer to prayer He will be your defence. Therefore, sing unto His name. Did not He deliver you thus when you went out to meet the great army of your sins? You saw that Christ had put them away, and your heart danced within you as you said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, for He has slain our sins and they can curse us no more." So has it been with a great many troubles that have appeared to you to be overwhelming: when you have come to them, lo, they have disappeared. They have been cleared out of your way as you have advanced, and you have had nothing to do but to sing and praise the name of the Lord.

III. And now, thirdly, and this is the main point, let us note HOW THEY ACTED AFTER THEY HAD PRAYED AND HEARD GOD'S VOICE. They asked for help, and they had it: how did they then behave?

Well, first, as soon as ever they had an assurance that God would deliver them, *they worshipped.* That is one of the intentions of trial—to revive in us the spirit of devotion and communion with God. And mercy, when it comes on the back of a great trouble, leads us sweetly to prayer. I warrant you there had not been such a piece of worship in all Jerusalem as there was that day, when, after that young son of the Levites had stood and delivered the word of the Lord, the king bowed his head and all the people bowed their heads and did homage to the God of Israel. You could have heard the sound even of the wind among the trees at the time, for they were as hushed and as quiet as you were just now. Oh, when you know the Lord means to deliver you, bow your head and just give Him the quiet, deep, solemn worship of your spirit. I do not suppose we shall ever fall into Quakers' worship in our public assemblies, though an occasional experience of it would do you a world of good: to sit still before the Lord, and to adore, and to adore, and to adore again and again, and still again, braces the spirit and clears the soul for the understanding of eternal realities. They worshipped, but why did they do it? They were not delivered. No, but they were sure they were going to be delivered. Their enemies were not dead. No, they were all alive, but they were sure they would be dead, so they had worship, and their devotion rose from trustful and grateful hearts. May we get into a worshipping frame of mind, and be kept to it. Then God will appear for our help.

As soon as ever the worship had closed, or rather ere it had quite closed, *they began to praise.* As we read just now, up went the loud voices of the trained singers under the leadership of the chief musician, and they praised the name of the Lord. They sang, as we do,—

> "For His mercies shall endure,
> Ever faithful, ever sure."

That is the way you should deal with God. Before the deliverance comes, praise Him. Praise Him for what is coming; adore Him for what He is going to do. No song is so sweet, methinks, in the ear of God as the song of a man who blesses Him for

"grace he has not tasted yet"—for what he has not got, but what he is sure will come. The praise of gratitude for the past is sweet, but that praise is sweeter which adores God for the future in full confidence that it shall be well. Therefore, take down your harps from the willows, O ye people, and praise ye the name of the Lord, though still the fig tree does not blossom and still the cattle die in the stall, and still the sheep perish from the folds; though there should be to you no income to meet your want, and you should be brought almost to necessity's door, still bless the Lord whose mighty providence cannot fail, and shall not fail, so long as there is one of His children to be provided for. Your song while you are still in distress will be sweet music to the ear of God.

After they had worshipped and sung, the next thing these people did was, to act: *they went forth marching.* If there were unbelievers in Jerusalem, I know what they said. They stood at the gates and they said, "Well, this is foolishness. These Moabites and Ammonites are come to kill you, and they will do it, but you might as well wait till they get at you. You are just going to deliver yourselves up." That would be the idea of unbelief, and that is also what it sometimes seems to our little faith when we go and commit ourselves to God. "What! are you going on your knees to confess your guilt before God and own that you deserve to be lost? Are you going to withdraw every excuse and apology, every trust of your own, and give yourself up, as it were, to destruction?" Yes, that is exactly what to do, and it is the highest wisdom to do it; we are going out of the city marching away according to orders, and if, as you say, we are to give ourselves up, so we will. Perhaps, in your case, you are going to do an action of which everybody else says, "Well, now, that will be very foolish. You should be crafty. You should show a little cunning." "No," say you, "I cannot do other than I am bidden, I must do the right." Probably that will turn out to be the very best thing in the world to have done. The nearest way between any two points is by a straight line, the straight way will always be better than the crooked way. In the long run it is always so. Go right out, then, in the name of God: meet your difficulties calmly and fairly. Do not have any plans or tricks, but just commit yourselves unto God; that is the way by which you may in confidence expect to find deliverance. These people of old went out of the city.

But now, notice again, that as they went out, *they went out singing.* They sang before they left the city, and sang as they left the city, and when the adversary came in sight they began to sing again. The trumpet sounded and the harps rang out their notes, and the minstrels again shouted for joy, and this was the song,—

> "For His mercies shall endure,
> Ever faithful, ever sure."

It must have had a grand significance when they sang that passage, "To Him which smote great kings: for His mercy endureth for ever: and slew famous kings: for His mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of Amorites: for His mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan: for His mercy endureth for ever." Why, every singer as he sang those lines, which look to us like a mere repetition, must have felt how applicable they were to their present condition when there was a Moabite and an Edonite and an Ammonite to be overthrown in the name of the mighty God whose mercy endureth for ever. So they kept on singing.

You will observe that, while they were singing, God had wrought the great deliverance for them. When the singing ceased, *they prepared to gather up the spoil.* What a different employment from what they expected? You can see them stripping the bodies, taking off the helmet of gold and the greaves of brass; the jewels from the ears and from about the necks of the princes; spoiling the dead of their Babylonish garments and their wedges of gold; heaping up the tents—the rich tents of the eastern nations—till they said one to another, "We know not what to do." But the difficulty was different from what might have befallen them at the first. Then they did not know what to do because of their weakness in the presence of their foes, but now the difficulty was because of the greatness of the spoil. "We cannot carry it home," they would say to each other, "there is too much of it. It will take us days and days to stock away this wondrous booty." Now, child of God, it shall be so with you also. I do not know how, but if you can only trust God and praise Him and go straight ahead, you shall see such wondrous things that you shall be utterly astonished.

Then what will you do? Why, you will at once again begin praising the Lord, for so they did. *They went back singing.* "They came back to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord." When God has done great things for you, and brought you through your present difficulty, you must be sure to repay Him in the courts of His house with your loudest music and your most exultant notes, blessing again and again the name of the Lord.

After that *they had rest.* In the narrative it is added, "So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; for his God gave him rest round about." His enemies were afraid to come and touch him any more. After a very sharp storm it generally happens that there is long rest. So shall it be with all the Lord's people. You will get through this trouble, brother, and afterwards it will be smooth sailing for a very long time. I have known a child of God have a very cyclone; it has seemed as if he must be utterly destroyed, but after it was over there has not been a ripple on the calm of his life. People have envied him and wondered at his quietness; he had had all his storms at once, and when they were over he had come into smooth water that seemed never ruffled. Perhaps you will have the same experience: only ask the great Pilot of the Galilean lake to steer you safely through your tempest, and then, when the storm shall cease at His bidding, you shall be glad because you be quiet; so will He bring you to your desired haven.

I have been desirous to speak these comfortable words to God's children, for well I know how they are tried, and I pray the Lord, the Comforter, to apply the word to their troubled hearts. But I never can finish my discourse without having the very sad thought that there are always in our congregation some to whom these comfortable things do not belong. They are not believers. They have never trusted in Christ. If this be so with you—if this be so—ah, friend, you have to fight your own battles: you have to bear your own trials, you have to carry your own burdens, and when you come at the last

great day before the judgment seat you will have to answer for your own sins, and to bear your own punishment. God have mercy upon you, and deliver you from such a condition as this. It is a bad condition to live in; it is a terrible condition to die in. May you be brought to receive Christ for your substitute and your surety, and glorify His name for ever and ever. Amen.

"GOODNESS, AS A MORNING CLOUD"

"And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest."—2 Chronicles xxiv. 2.
"Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass."—2 Chronicles xxiv. 17, 18.

THERE is a book called *The Museum of Natural History*, and the most singular animal in that museum is man. It would be far more easy to understand any other creature than to understand a human being. He is worthy of very great study; and the more he is studied, the more will he surprise you. There are certain characters that are great curiosities. Alas, there are also other characters that are great monstrosities! You can never tell, from what a man is, what he will be. The case before us is a very extraordinary one, because here is a man with every possible advantage, who through a number of years exhibited the brightest form of character; and yet in the end he was not thought worthy to be laid in the sepulchres of his fathers with others of the kings of Judah; neither was he worthy of any royal interment, for the latter part of his life blackened and defiled the whole of his career, and he who began his reign like the dawning of the day ended it like the middle of the night.

I wonder whether there are any persons here who will turn out to be very sinful and wicked before life is over; I mean, those who have begun well, who are now the hope and joy of those who know them, but who will end badly, in dishonour to themselves, and grief to their households? If there be such here, probably you can find them out by this one test. Those who say, "It is impossible that it should be so with us," are probably the persons; while those who are afraid lest it should be so, and ask for grace that it may not be so, are probably those who will be preserved, and whose path will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

Dear friends, what need there is to go below the surface in the examination of moral and spiritual character! I shall have to prove this to you to-night, for in appearance Joash was all that we could wish; yet, had he really been what he seemed to be, he would have continued so. If there had been that work of grace within his soul which there appeared to be in his life, he would not have turned aside as he did; for where a work of grace is real and true, it is known by its abiding influence throughout the whole of life. Where godly principles have been imparted, and a divine life has been infused, these things are not taken from a man. "They went out from us, but they were not of us"; said the apostle John, "for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." So was it with Joash. He turned aside from God because he had never truly known the Lord at all, and his last end was worse than the first because his beginning was really not such as it had seemed to be.

I trust that every person here desires to have genuine religion, and not to have the sham. There is a prayer that I recommend to everyone as I desire to use it myself, "Lord, let me know the very worst of my case! Do not suffer me either to deceive myself, or to be deceived by others. If I am not Thine, let me know that I am not Thine. If my repentance be but a seeming repentance, and my faith but the mere shadow of faith, and not the substance of it, Lord, by Thy good Spirit convince me of my dangerous delusion, and let me know just where I am, and what I am!" I am sure many of you desire to pray like that; and perhaps, while I am speaking, that petition may be answered, especially in the case of some of our young friends.

I was very happy, last Sunday night, in preaching as I believe so as to suit the case of one young man of whom I knew but very little; yet it seems that I described him so accurately that he felt that I was speaking specially to him. At the same time, there was another young man, sitting in quite another part of the Tabernacle, who came in on Thursday to tell me how pointedly and distinctly I had described him. On Saturday, I received a letter from the centre of England, from a father who sent me his son's letter saying that he was here, and that I had looked at him, and distinctly and accurately described him. It is not always that we can hit three birds with one shot; but I have been praying that I may have still better success to-night, and that many may feel, "The preacher is speaking of me, he is describing my character." God grant that it may be so!

My first head will be taken from the first verse of our text: "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest." This is my first division: *It is a great blessing when young people yield to godly influences.* The second division will be,—*But this is not all that is needed:* and the third will be,—*This yielding spirit may prove a source of mischief.* Instead of being a blessing, it will be a curse, if it has not something more added to it.

I. First, then, IT IS A GREAT BLESSING WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE YIELD TO GODLY INFLUENCES.

Although Joash came from a bad family, yet he had a good aunt, who was married to the high priest, and the aunt and the uncle took care of young Joash. When he was but an infant, they stole him away, so that Athaliah might not kill him with the rest of the seed royal; and thus Joash had this remarkable privilege that *for six years he lived in the temple:* "He was with them hid in the house of God six years." That is a splendid beginning for any life, to be hid in the house of God six years. I do not think we ever value enough those first six years of a child's life; impressions then made have a remarkable

influence over the rest of life. Joash was where God's praise was sung from day to day, and where holy prayer was perpetually offered. He was seldom beyond the fragrance of the perfumed incense, or away from the sight of the white-robed priests. He heard nothing that could defile him, but everything that could instruct and purify him. He was hidden in the house of the Lord so as not even to go out of it, concealed with godly people for the first six years of his life. Perhaps, nay, I am sure, some of you present had similar felicity. The first thing that you can remember is your mother taking you to a place of worship; you can never forget the time when father also led you there, and did not seem to be happy unless his boy was trotting by his side when he went to hear the gospel. Amongst our earliest recollections are the memories of holy hymns, and the sayings of gracious people, in whom, as children, we took an interest when they came to our father's house. It is a grand thing that the first days of one's life should bear the impress of the divine finger. It is well when the vessel begins to revolve upon the wheel, and the clay is soft and plastic, that the first fingers that should touch and shape it should be the fingers of God's servants. God grant that they may be as the very finger of God upon our souls! Thus Joash began his career by being hid in the house of the Lord six years.

After he was seven years of age, *he was started on his life's business in a very admirable way.* He was to be the king, but there had to be great care taken to sweep away the usurper from the throne, and to put the little king upon it, and Jehoiada managed the whole affair with great skill. He also drew up a covenant for the king to sign, a covenant with God that he would be obedient to Jehovah as the supreme King, and a covenant with the people that he would rule according to equity and right, and not tyranize over them. It was all done so well that no objection was ever taken to it; and Joash reigned with great prosperity and happiness over a people who were blessed by his rule, Jehoiada all the while being his faithful prime minister and guide. It is a grand thing to be started in life aright; it is half the battle, you know, to begin well. Some young men, and some young women, too, are launched in life wrongly; it seems almost a matter of course that they should be too strongly tempted, and in all probability yield to the temptation. But many of you were not started so; you began with a father's blessing, and with a mother's prayers. You recollect your first going out into life; some of us remember the ride on the coach when, early in the morning, we had to leave our father's house for the first time. Perhaps it was a cold and bitter frosty morning when we started in those old days to go across the country; we recollect it well, and how God cared for us, and blessed us; and we desire to praise Him that He has preserved us even unto this day.

I am showing you the bright side of Joash's career first. After the six years in the house of God, he had a grand start in life with everything to his advantage. Alas, alas, alas, that, with such a bright beginning, he should come to such a sad end!

Notice also that, being thus well started, "*Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.*" While that good man lived, the king was under his influence; he consulted him in every matter of importance, he seems even to have been guided by him to some extent in the matter of his marriage. He was plastic under his uncle's hand, and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; mark you, not only that which was right in the sight of good people, but that which was right in the sight of the Lord. His life seems to have been at least outwardly obedient to the law of Jehovah, and he yielded himself up, apparently at any rate, to be a loyal servant of the great King; and that he did, not for a short time only, but all the days in which Jehoiada lived. Well, now, have we not known men and women, whose lives have been under the benign influence of some kind elderly person, uncle or aunt, father or mother, and they have done what was right year after year, as long as their godly relatives lived? They have been diligent in going up to God's house, apparently devout in Bible-reading and prayer, willing to assist in holy work in the Sabbath-school and all sorts of service for the Lord, and leading outwardly most useful, admirable lives all the time that these higher influences were over them, even as "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest."

Yes, and more than this, *he was zealous for the externals of religion:* "It came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord." He actually chided Jehoiada, his uncle, because of the slowness of the Levites: "The king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection?" Yes, and there are some whose hearts are not right towards God who nevertheless are very zealous about the externals of divine worship. It is a much easier thing to build a temple for God than it is to be a temple for God; and it is a much more common thing for persons to show zeal in repairing temples than in reforming their own manners. So this young man, you see, went even beyond his uncle in intense zeal for the cause of God, just as there are many now who, trained up in the ways of the Lord, are indefatigable in rendering some external service to the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. They would give to the building of a church; they would work hard to promote the paying for it, and so forth; but, alas, you may give, and you may work, and you may attend to all the externals of religion, and yet have no part nor lot in the matter! Mr. Bunyan says that, when he was an ungodly man, he yet had such a reverence for the outwards of religion that he would fain have kissed the ground that the clergyman walked upon, and every nail in the door of the church seemed holy to him. That is all very fine; but unless there is a great more than that in us, we shall fall far short of the requirements of God.

All this while, *Joash influenced other people for good.* As king, he kept back the nation from the worship of idols; as king, he threw the cloak of his patronage over those who worshipped Jehovah; and things seemed to go well for years, "all the days of Jehoiada the priest." As long as Jehoiada lived, Joash seemed to be all that he should be.

II. Now I am going to turn, for a few minutes, to the second point, to show you that, good as this is, IT IS NOT ALL THAT IS NEEDED.

For, mark you, *this is not yielding the heart to God.* "My son, give Me thine heart," says God. All that Joash had done was to give his heart to Jehoiada, not to Jehovah. It is very easy to be outwardly religious by giving your heart to your mother, or your father, or your aunt, or your uncle, or some

good person who helps you to do what is right. You are doing all this out of love to them, which is at best but a very secondary motive. God says, "My son, give *Me* thine heart." If your religion is taken up to please any creature, it is not the religion which pleases the Creator. Your homage is due, not to any one here below, but to Him who sitteth in the heavens, whose kingdom ruleth over all. Dear Christian friends, as you think yourselves to be because of the Christianity of your parents, I do beg you to remember that true religion must be a matter of your own heart, and of your own soul. If you merely attend to it out of respect to the dearest and most precious person under heaven, you do not reach the standard that the Lord has set up.

Note next, that *this yielding to godly influences may exist without any personal, vital godliness whatever.* You may meet with God's people, and yet not be one of God's people. You may give attention to God's servant, and yet not be yourself God's servant. A young man may yield to his mother's advice, and yet never be really repentant on account of sin. He may listen to his father's word, and pay respect to the externals of his father's religion, but yet never have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. You must yourselves repent, and yourselves believe in Christ, or else all the rest will aggravate your sin by increasing your responsibility, but it will not go even a hair's breadth towards your salvation. I would have every person here, whether young or old, examine himself to see whether his religion is vital to his own soul. Have you been born again? I enquire not now about your mother, or father, or friends. Have *you* been born again? Are you now condemned under sin, or are you justified by faith in Jesus Christ? There can be no proxies, and no sponsors here; every man must give account for himself to God; and each man, each woman, must come to the Saviour personally, and accept Him, and be saved by Him, or else eternal ruin is certain.

I do believe also, dear friends, that a character like that of Joash, a yielding character, *an externally pious character may even prevent men from being saved at all.* I mean, you may take it for granted that you are saved; but you must not take anything for granted between God and your soul. I charge you to make sure work here; take your wealth for granted if you like; take the title-deeds of your estate for granted if you please; but between God and your soul let everything be settled, and straight, and clear, and sure, and have no mistakes about this matter. It is so easy to have been under religious influence from our youth up, and then to go on, year after year, never having raised the question whether we are Christians or not, saying to ourselves, "Of course it is all right." You will be much nearer the truth if you say, "Of course it is all wrong." You will be much more likely to come to an honest conclusion if you rather suspect yourself too much than believe in yourself too much; I am sure that, in speaking thus, I am giving you sound teaching.

After all to be under godly influences year after year, without any great trial or temptation, may leave *the personal character altogether undeveloped.* Some put children under restraint continually, never suffering them to have any sort of temptation. It is so with children sometimes in large institutions; they have not any money, and they cannot steal any, because there is nobody else who has any; they are kept out of the world altogether, they live only amongst their own company, and there is very much of prayer and everything that is good; and often, when they go out into the world, those who have trained them are altogether disappointed with them; yet they need not very much wonder. If a person on dry land thinks he can swim, it is not certain that he will swim when he gets into the sea. We must have some kind of test, or else we cannot be sure of the character; we cannot know whether a child is honest or not if it never has any chance to take that which is not its own. You cannot be sure about principle being in any young man if he has been kept under a glass case, and if his principles have never been tried. That was the condition of Joash; the real character of the man had never come out at all, because Jehoiada, as it were, covered him. He was guided and influenced by the high priest; but his own disposition only wanted an opportunity of developing itself. I have heard of an officer in India, who had brought up a young leopard. It was completely tamed, apparently it was as tame as a cat, and the officer had no fear of his leopard. It went up and down the stairs, and entered into every room of his house; he never suspected for a single moment that it would be guilty of bloodshedding; but, while he was asleep, one afternoon, in his chair, the leopard licked his hand in all tenderness as a cat might have done; but after licking for a while, it licked too hard, and a little blood began to flow. It no sooner tasted blood than the old leopard spirit was up, and his master was his master no more. So does it happen to many that, by being shut in, and tamed, as it were, but not changed, subdued but not renewed, kept in check but not converted, there has come a time afterwards when the taste of blood has called out the old nature, and away the man has gone. You would never have thought that he could act as he did; but he did so because he had not a new nature. It was human nature held in check for a while, not the Spirit of God creating a new life, and infusing a new character into the soul.

Do you see where I am coming to, dear friends? I am speaking to those of you who have not passed from death unto life, to you who have never been renewed in the spirit of your mind. I do pray you not to imagine that natural religion is spiritual religion. Do not mistake the lessons learnt at your mother's knee for the teachings of the Holy Ghost, do not confuse *a* change with *the* change; and do not think that anything that can come to you by your first birth can serve your turn without a second birth. "*Ye must be born again*," or else, though you spent the first six years of your life in the house of God, and though you were started under the most hallowed influences, you only want an opportunity, a temptation, a peculiar stress laid upon you, and you will go off whither the old nature carries you, and you will find out for yourself and to the horror of others that all your early training had effected nothing because it stopped short of the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

III. Now, in the third place, I wish to show you that THIS YIELDING CHARACTER MAY EVEN PROVE A SOURCE OF MISCHIEF.

We like young people to be obedient, we are very glad to have to do with those plastic characters that are readily shaped; but, at the same time, we ought never to be too sure about them. A person with grit in his character, if really affected by the grace

of God, may turn out a far better man than your too plastic, pliable character. Oh, dear, how many we know who are very good, but there is nothing in them at all! We have known some others who were dreadfully hard to manage, and to get at; but when at last a change has been wrought by divine grace, that very obstinacy and wilfulness of theirs, when sanctified, has given a strength to their character, and instead of being a drawback, it has been a help.

This young Joash was exceedingly supple in the hand of Jehoiada, but alas! Jehoiada was dead. *Other counsellors came and flattered him:* "Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king." Do you not see those gentlemen coming, bowing and scraping a hundred times before they get up to him? They "made obeisance to the king." Jehoiada had not often made such obeisance to him; he had treated him with due respect as his king, but he had also spoken to him honestly and faithfully. Joash had somebody to look up to while Jehoiada lived, and now he found himself a great man, with everybody looking up to him; and the princes of Judah, the fashionable part of the realm, the respectable people who never had been worshippers of Jehovah, but who had always preferred the more recondite, ritualistic, and sensuous service of Baal, the philosophical god, came, and bowed, and made obeisance to the king. I think I can hear what they said: "Royal sir, we congratulate you upon being released from leading-strings. Now you can think for yourself. It is a fine thing for a young man to be delivered from the power of his old uncle; he was no doubt a very excellent person, we were present at his funeral, and we paid him all due respect; still, he was a regular old fossil, one who never had made any progress at all. He clung to the worship of Jehovah, and served the God of his fathers. Royal sir, we congratulate you upon the liberty to which you have attained. Besides that, we fear that you have been considerably priest-ridden. This Jehoiada was a priest, and of course you respected and venerated his character; but you could not indulge yourself as long as he lived. We have always had high thoughts of you, royal sir, we always believed that you would break out one of these days; and now that the good man is laid asleep, we are sure that you will not let his dead hand rest upon you, but you will wake up, and be abreast of the age, and keep up with the spirit of the times." You know how they do it; it is always being done, this pouring of drops of poison into the ear, these soft, subtle flatteries. Even when a man has reached Joash's age, he is not beyond the power of flattery; I wonder how old a man would be when he would be too old to love flattery. Of course, he always likes to be told, "Ah, dear sir, I know that you could not bear flattery," being at that moment more highly flattered than at any other time in his life. So these princes of Judah did; and poor Joash, good Joash, Joash who repaired the temple, Joash who was even more intensely earnest then Jehoiada himself, was led astray by the soft words of the deceivers, and we find him burying his religion with his uncle. In Jehoiada's grave he buried all his piety. Some whom I have known, and over whom I have wept, have acted in the same way.

After that, *he went off to sin.* The images which he had broken down were set up again; the groves which he had cut down were planted again; and he who seemed so zealous a servant of Jehovah had now become a worshipper of the foul Ashtaroth, and bowed before the accursed Baalim. Oh, sad, sad, sad mischief this! There was a want of principle in Joash, and it is of that I want to warn all our friends. Do not, I pray you, be satisfied with the practice of piety without the principles of piety. It is not enough to have a correct creed; you must have a renewed heart. It is not sufficient to have an ornate ritual; you must have a holy life, and to be holy you must be renewed by the Holy Spirit. If this change is not wrought in you by the Holy Ghost, you who yield so readily to good will yield just as quickly to evil.

What happened next? *Joash refused reproof.* God sent prophets to the people, and they came, and warned them, testifying against the idolaters: "But they would not give ear." This Joash, who had spent his first six years in the temple, now would not give ear to the Lord's prophets. He was always ready to listen to Jehoiada, but now he would not give ear. He was a tremendous zealot for repairing the temple, with most costly architecture, and gold and silver, without limit; but now he will not give heed to God's servants at all. They may speak with all their heart and soul; but he is as the deaf adder that will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Yet he was once your good young man, your pious young man! Oh, what a sifter London has been to many like Joash! Many do I remember whose story was like this. They had been to the house of God always; they were brought up where there was a family altar in the house; everybody reckoned them to be Christians; and they came to London. At first, they went where their father exhorted them to go, to some humble place where the gospel was preached; but after a time they thought it was not wrong to go on the Sunday to see one of the more showy religious places. That done, they went to some showy place that was not religious. They worked so hard all the week that they must go out a little into the fresh air on the Sunday; and by degrees they found companions who led them, little by little, from the path of integrity and chastity till "the good young man" was as vile as any on the streets of London, and he who seemed to be a saint became not only a sinner, but the maker of sinners.

What did Joash do next? *He slew his friend's* son. Old Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, one of those who had helped to put the crown upon young Joash's head, was at last moved to come out, and speak in the midst of the temple service to the people, as he had a right to do; and he began to upbraid them for turning aside from Jehovah to the worship of the foul idol gods. Now, see, the tiger's blood is up! Joash bids them kill him. How dare he testify against his king? True, he is the son of his best friend, he is his own cousin, he is one who helped him to ascend the throne; but what matters all that to this once good young man? The milk of human kindness is soured now. The oil that was so soft burns fiercely when it once takes fire. "Let Zechariah die. Kill him in the temple. Bespatter the sacred altar with his blood. Stone him. He has dared to speak against me." See your soft clay, how hard and coarse, and rough it has become! I have seen this change come over men. I believe that the worst persecutors in the world are generally made of those who once were tender and soft-hearted. Nero would at first scarcely sign the death-warrant of a criminal; and yet he lived to delight in wholesale

murder. When the son of perdition was wanted to betray his Lord, the raw material of the traitor was found in an apostle. You cannot make an out-and-out bad man except from one who seems to be good. You must take the man who has been six years in the temple, the man who has done that which is right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada, to make such a devil as Joash turned out to be when he killed the son of his benefactor in the court of the house of the Lord. O, I could look steadily in the face of some here to-night, and in the spirit of prophecy I could burst out into tears to think of what they will yet be, what they will yet do, and what they will yet say! Perhaps you look at me, and ask, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" O, sir, you are worse than a dog; there lurks within you a heart "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" Oh, that you did know it, and would turn to God, and say, "O Lord, renew me! Lord, make a new creature of me! Lord, save me, that I never may do such things as now, to-day, I think it impossible that I should ever do!"

This Joash, perishing, miserable, *having no faith in God, robbed the temple*, and gave all the gold and treasures unto Hazael the Syrian. Personally, he was full of disease, and by-and-by his own servants, disgusted with him for his conduct towards Jehoiada's son, slew him on his bed. What a death for the young man who was six years hidden away in the house of the Lord! Oh, if I could tell some of you what will become of you, you would never come to this place again, you would be so angry with me! If I could prophesy to some good young fellow here,—I mean, outwardly good as Joash was at first, but without a new heart, without the grace of God in his soul,—if I could prophesy to him what he will be, he would spit in my face in indignation that I should dare to foretell such a thing. There is not a man or woman here who is safe from the most abominable sin until they yield themselves to Christ. There is not one of you who is sure that the deepest damnation of hell will not be your portion unless you come and commit your soul into the hands of Jesus, who is a faithful Keeper of them that put their trust in Him. Can there be a Character Insurance Society? There can be no such Society formed by men that can insure our character; yet God has formed one. "The righteous also shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." The Lord will keep him, and preserve him from evil, for "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." I do adjure you, by the living God, my hopeful young friend, yield yourself to Jesus Christ, and seek His guardian care, lest the fair blossom of to-day should never bring forth fruit, but end in disappointment.

The Lord grant that we may all of us meet in heaven, for Jesu's sake! Amen.

"THAT KING AHAZ"

"And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz."—2 Chronicles xxviii. 22.

IT is absolutely certain, dear friends, that whatever our personal characters may be, we shall have to know, by practical experience, the meaning of the word trouble. Saint or sinner, "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards." The road to heaven is rough, and the path to hell is not always smooth. There are some tribulations which belong specially to the people of God, yet it is also true that "many sorrows shall be to the wicked." If a man, trying to escape from sorrow, should take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, he would find that sorrow was even there upon the sea. Should he go to the frozen regions of the North, he would find sorrow there, for there have some of the fondest human hopes been wrecked. Let him journey to the sultry South, and trouble shall pursue him there, for plagues, fevers, and miasma haunt that region, and the gates of death are near. Until we mount to heaven, we shall never be able to escape from sorrow and sighing; only there shall we obtain joy and gladness, when our sombre companions shall have fled away for ever.

Since, then, dear friends, the stream of sorrow is here, and we cannot make it flow in any other direction, what shall we do with it? Let us try to put it to profitable uses; let us lift up our hearts in prayer to God that all our sorrows may be sanctified, that, with all other things, they may work together for our lasting good, and that we, who are the children of God, may be perfected in the image of Christ according to the divine purpose. Let us remember, however, that sorrow will not of itself be beneficial to us. It is possible to endure afflictions on earth, and afterwards to endure eternal damnation in hell. Sinners may go from beds of languishing to beds of flame, from toil and poverty here to torment and despair hereafter. There is nothing at all in sorrow that can burn out sin; there is no power in human suffering to remove the wrath of God.

I. I shall commence my discourse with this very simple remark, that, IN THEIR TIMES OF DISTRESS, GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE OFTEN FOUND VERY GREAT PROFIT.

Suffering is one of the things which is written in the covenant of grace as a blessing. The rod was promised to us when we became the children of God, and we cannot escape it; and I think the poet Cowper was right when he said that "the true-born child of God" would not escape it if he might. The distress of believers, when it is sanctified to them, *loosens their hold upon this world.* Trials cut the ropes which fasten our souls to earthly things, and so enable us to mount; they file the chains which, as on the eagle's foot, will not let her spread her wings, and soar upward toward the sun. Trouble, like a sharp spade, digs up the earth that is about our roots, and then we bring forth the more fruit. Were it not for the thorns in our nest, we should be so content with its soft lining that we should sit in it till we died; but the sharp thorns prick our breasts, and then we

turn our eye aloft, and learn to try our wings, ready for the time when they shall have fully grown, and we shall mount to joys above.

Afflictions also are often to the benefit of believers *in leading them to search for sin.* Our trials should be search-warrants, sent to us from God that we may search and find out the secret evil that is within us, the offence that we have hidden, the lie that is in our right hand. You know, beloved, that it is not an easy thing to bring us to self-examination. We are afraid of it; we are too apt to take things as they seem to be, without testing and trying them to see what they really are; but when the consolations of God grow small with us, then we say, "Is there any secret sin within us?" A rough wind blows through the forest, and the rotten branches creak, and are torn from the oak, where else they would have become a nest for all sorts of destructive insects, and a centre of decay for the whole tree. So, our afflictions often drive away some besetting sins, some darling propensities, which otherwise we might have carried in our bosom till they had done us grievous damage.

Do you not also know, dear friends, how *trials give new life to prayer?* Do we ever pray so well as when we feel the prickings of our Father's sword? He never wounds us so severely as to kill us, but he does sometimes just gently probe us to wake us up from our lethargy. Oh, what fervent prayers we offer when in the furnace; and I may add, oh, what grateful songs we sing when we come out! There is more life, I do think, in one's piety in times of sorrow than at any other season. I do not wish to be laid aside from pulpit labour, but I must confess that I have often felt unusual spiritual power when coming up to preach to you after a season of sickness; and there have been times when I have heard some of you say, "Our minister speaks more sweetly now than he did before he was laid aside." Yes, the olives must go into the press if the oil is to be squeezed out of them, and the grapes must be trodden upon with loving feet before the wine flows forth from them. The file must be used upon us to bring out the true quality of the metal. There is no hope that we shall ever be made into the much fine gold unless we are often put into the crucible, and unless that crucible be put into the midst of the glowing coals. So I say that we get much good from our trials.

Have you not also found, dear friends, that *trials make your faith grow stronger?* We, who are but striplings in the Lord's army, enlist very readily; we put the colours in our cap, and we think that we are going to do great things,—to stir up the Church, and to rout the world, the flesh, and the devil; but we soon find that we have to be drilled by the black sergeant, Affliction, and afterwards we have to march out to the battle of the warrior, "with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood"; and, by-and-by, after many a conflict, we become hardened veterans; and we, who might have turned our backs aforetime, if it had not been for trial, become bold as lions for the Lord our God. Brethren, there is no teaching, no ministry, even of the best-taught servant of God, that can do you such good as sanctified experience will. You must learn for yourselves; under that blessed schoolmaster, Mr. Affliction, must you study the sacred science of divinity; it is good to go to his school, for the lessons to be learnt there are so beneficial. One of his scholars wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word."

We also get *our sweetest comforts in the time of trouble.* Do not mothers often give their children, in their seasons of sickness, tokens of love that they never give them when in health? I know that there are kisses of Jesu's lips for His tried children that He gives not to those who are without trial. "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom"; then I would love to be a lamb, to ride so near to His heart;—"and shall gently lead those that are with young," and it is well for us sometimes to feel those pains and weaknesses that we may have more of the gentle leadings of the tender Shepherd. I think it was Rutherford who said that, when Christ put him down in the cellar of affliction, He knew that He kept His wine there, and he groped about until he found the bottles, and then he drank, and was revived. Ah, there is rich wine of comfort in the lowest cellars of affliction when Christ puts us down there; even the joys of heaven will be all the sweeter because of our experiences of trial here, where we often sing,—

"Sweet affliction,
Thus to bring my Saviour near."

Christ is superlatively sweet to us, and the next sweetest thing in all the world is Christ's dear cross. He is Himself most precious; but next to the kisses of His lips are the blows, the love-pats of His pierced hand.

II. Now I advance another step, and remind you that, VERY OFTEN, THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD, UNGODLY PERSONS HAVE HAD REASON TO BLESS THE LORD FOR THEIR AFFLICTIONS.

Not unfrequently have I heard a story of this kind from a man who has passed the prime of life, whose garments bear evidence, though he still looks respectable, that he is one who has seen many sorrows and trials, and who carries on his brow the marks of the ploughshare of grief. He has come to unite in fellowship with the church, and he begins telling the story of his conversion, which is something like this:—"I was once a flourishing tradesman; I had a large business, and was a wealthy man; but, alas! I was foolish; worse than that, I was wicked; I misspent my time, I delighted in the ways of sin, and became a profligate. My companions thought me generous, and I did not wish to be less than they thought me to be; so I wasted my substance in riotous living. My business suffered; and, at last, there came a crash. All I had went where all must go when a man squanders his time and money as I squandered mine. I became poor; I had not previously known what it was to eat the bread of dependence, but I did eat it for a few months. Friends assisted me for a time, but they grew tired of doing so, and I was cast off by the world; and I felt, when any looked coldly upon me, that I deserved it. I have been a fool, sir, I know that I have; but it was then, one cold, pitiless night, when there was only one place where I could find shelter for my head,—that place was the pauper's last refuge;—it was then that I thought upon my ways, and lifted my eyes to heaven, and breathed the prayer, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" The man has told me that he blesses God for his poverty, for that was the means of bringing him to Christ; and since he has come to know the Lord, he has thought it a thousand mercies that he was thus brought very low, for if he had not been, his proud spirit would never have been broken, and he would never have been humbled before the Lord.

And some of you, my sisters, know that you have told me and the church your story. You were happy mothers in your households, but you feared not the Lord; you had your children around you, and you and your husband took what you called "your pleasure" on the Sabbath day, for you had no fear of God before your eyes. But, by-and-by, one of your little ones was taken ill. You watched, with anxious care, the pale cheek as it grew paler still, but grim Death took your darling from you. Again His shafts flew, and a second one was taken, and your soul was melted because of heaviness. There is one here who had four children taken away in succession, till, at last, the mother's agonized soul, bereaved of all earthly comfort, could go to no one else but Christ; and when she went to Him, she found in Him what was better than ten sons,—His love, His pardon, His acceptance, His free gift of eternal life.

Ah, brethren and sisters, there have been many who have thus, by a series of bereavements, through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, been brought to know the Lord. I need not stay to mention instances of which I am constantly hearing, and I believe that the black angel of distress has brought as many to Christ as the bright angel of tender mercy; in fact, if you look well at the black angel, as I have called him, you will see that he is not black, but exceedingly bright, for there is a gracious ministry in those loving sorrows, there is an angelic kindness in those loving cruelties (as some term them) by which God doth sometimes bring hardened sinners to Himself.

III. But now I come to the main point of my discourse, which is that, although distress is often blessed to God's people, and is frequently sanctified to the conversion of sinners, our text is a notable proof that THERE IS NOTHING IN TRIAL ITSELF WHICH WILL NECESSARILY SOFTEN THE HEART, AND MAKE A MAN REPENT: "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz."

If further proof were needed that trouble, affliction, sickness, and familiarity with death necessarily softened the heart, then those people who have most to do with these would have the tenderest hearts; but it is not so. Think of the men who have to deal with the dead. Where will you find anywhere, as a class, a more hardened set of men than an undertaker's men often are? I know that anyone, who is well acquainted with them, must have observed how they joke over a corpse, and make mirth over the death of their fellow-creatures, regarding a fever rather as a blessing which brings them employment than as a calamity which takes away the husband from the wife, or the parent from the children. I do not speak without my book in this case, and it is very much the same with other people. I think I said, one day, that, if a man or a woman were not converted before they became pew-openers at a church or a chapel, it was probable that they never would be converted, and I am still of the same opinion. I once said that I thought even reporters of sermons, if they did not know the Lord before they undertook that work, would very likely fail to get any good out o the sermon; and, therefore, it is always a great joy to me when I know that those who have any share in the preparation of the sermons with a view to their publication have realized the power of the truth in their own hearts; so that, even while engaged in the mechanical operations connected with reporting and printing the sermons, their souls drink in something of the sweetness of the truth which is afterwards to be read by others.

Probably, however, the truth of the text will be best illustrated by a Scriptural instance. Look at Pharaoh; was any man ever more troubled than he was? All the powers of land, and water, and sky united to plague him. It seemed as if all the frogs in the world had made Egypt their *rendezvous;* and the locusts, and the lice, and the flies, and the murrain, and the sore blains, and the hail, and the thick darkness;—and though all these plagues came upon Pharaoh, he still hardened his heart, and would not let the people go. Affliction did not soften him; on the contrary, it hardened him; and the case of Ahaz is another instance of the same evil spirit, for the more trials came to him, the more did he trespass against the Lord. The children of Israel, too, though they were smitten many times, yet revolted again and again. They were hunted about by marauders, and delivered up to their enemies; their crops were devoured of locusts, famine and pestilence came upon them; but, for all that, they turned not unto the Lord, but hardened their hearts against Him, and were a stiff-necked generation, even as they are unto this day.

However, I need not go on beating round the bush, for, if further proofs that sorrow does not necessarily soften are needed, there are plenty of such proofs here at this moment. There is that sailor over yonder, he knows that he is a great deal worse man than he was three or four years ago. He had more prickings of conscience than he has now; yet it is not many months since he escaped from shipwreck. He thought the angry deep must surely swallow him up, so he cried unto God in his time of trouble, and said, "Save me, O God, for the waters have come in unto my soul!" God spared his life, but the trial he then endured had no beneficial effect upon him; and, as I have said, he is a worse man now than he was years ago. Then there is that man yonder, whose business has been going down: what effect has that had upon him? Why, he is growing harder and harder, and is even cursing God for what he calls his ill luck. In trying to improve his position, he is only plunging deeper into the mire, and he will be head over heels in the morass, presently, unless the almighty grace of God shall deliver him. But the man is not softened in spirit by all that he has had to endure. That which would have softened him had he been as wax has hardened him because his nature is like clay. May God yet have mercy on him, for I plainly perceive that his trials by themselves will be of no use to him.

And you, too, who have come creeping out to this service;—you have been so ill that hospital after hospital has turned you away as incurable; the doctors say that nothing more can be done for you; and you have come limping in here, though you can scarcely keep your seat for weariness for you are very ill and weak;—yet your unhumbled spirit is as proud as though your ribs were made of iron and your heart were strong as steel. If you should be chastened any more, you would only revolt more and more. You have already been smitten until your whole head is sick, and your whole heart is faint; from the crown of your head to the sole of your feet there is no soundness in you, for you have become, as the result of God's chastisements, a mass of wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores; yet still is sin as

strongly entrenched within your soul as ever it was. What more shall the Lord do unto you? Shall He give you up as hopeless? Shall He make you as Admah? Shall he set you as Zeboim? Shall He say concerning you, "He is joined unto his idols; let him alone"? What else remaineth to be done for you when all this affliction and trial will not break your heart?

I might go on pointing out you who are like king Ahaz, for my Master knows all about you, and He knows how to direct my tongue so that I shall describe you. I feel a great yearning of heart, the throes of strong convulsions in my soul over some of you who are here. I know that I have a special message from God for some whom I am now addressing; who and where they are, the Lord knows; I do not, but I pray that my message may now be accepted by them. As the Lord my God liveth, before whom I stand, if thou turn not at His rebuke, O soul, if this last affliction shall not humble thee, He will dash thee in pieces like a potter's vessel, and break thee with a rod of iron! "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Why will you draw destruction down upon your own head? Why will you stain your garments with your own blood? Wherefore will you dash yourselves to pieces upon the bosses of Jehovah's buckler? Why will you run upon the edge of His sword? Why will you leap into the fires of hell? Why will you ruin your souls for ever? Pause, I entreat you; a brother's love bids you pause. Thou, who art like "that king Ahaz" who, in the time of his distress, trespassed yet more against the Lord, I pray thee to stop and consider, lest, at thy next step, thy feet should hang over the awful darkness of the pit, and thy soul be precipitated into the depths eternal!

I have thus, I hope, come somewhat near the mark at which I am aiming, and I am getting to speak right home to those who have had afflictions and trials, but are growing worse, rather than better, notwithstanding all that has happened to them. I will turn from them to speak to some of you, who have the notion that you will repent and believe in Christ some day, but you will not repent and believe in Christ just yet. You have not made up your minds that you will go to hell; oh, no, you mean to be saved one of these days; you have not decided when it shall be; but, still, you do mean it to happen one of these days. Your secret thought is that, one of these days, you will be obedient to the heavenly vision. You talk to yourselves in some such fashion as this, "I shall be laid aside one day, perhaps it may not be until I grow old; and when I am ill, I shall have time to turn the matter over calmly and quietly. I have heard my friends say, concerning some who had lived very bad lives, that they hoped it was all right with them at the last; therefore, may I not hope that it will be all right with me?" Friend, I want to give you a warning word; perhaps my meeting you here, and talking specially to you for a little while, may be the means of your eternal salvation. What makes you imagine that a time of sickness is a suitable time for repentance? Do you not think that you will have quite enough to do to bear your pains of body, without having to think of the state of your soul? When your head is aching, you cannot properly attend even to your earthly business; so how can you hope to attend to your soul's business when your head and your heart will both be aching? You find that your worldly concerns need a healthy mind and body to conduct them properly; so do you think that, when the mind is becoming weak through senile decay and physical infirmity, that then will be a fitting time to think of these momentous and eternal realities?

In many diseases, I believe that repentance and faith are scarcely possible, for some of them bring such a lethargy of spirit that the mind is hardly able to act at all. There are, doubtless, many persons who are alive, but who, for all practical purposes, are dead long before they actually die. You know, too, how often the very thought of death is so harassing to an unbeliever that he can hardly think of sin. A murderer may repent that he has been brought to the gallows, yet not repent of the murder that brought him there; just as, on their death-bed, many repent of hell, but not of sin. I fear that, often, the sense of the wrath to come gets to be so vivid, and so real, that sin hardly comes into the reckoning; and remember, friend, that it is not repentance of hell that will save you, but repentance of sin;—not repentance of the punishment, but repentance of the evil deed itself, a sincere hatred of the very pleasure which sin would bring. O sirs, take my word for it, and I think that, if there were physicians here, they would certify that I am speaking the truth when I say that there are other things to do, on your death-bed, than to talk of "making your peace with God." I am uttering a solemn truth, but it is one that must be spoken; there may have been some few persons who have been saved on a death-bed, but my own conviction is that they have been very, very, very, very, very few. We only read, in Scripture, of one who was saved at the last,—the dying thief on the cross; and it has been well said that there was one that none might despair, but only one that none might presume. I do not know that there ever was another besides the dying thief who was called by grace at the eleventh hour; I repeat that I do not *know* this. I do not say that there have not been any, I *hope* there have been many, but I do not know it. I have no revelation concerning it, there is nothing in this blessed Book about it; only this I know, there was one, and therefore I hope there have been more; but since I only know of that one, I would warn you not to put any confidence in a repentance that may possibly come at the last. You may be saved on your death-bed; but I think there is every possibility that you, who have loved sin so long, will hug it to the last. I do not see any reason why you should turn your backs suddenly on your former course; if there be any such reason, let it operate upon you now. Surely it should have as much force upon your conscience, at this moment, while you are capable of weighing the whole matter calmly and deliberately, as it will have when you lie tossing on your bed, and your judgment has lost a great part if not all of its former vigour. May God bring you to Christ now; but do not, I pray you, be dreaming about a death-bed on which you may never lie, or of a repentance which you may never experience. There was a man who was an awful swearer, and whenever anybody spoke to him about his not being saved, he used to say, "Oh, well, when my turn comes to die, I shall just say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me,' and that will be enough." It happened that, one dark night, when going home on horseback drunk, his horse leaped the parapet of a high bridge, and horse and rider fell right into the water; and the last word that the

man was heard to utter was an oath, so beyond all doubt he plunged into a hopeless eternity. It is quite possible that you will never have the opportunity to breathe a dying prayer; or if you could have such an opportunity, it is quite possible that you would have no inclination to utter it. Remember that "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." May God, in His sovereign mercy, turn you to Himself now!

Now I come back to you, who have had many trials, but who have not been bettered by them. My friend, over yonder, you do not often hear a minister preach the Word; and, therefore, now that I have you here, let me deal very plainly and faithfully with you. Why do you think that your trials were sent to you? I have shown you that, often, distress has been blessed to others. Now, supposing you have had an experience which has been blessed to others, but it has been no blessing to you, what is the inference? If a man takes a piece of quartz, in which he thinks there is some gold, and puts it through the usual processes for extracting gold, and when he has done that, sees that there is no likelihood of finding gold in it, what is he likely to do with it? Why, methinks, ere long, when he has tried all the plans he can think of, he will throw it away, and have nothing more to do with it; and is it not likely that God will soon throw you away as utterly worthless? Did you not say, the other night, that you wished God would let you alone? You would not have come in to this service if you had thought that I should speak so pointedly and personally to you, would you? You would like to see every church, and chapel, and mission-hall destroyed; you would like to have no Sundays, and no religious people, because they plague you, they get in your way, they stick pins into your pillow, they will not leave you alone to sleep the sleep of death.

But do you not see that the fact that you want to be let alone is itself a proof of your reprobate mind? God is beginning to let you alone, I am afraid; inasmuch as you are wishing to be let alone, I am afraid that awful curse will come upon you; and, possibly, it will come upon you soon. Should your present condition continue much longer, I can tell you what will happen to you, you will become an avowed atheist, you will deny even the existence of God. You may even become an open blasphemer, or you may become unconscious of any spiritual emotion. Your conscience will never prick you, and you will go on sinning with a high hand until you come to die. Perhaps, even then, no alarm or terror will disturb your false peace of mind; even when you dip your feet in the chilly stream of the river of death, you will be self-deceived to the last; but oh, sir, what a change wil come over you when you once get into the world of eternal realities! When, at last, you realize that you are a lost soul, and that you have for ever to anticipate the wrath to come, what will you do then? O man, how will the blood boil in your veins, and your nerves become burning tracks for the wheels of pain to travel on! God help you! God save you! Only He can do this, for I see the dread forecast of the flames of hell in you when you begin to ask God to let you alone in your sin.

"Well," says one, "like that king Ahaz, I have transgressed yet more and more against the Lord notwithstanding all my distress; but God, who knows all things, knows that I would be saved if I could. While you were singing that hymn just now, I thought I would act upon it; I said in my heart,—

"'I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away I know,
I must for ever die.'"

Dear friend, give me your hand; I feel that I may rejoice over you, for if God the Holy Ghost has put it into your heart to say, "I am resolved to try;" or, better still, "I am resolved to trust Jesus Christ as my Saviour; though He slay me, I will trust in Him";—depend upon it, He will not slay you; He would not do so even if you were the blackest of sinners, one who had sinned till you had become the vilest of all offenders. Jesus casts out none who come to Him by faith. Do, I pray you, now say in your soul, "God helping me, I will now come to Him; and who can tell whether there may not be a harp in heaven even for me, and a crown of glory for me? I trust that I may yet stand with all the blood-washed host before the throne of God above, and join in singing the everlasting song of praise to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and even here on earth, I may be among the children of God, I may be forgiven, I may be saved, I may be accepted in the Beloved." If thou talkest thus, and meanest all thou sayest, I say unto thee, not only that this may be the case with thee, but that it may be the case with thee this very hour.

"Oh! believe the promise true,
God to you His Son has given."

A loving Father waits with arms outstretched to welcome the returning prodigal to His heart. Jesus waits by the fountain filled with His precious blood to wash you from all your sinful stains. The Holy Spirit is working in you even now; 'tis He who bids you come. Let not Satan persuade you that it is too late for you to come to Jesus; it is never too late while the messenger of mercy continues to speak to you. Let not the devil convince you that you are too sinful to be saved; often, the greatest sinners are the first to be saved. If the devil tells you that you are an extraordinary sinner, tell him that Christ is such an extraordinary Saviour that He can save all sorts of sinners, ordinary and extraordinary too. Say not in your heart that you cannot be saved; for, high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's thoughts above your thoughts, and His ways above your ways. My poor friend, if thou feelest the need of a Saviour, join with me, and with all the people of God here in singing this verse; sing it from your heart, and the great transaction's done,—

"Nothing in my hands I bring:
Simply to Thy cross I cling:
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

RUINS

"But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel."—2 Chronicles xxviii. 23.

I HAVE a little to say about the condition of Judah under Ahaz, before I come to personal dealing with souls from this text. God had given to His people a very simple mode of worship. He was the invisible and only living God, and they were to worship Him in spirit and in truth; there was to be one altar, and that was to be at Jerusalem; but all the rest of the world was given up to idolatry, and the Israelites were not a very spiritual people, so by-and-by they wanted something to see, some image, some symbol. When the ten tribes broke off from Judah, they set up images of a bull to represent the strength of Deity. Those who kept to the worship of the invisible Jehovah, without emblems, ridiculed these symbols, and called the bulls, in contempt, calves; but the calf-worship became very strong throughout Israel, and there were many in Judah who were attracted to it. It was the worship of God, but it was the worship of God in a wrong way: for there was a very express commandment which forbade it: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." There are many still who worship idols and images; but they say, "No, we do not worship them; we worship God through them." Just so, but that is as much forbidden in the second commandment as the worship of other gods is forbidden in the first; they are both violations of the Divine law. When the people of Judah had gone so far as to worship God through images, they went still farther, and bowed down to Baal and Ashtaroth, the sun, and even flies, for Baal-zebub, the god of flies, became one of the objects of adoration. Associated with this idolatry was everything that was sinful; I should not dare to tell you what horrible and loathsome abominations were witnessed in connection with the worship of these gods.

Do not, however, condemn those Jews and Israelites without remembering another story. In this world, in later times, the Son of God set up a pure and undefiled religion in which there was no similitude of God whatsoever; but, after a while, they who professed to worship Christ must needs have cross and crucifix, picture and image. Of course, they did not worship the cross, or the crucifix, or the picture, or the image! No; but they professed to worship Christ by the help of these things. That was the first violation of the simplicity of worship, and it was in reality departing from the living God. In a very short time, they took to the worship of saints, and from that they went to the worship of cast clouts and rotten rags, until some of us have seen, with our own eyes, bones,—supposed to be the bones of saints,—decayed teeth, and all kinds of rubbish made the subjects of worship when they have been exposed to the gaze of the deluded people. Into such idolatry, by slow degrees, did those fall who professed to call themselves Christians; and only three or four hundred years ago, from one end of this island to the other the land was full of holy roods, and images, and relics, and I know not what; the people were utterly given up to idolatry, and the gospel of God was scarcely known. Then rang out, clear and shrill, the voices of Wycliffe, and Luther, and Calvin, and the like; and, after a while, men arose who said, "We will worship none but God, and all these images we utterly abhor." There was for them nothing but the prison, the stake, and all manner of cruel deaths; but they were steadfast even unto the end. You know that brave Hugh Latimer, as he began to burn at the stake in his old age, cheered up his companion by saying, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out." And so they did. There came out, to die for Christ, poor, humble, illiterate men and women, and some of noble rank, and even bishops could sometimes take their share of the persecution, and die, until at last men began to hate the idols by reason of the cruelty which was used in keeping them up. Then came a revolt against Romanism, and all over England men smashed the "holy water" basins, and defaced the pictures, and pulled down the images, and treated them with utter contempt, and England was freed from the idolatry under which she had groaned so long. We thought she would always remain free; but, alas! we only dreamed it. By-and-by, there came men in the Established Church, who did not bid us worship saints, nor did they at first go very far in idolatry; but they said that they must have vestments, incense, and I know not what, and now they have boldly set up the crucifix,—that calf of Baal, for it is nothing better,—that image which they adore, and which we loathe, because it has become the thin end of the wedge, the first open return to idolatry. Where is true Protestant feeling in England? It seems to me to be almost extinct. All that many care for is an ornate service, something beautiful for the eye to rest upon, flowers more abundant than in a conservatory, music sweet to the ear, the scent of incense, and thus by-and-by, unless God prevent, we shall get back to the old Roman idolatry, and that would be the ruin of this land as it has been the ruin of every land where it has had the sway. Time was when God covered England with His wing, when Spain's Armada was swept away by the tempest, like chaff before the wind, and God was with our country, and gave her power, and made her to be the empress of the seas; but if she forsakes her God, she will fall from her heights; if this land becomes full of images and idols again, and there be found none to protest against it, the God that lifted us up will throw us down. He that hath used us for His glory will reckon us to be unfit for His service, and cast us away with other nations that He hath forsaken because of their defilement through idolatry. I will not say more upon this matter now, but I will pray about it, and I ask every man who feels as I do to continue to pray, lest it should be said of us,

concerning these idols, "They were the ruin of him, and of all Israel;" for so it must be if we forsake the living God, and turn aside unto gods that are no gods.

Now I come to a more practical matter as far as each individual is concerned; and, first, I shall want you to notice *the man ruining himself;* secondly, *the man in ruins;* and, thirdly, *other people ruined with him.*

I. First, look at THE MAN RUINING HIMSELF.

Sin will ruin any man; if it be not forsaken, it will eternally ruin him. Ahaz is the type of those who ruin themselves. I daresay many will at once exclaim, "This description does not belong to us." Perhaps you suppose it never could belong to you. Listen: I have seen those who bade fair to live a holy life turn aside to the grossest immorality; often, they have been men who thought they were past temptation, and believed it was utterly impossible that they should turn aside. Let us speak of Ahaz, and as we do so, let each man take to heart anything that belongs to himself; and that which doth not belong to him, let him pray God to bless to the one to whom it is suitable.

Here, then, was one who, as a king, *began life by determining to be his own master.* He has been bidden to worship the invisible God with the simple rites of the law, but he resolved that he would worship what he pleased, and where he pleased, and how he pleased. He was not to be dictated to, he would select his own gods, and worship as many as he, pleased. So he did, "but they were the ruin of him." A man may begin life with this resolution,—"I am not going to be bound by anybody; I shall do as I like, I shall have my own way, I shall be independent. I am not going to be obedient to God, nor to hearken to what His Book prescribes, I shall have what indulgences I choose." If he does so, those indulgences will be "the ruin of him"; that character, which has not for its corner-stone obedience to God, is a character that will tumble down in ruins one day or another. O young man, begin life with this resolve, "I will serve God, I will seek to know His mind and His will, and I will say to all others, 'Whether it be right to obey God rather than man, judge ye.'"

This man, Ahaz, was also *very high-handed in his sin.* He set up rival altars, even in the temple itself. Dreadful as it seems, yet he imported an altar from Damascus, and erected it in the place where had stood the altar of God. He went beyond all predecessors in his determination that idolatry should cover all the land, and he persecuted and oppressed the faithful servants of Jehovah. A man may be very high-handed against God, and sneeringly ask, with Pharaoh "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" but if he does so, it will be "the ruin of him." Pharaoh did not find it answer; he might continue to provoke Jehovah, but, in the end, when God had smitten the first-born of Egypt, the chief of all her strength, he learned that it is perilous for a man to be high-handed with God.

Further, Ahaz also *lavished great treasure upon his sin.* All the wealth he had, he was willing to spend in order that he might have his own way, and worship his own gods; yet, "they were the ruin of him." Perhaps he was ruined all the faster for that very reason; and when a man has plenty of money, and he lets it run away freely, simply that he may sin against his God, and indulge his evil passions, he may seem to flourish for a while; but let no man envy him, for those passions will be "the ruin of him." Though the land be full of silver and gold, though there be no end of the horses and chariots, yet, as the Lord liveth, if a man shall use these in fighting against God, they will be "the ruin of him." That is how it will end, sooner or later, and probably sooner.

Ahaz also *defied the chastisement of God.* The Lord punished him by permitting his enemies to invade his country; his people were carried away captive, yet he would not humble himself on account of that; the more he was distressed the more he sinned. "This is that king Ahaz"; and we have seen men whom God has smitten terribly, but they have not yielded to him. They have even risen from a sick bed more wicked than when they were stretched upon it,—breaking their promises, casting their vows to the wind, and going back, "like the dog to his own vomit, or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." They have said that they cared nothing for pain, sickness, illness; they would not turn unto the Lord, and thus their sins were the ruin of them. The blows of God came home to them at last, and sin slew them after all.

Yet further, Ahaz *was exceedingly clever.* He said, "I will make a friend of Tilgath-pilneser, the king of Assyria, and he will protect me; I will put myself in vassalage under him, and then the little kings of Syria and Israel will be afraid to touch me, and I shall be left in quiet." Ah! men are sometimes very clever in their sin; at least, so they think. They will not yield to God, they will not become Christians, they are not such fools; they are so sharp, they will do well enough! They have a friend somewhere, they have a card they have not played yet, and a scheme which, when it is revealed, will astonish you; they will do well enough without God, let those who want him pray to Him. Yet their sins will be the ruin of them; for the clever men shall be taken in their own craftiness, and shall be destroyed by the very instruments with which they sought to promote their prosperity, even as this man was; for, when the king of Assyria came, he plundered the palace of Ahaz, and took away his wealth, but did not help him in the least.

Ahaz was also *a man of great taste.* That was one reason why he was an idolater; the worship of God in a simple manner, did not please him, or gratify his refined taste. He was a cultured and æsthetic individual, so when he went down to Damascus, and, saw an idolatrous altar there, he said, "That is my idea of an altar; I will have one like it," so the pattern of it was sent off to Jerusalem, and Urijah the priest made himself very busy in carrying out the king's wishes so that, by the time Ahaz came back, there was his new altar all ready. I can imagine that he said, as he looked at it, "That is the style of altar for me; I want none of your old-fashioned Davidic altars." Yet those fine ideas of his were "the ruin of him"; and I am afraid there are a great many persons who will be ruined by their taste, by allowing it to override conscience, and suffering themselves to be guided by their whims and fancies, and not by the teaching of the Word of God. To me, that seemeth beautiful which God ordaineth, and that is abominable which God abhorreth. May it be so with each one of us; but if we allow our own taste to lead us into sin, then we shall find that it will be the ruin of us, and of all who do like unto us.

This man—I have not yet completed my portrait of him,—*had some to back him, who ought to have opposed*

him. When his predecessor, Uzziah, went into the temple to offer incense, the priests withstood him, and thrust him out; for he had no right there, and leprosy came upon his brow, and he hasted to go out; but when Ahaz wanted this new altar, Urijah the priest was quite ready to adapt himself to his lord's ideas. He would, of course, prefer the old-fashioned low church; but, still, he was a very broad-minded man, and he was willing to have a high church altar set up, if his majesty wished it; and when his majesty said so, and when he came and offered sacrifices upon it, Urijah did not say a word against it; how could he? It was a state church, and therefore the king did as he liked. That style of action is often seen in religious and social life. A man does wrong, and the Christian minister, who ought to speak plainly to him about it, does not dare to do so. Perhaps the minister, who ought to be faithful for his Master's sake, thinks that, for peace sake, he had better not interfere, and so he does not. Then the guilty man says, "It does not signify what I do, I have a priest at the back of me, I shal be all right." Yet his sins are "the ruin of him" for all that. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

This man, Ahaz, had another thought within his mind; namely, that *he would imitate prosperous sinners.* "Look," said he, "at the king of Syria; see how he prospers! I will worship his gods, and then I shall prosper, too"; "but they were the ruin of him." That is where the emphasis of the text comes in. I have known a man say in deeds, if not in words, "I know what I will do. I have no trust in God, nor in His providence; but there is So-and-so, who has a very clever way of making money, I shall do as he does." Oh, the many who have found that this mode of action has been the ruin of them, when they have broken loose from the bonds of integrity and righteousness, and have begun to play fast and loose with honesty and truth! Take heed, dear friends, not to imitate the prosperous sinner; for if you do, you may be sure that following his plans will be the ruin of you. Envy not the man who gets rich by that which is not straightforward; for he must come to an evil end.

It was so with Ahaz, for *he abandoned the worship of God altogether.* He broke up the holy vessels of God's house, put out all the lamps which had burned perpetually, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord. This is the case, nowadays, with men who say that they have done with religion. Nobody in their house goes to a place of worship; they have no Bibles to bother them; they care nothing about the Sabbath-day. As for themselves, they never darken the doors of any house of prayer; you never see them there any more, and they say, "We have got rid of this, and of that, which used to be our custom"; but such conduct is the ruin of them. A man may harden himself until he becomes like the nether millstone, his conscience may seem to be suffocated, and the last spark of goodness to be extinct within him; but he cannot, for all that evade the impending doom; for his sins will be "the ruin of him." It is hard work to have to speak thus; but there are some who must have this stern truth spoken to them, lest they should die in their sins.

II. Secondly, and very briefly, I want you to look at THE MAN IN RUINS.

You say, perhaps, that you will never be in that state; you are not converted, but still you are honest, and upright, and truthful. Well, we shall see; or, at all events, God will see. I have beheld a man in ruins who once seemed a Christian man; he came in and out amongst his brethren, and they esteemed him. But he was in secret living a defiled life; he was unchaste, and that worm gnawed, and gnawed until, at last, his household was forsaken, domestic comfort was gone; and at this moment I scarcely know where he is. But no one wishes to know, for he has become so abandoned and so foul that those who knew him once can only sigh as they remember him.

I have known others of this sort. They were apparently doing well; they were admirable and excellent; they were the delight of every company in which they entered, but they took the intoxicating cup a little, and then a little more, and then secret drinking became visible by certain tokens upon the face; by-and-by, business was neglected, other things were not attended to, and now the man may be known by his very clothing; if he is not in rags, he is near to it; his character is gone, for he is a confirmed drunkard; he must own it, he cannot truthfully deny it. That is another kind of ruin. I have also seen a Christian young man, apparently, begin to go into bad company, and join with those who were merry fellows; it is true they scoffed at religion a little, but he winked at that, for he enjoyed their society. They flattered him, and now he has become just as bad as they are; instead of being shocked at infidel sentiments, he is the first to vent them,—a very ringleader in taking the chair of the scoffer, and sitting there a ruined man.

I have seen men ruined as to their peace. They once seemed bright and happy, but they are not so now, their laughter is but a mimic joy; they have sinned, they have turned aside from God and their peace is marred. In some, their character is ruined; those who know them cannot trust them; so their prospects are ruined. They went aside little by little and whereas we hoped they would have been useful and honourable men, they are the very reverse: they are like drowning men, they are themselves sinking, and they are pulling down others with them. Worst of all, their soul is ruined; and unless infinite mercy shall prevent, they are ruined for eternity, ruined past all hope save that one grand hope the door of which stands open, even to the dying sinner, by faith in Jesus Christ. But as yet they are ruined, utterly ruined, though once they seemed to bid as fair for goodness as any man in the world.

Whenever I see a ruin, I cannot help thinking of what it used to be; can you? Here, once sat knights at their tables, while the minstrel poured forth sweetest song; now, all is a desolation! So, in that man was once everything that was hopeful; you would have been glad to go to the house of God in company with him. Look at him now,—the victim of every passion, a waif and stray upon the great ocean of vice.

When you look at a ruin, you cannot help thinking what it might yet be. It was once a famous church where the praises of God rang out both at morn and even. It might be so still, but the roof is gone, the walls are tottering, and the windows let in the cold blasts. So, I see a man who once seemed to praise God, but he is a ruin, his sins have been "the ruin of him." What do you often find in a ruin? Go there at night, and hear the owl hooting to his fellow; go by day, and see all manner of loathsome creatures finding a harbour there. So, go to the ruined man, the man who once promised as well as any man amongst us, but who departed from God, and gave way to sin, and little by little went further and further

from the paths of uprightness. Think of him with sorrow. He has lost his opportunity; think what he might have been. Ah! and think what he is now through his sins. "They were the ruin of him."

If I had the time, I would like to indicate many things, perhaps to men here, that will be the ruin of them; but if there is one here who has begun to get away from God, who thinks that he can do without God, I do implore him to stop before he goes further, for sin will be "the ruin of him." There never was a man yet who made a good bargain with sin. There is not one man, now in eternity, whose course in this life is finished, who, when he takes his tablet to reckon up the result of a sinful life, can say that he was the gainer by it. What if it made him a king, if he waded through sin to a throne? What are his gains to-day? What if he grew rich; where is his wealth now? That solemn question of our Lord he can sorrowfully answer for himself now, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Oh, that God the blessed Spirit would send these warnings home to some who are beginning to trifle with sin, lest it should be the ruin of them!

III. I have one more point to dwell upon; not only was there a man in ruins but there were *others that were ruined with him*; for the text says, "They were the ruin of him, *and of all Israel.*"

Ahaz ruined all Israel as well as himself; this man perished not alone in his iniquity. My friends, if you perish in your sin, you will not perish alone. That is one of the most terrible things about evil. If I have preached to you, during my ministry here, false doctrines, and that which is not God's Word, there are many here who must perish with me; but then my lot would be more horrible than that of any one amongst you, if I have misled you, and if I have not been faithful. It will be an awful thing for a man who has occupied a pulpit, and yet has not preached the gospel, to go before the bar of God, and have to answer for the souls committed to him. That ancient message still needs to be heard: "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand." This it is that makes our work so weighty that our knees sometimes knock together when we are thinking of going up to our pulpit again. It is no child's play, sirs, if there is to be a judgment, and we are to answer for our faithfulness or unfaithfulness. What must be our account if we are not true to God and to man? "Don't speak so sharply," says one. "You are very dogmatic, sir," says another. I know what is said; but what is that, compared with clearing my conscience, so that I may stand up in the light of the last great day, an honest man? I have prayed many a time, that I might be able, at the end of my ministry, to say what George Fox, the Quaker, said when he was dying, "I am clear, I am clear." If we have been faithful in our testimony, if we have said what we felt, and have not hesitated to speak out for fear of sinful men, and never tried to put velvet on our lips, that we might restrain the Spirit's course within us, to earn the approbation of some few persons of taste, it will be well with us in the great day of account.

"Well," says someone, "I am not a minister." No, perhaps you are not; but are you a father? Suppose your boy perishes through your iniquity, what will you say to that? One day, I heard a man, who was given to drink, say to his son, "Open your shoulders, boy, and take it in like a man; I want you to drink like your father." Who but his father made that boy a drunkard? There was a father who dropped an oath. Do I mean you? you ask. Yes, if you are here to-night; then, when your boy took to cursing and swearing, you did not like it; but who taught him to swear? Are there not many men who will be the ruin of their children's souls? And are there not mothers, in a different rank of life, who train their daughters for gaiety and frivolity, who will have to answer for the ruin of their souls? Do you not think that there are people, who would like to be thought respectable who are planning to bring up their children to be victims to sin? They know they are not putting them where they are likely to come under good influences; but where, according to the order of nature, they will be led away from Christ, and from the service of God. O sirs, we all have vastly more influence than we reckon upon! The workingman in the shop thinks that he is the victim of his companions' bad example; but, if he had more backbone, he might be the master and leader of them. Now he follows suit, and goes in the swim; but if he were to be converted, how many he might influence for good! I thank God that, when men are really turned by His grace, those who have been the worst usually become the best. Did you not hear me speak just now, of grand old Hugh Latimer, who burned so bravely for the faith? Yet he was, before his conversion, one of the most thoroughgoing Papists in the world, and was so violent that he would have put to death every heretic that he got hold of; but when the grace of God arrested him, he became just as earnest for the gospel of Jesus Christ as he had been earnest against it. If sin will be the ruin of men,—and surely it will,—yet our Lord Jesus Christ knows how to take the ruined sinners, and build them up to be temples for His indwelling. Christ will take the very castaways of the devil, and use them for Himself. He delights to stoop over the dunghill, and pick up a broken vessel, that is thrown away, and make it into a vessel meet for the Master's use. Do we not sometimes sing to His praise that He hath taken us from the dunghill, and made us to sit amongst princes, even the princes of His people? Turn ye unto God, then, ye wanderers, turn ye unto Christ; it may be so with you! Look ye to the bleeding wounds of the great Redeemer! May His Spirit help you so to do at this very hour; and looking, you shall live, and then your sins shall not be the ruin of you; but the Repairer of these ruins shall come to build you up into a temple for His praise! The Lord bless these feeble words, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

LIFE IN EARNEST

"He did it with all his heart and prospered."—2 Chronicles xxxi. 21.

THIS is no unusual occurrence; in fact it seems to be the general rule of the moral universe that those men prosper who do their work with all their hearts, while those are almost certain to fail who go to their labour leaving half their hearts behind them. Look around you in business. Who are the young men who rise in the establishment? Not your men who sleep behind the counter, who are glad to avoid a customer. Employers soon discover those who throw energy into their work, and they like a young man who has "push" in him; he is sure to be promoted, and in time will become a trader on his own account. Who are the merchants that succeed in this busy time of competition? Your lazy sluggards? No; your men who are diligent in business, who do what they do with both their hands, who breast the current with all their strength, scorning to be carried down the stream to the cataract of bankruptcy. Who are your men who rise to eminence? Men do not go to bed and wake up in the morning to find themselves famous, at least not until they have encountered many stern labours; for God does not at this day give harvests to idle men except harvests of thistles; nor is He pleased to send wealth to the man who will not dig in the field to find its hid treasure. It is universally confessed that if a man would prosper, he must be diligent in business; for at this day, beyond every preceding age is it true, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread."

The same thing is true if we leave mercantile pursuits, and survey any other of the walks of life. If a man would make discoveries in science, he does not hit upon them by accident; but, being in the way, science meets with him. If a man would become eminent as a physician, he must walk the hospitals. If he would attain position at the bar, he must give days and nights to the folios of law. There is no hope for a man in these times in anything unless he proceeds to it with all his heart. It is the same in religion as it is in other things. I would not have you treat religion as though it were a business; but I would have you put as much force, and power, and energy, and heartiness, and earnestness into religion as ever you do into business, and, I might add, that it deserves far more. How is it that false religions have spread? What made Mahommedanism once so mighty in the earth? It was because Mahomet himself when he preached was as sincerely deluded as any of his followers: when he was pelted in the streets he still persevered, and when assassins dogged his footsteps he counted not his life dear unto him that he might proclaim what *he* thought to be a revelation from heaven. As for his followers, they were not sleepy professors; they drew their scimitars from their scabbards and swore that they would not rest till they had brought men by edge of steel to the faith of their prophet, and on they dashed till their religion, like a mighty rising ocean, swept all before it, nor could its rising wave be driven back till it was met by an equal enthusiasm to withstand its progress. Look again on Roman Catholic missions. How was it that Romanists did what we have never done, and what I fear we never shall do till we have changed our men? How was it that Francis Xavier carried his faith into India, preached in Burmah, obtained great influence in China, and even entered into the recesses of Japan, till everywhere you might see a Catholic convent or nunnery, and a cross lifted up, with devotees bowing before it? Because Xavier's spirit was full of fire. He seemed to be a flash of lightning flaming from one end of heaven to the other. Now mark, as it has been with false religions, so it must be with the true. Under God the Holy Spirit our only hope for the increase of the Church and for the conversion of the world lies in the development of energy within us, in the bringing out of earnestness in Christian souls. Oh! it was not scholarship that converted the heathen world at first, for on the slabs in the catacombs we have decisive evidence that the first Christians could scarcely spell their own names. It was not the pomp of learning, the pride of philosophy, or the power of eloquence, which made the early confessors so mighty; it was their singular earnestness. The Church was all on fire. She was like a volcano; she might not be high and lofty as some of the surrounding hills, but they had summits clothed with frost, while she sent forth earnest truths like streams of lava, which burned their way, and covered all the lands. Christians in those days were Christians indeed. They believed what they professed; they knew what they spoke; they testified what they had seen; and they spoke with an unconquerable, untameable energy, which smote even the iron power of Rome and dashed it into shivers. So must it be to-day, and indeed so is it. Look around you; who are the most useful men in the Christian Church to-day? The men who do what they undertake for God with all their hearts. Where is the preacher whom God blesses to the conversion of hundreds in a year? Is he a sleepy, prosaic soul? Does he confine himself within narrow limits? Does he speak sleepy words to a slumbering congregation? We know it is not so, but where God is pleased to give the congregation it is, whatever it may not be, a proof that there has been earnestness in the preacher. Who are the most successful Sabbath-school teachers? The most learned? Every superintendent will tell you it is not so. The most talented? The most wealthy? No; they are the most zealous; the men whose hearts are on fire; those are the men who honour Christ. Who among you to-day is doing the most for your Master's kingdom? I will tell you. Lend me a spiritual thermometer by which I may try the heat of your heart, and I will tell you the amount of your success. If your hearts be cold towards God, I am sure ye are doing nothing though ye may pretend to do it, but if ye can say, "Lord, our soul is all on flame with an agony of desire to do good to the souls of men;" then you are doing good, and God is blessing you as He did Hezekiah, who did it with all his heart and prospered.

Feeling that very many Christians are not Christians with all their hearts, and that perhaps some of you have only given Jesus Christ a dull,

cobwebby corner of your hearts, instead of bidding Him sit at the head of the table and reign upon the throne; fearing that we are all in danger of getting into a Laodician lukewarm state I wish to stir you up this morning, and if I may only stir myself up, I shall be thrice happy to go home and think that at least one has gotten some good from the service, for the preacher needs to be kept alive quite as much as the hearers, for there is a danger that even the Lord's servant may lack the live coal upon his lips, and then he will be useless to his hearers.

This morning we shall notice *the effects of wholeheartedness upon the Christian;* I shall then *endeavour to stir you up with many arguments to be earnest in your work of faith and labour of love;* and when I have so done, I shall *address those to whom religion has as yet been a trifling matter;* and God grant that they may be ready to seek the Lord with all their hearts, for then He will surely be found of them.

First, then, let us notice THE SPHERE WHICH CHRISTIAN EARNESTNESS OCCUPIES IN THE DIVINE LIFE. Mark, I speak now only to those who are really and savingly converted to God, for if we be not first right with God, zeal for God is but a pretence.

One of the first things that thorough earnestness will do for a Christian man, is to make him *think* very earnestly for his Lord and Master. In the diary of Jonathan Edwards, we find the following account of his feelings towards the Lord's work, "I had great longing for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world; my secret prayer used to be in great part taken up in praying for it. If I heard the least hint of anything that had happened in any part of the world, which appeared to me in some respect or other to have favourable aspect on the interest of Christ's kingdom, my soul eagerly caught at it, and it would much animate and refresh me. I used to be earnest to read public news letters, mainly for that end, to see if I could not find some news favourable to the interest of religion in the world." Now, when we are full of zeal for God, it is the same with us. Our thoughts are continually set upon things divine; go where we may we regard our place not as a sphere for business, but as a sphere for usefulness. We make that our very first thought. Why, beloved, if we are really in earnest for God, we shall begin to think of Christ's work in the world as soon as ever we wake; and when we rest at night it will be still with the Lord before us, and with His glory written in our hearts. I am afraid some of you think but very little of Him, and of His cause in the world. How often when our missionary heralds are issued, nobody cares to read them. The annual report of what God is doing in foreign nations is generally the driest and dullest affair that ever comes in our way—not so much dry in itself, but because we of this generation have not been tutored and schooled to think of the advance of the gospel and the progress of Christ's cause. Let once this flaming torch of zeal kindle your souls, and you will have Christ's cause upon your hearts at all times.

But when a man has thus had his soul quickened to consider the cause of Christ, the next thing he will do is to *plan* and to *purpose* for it. What fine purposes some men have at eccentric seasons! After they have listened to some earnest address they go home thinking,—"Well, I must do something;" and they half resolve they will, but, lacking the whole-heartedness of Hezekiah, the purpose never comes to a definite shape; it still resides in the clouds. As some men build castles in the air, so others build churches there, they educate preachers in the air, they support ministers in the sky, they send out fresh missionaries in the clouds. All their plans are very beautiful, and all practical schemes are poor affairs compared with their magnificent projects, but then it is all an unsubstantial dream—a pleasing picture, a dissolving view, and it soon melts into something which for them is more practical—the world and the affairs thereof. Give a man earnestness, and every time he makes a purpose it *is* a purpose; every stroke of the great motive-power within his soul tells, and sets a wheel in motion; he cannot let the blood circulate through him without its carrying life in every drop; but some men have dead blood in their veins, it is going round, going to the heart and issuing from it, but there is no life in a drop of it. They can talk, and they can sometimes make a resolve, but it never comes to a definite purpose; they never set their teeth and plant their feet down, and say, "God helping me, I will do something. God being with me, I will not live in this world for nothing. I will not be as an oyster which lies in the mud, and opens its shell according as the tide brings round the meal-time; it shall not be said that I live merely to eat and drink, and to accumulate wealth; but, O Christ Jesus! by everything that is true, if Thou wilt help me I will serve Thee while I live, and, if it must be, will be prepared to die for Thy cause." Only earnest men get so far as to select their purpose and adhere to it. Dear friends, choose your gun, but mind you stand to it till every round of ammunition is exhausted.

But we have known persons in a great spasm—in a sort of apoplectic fit of pious enthusiasm, make a huge resolve, but they came to their cooler senses long before it was carried out. The blood has run to the head very powerfully, there has even been too much blood; they have rolled over in the spasm of fanaticism; it has never come to a practical effect. Now, when a man's heart is right with God, what he has resolved to do he will do. I can speak for one, when I say I know a man who, when he feels that God has given him work to do—when he has once resolved it shall be done, would move heaven and earth but what he would accomplish it; and he would sooner break his heart or destroy his health than he would fail in it; for he feels that if it be God's work, it must be done. Man's work may stop, but God's work cannot; and when any get in his way, or seem to thwart his purpose, that man feels his zeal so boiling over, that for God's sake he forgets everything else; and even dear friendships snap when it appears as if Christ's cause were imperilled. I know this, that when a man gets thoroughly alive for God, he cannot put up with those lazy sluggards who will neither work themselves or permit others to labour. When once a believer gets his spirit wholly up to the work, it is now—for God and Christ, follow who may; but as for ye that are faint-hearted, go to your homes lest ye make also the man-of-God's heart to faint; stand ye away, lest the chilling influence of your icy souls should do something to abate our fervour. Methinks a Christian is never worth much till, having been brought up to the point of resolve, he will achieve the heaven-born purpose, come what may, and is ready everything earthly and worldly to crash and smash, but what he will accomplish his life-work in the name of the eternal God who called him to it.

This earnestness of purpose will show itself in *perseverance*. The man fell the first time: "Never mind," saith he, "it is God's work; we will try again" He breaks down again: but he falls to rise. There he sees the mountain-summit glittering in the sunlight; and though he has a burden on his back, he vows, "I will climb there." He has fallen down that crag, and he lies there black with bruises, groaning, and moaning. The first thing he does when he wipes his eyes of the dust, is to look up, and say, "I will mount there yet." He climbs anon—but an antagonist shoves him down. He has not time to stop and examine who it is and resent the insult, but he recommences the ascent. Now and then he runs; when he cannot run he walks; and when he cannot walk he creeps; and when it seems impossible to go on hands and knees, he is content to pull himself up by his hands alone, at times even grasping a briar and sending a thorn into his flesh, but still saying, "It is God's place, and He has bid me climb, and in His divine strength I will do it. I cannot rest, I cannot be quiet till the deed be done." Perseverance is the sure effect of this whole-heartedness for God.

Mark carefully, that this heart being thus on fire will show its zeal in an entire dependence upon God, and in intensely fervent prayer for God's help and for God's blessing. Surely a man cannot know himself, who, when he has a high and noble purpose attempts it apart from God, for he is well persuaded that if it be God's work it must be done in God's strength, and as he must have that strength, he goes before God as if he meant to have it and could take no denial. One of the old Puritans says, "When we pray to God without fervency we do as it were ask Him to deny us, but when we can go with fervency, then we must prevail." Oh! those prayers which one has sometimes heard when the man of God seemed like a Samson to get hold of the two pillars of heaven bowing himself with all his strength to pull down the mercy and to destroy his sins, knocks at heaven's gate as for dear life, the knock of a starving beggar who cannot afford to be unheard. Oh! that is prevailing prayer, when we can get a grip of the angel and wrestle with him. I saw in one of the churches in Paris a picture by an eminent artist representing Jacob wrestling with the angel. I had not exactly conceived it so literally as the artist had, for he has sketched the patriarch with his foot between the angel's feet, trying to throw him down, and wrestling just as wrestlers might do in the ring. There ought to be a practical purpose about our prayer, and as intense an earnestness to win the blessing from the angel as there is on the part of the wrestler to hurl his foe upon his back. We shall never get true and lasting revival in the Church till we have men who in the supplications do their work with all their hearts, and thus prosper.

My dear friends, I shall not enlarge further to show you the proper sphere of earnestness,—the fact is that it enters into every part of the spiritual man; earnestness quickens his pulse, increases the circulation of his blood, it makes the man in all respects in an healthy state; these holy stimulants make the soul stronger than the giant when he is refreshed with new wine. If you would ask me what fire has to do with the Christian sacrifice, I would answer it has everything to do with it. You may present a sacrifice in the dark, but you cannot consume a sacrifice without flame, you may do with very little light, but you must have fire to burn the whole victim, or else the sacrifice is no offering at all. Oh for more of this fire! Jesus! Master! baptize us with the Holy Ghost and with fire! Fill our souls with fervour; restore unto us the indomitable energy of our ancestors; give us back the northern iron and steel, to which their resolute natures may be likened; deliver us from these willow days in which men bend before every blast: make us strong men to run the race of righteousness, and mighty men made mighty through Thy Spirit, with earnestness to serve Thee among the sons of men!

II. I shall want your earnest attention while I labour TO STIR YOU UP BY CERTAIN ARGUMENTS WHICH MAY PROVOKE YOU TO THIS EARNESTNESS.

Either our religion is the grossest imposture that was ever palmed upon mankind, or else it is one which deserves the whole life and force and strength of every man who has been blessed by it. I would to-day, if I were not sure that God's Word is true, and that the precious doctrines of grace are the very revelation of heaven, renounce them boldly. Oh! I could not, I hope—I speak before God—hold the religion of Christ, and yet be sleepy about it. It does seem to me that if religion is worth anything, it is worth everything: and that for man to keep his godliness as some great farmers do their little off-hand farms, which they merely farm for pleasure, while their very life and substance is spent in another place, seems to me to be the height of wickedness, and the topmost ridge of absurdity. Either I would never seek God and His righteousness at all, or I would seek them *first*. It seems to me to be an insane attack upon everything like wisdom, to put the worst things first, and the best things last—to put the world on our heads, and heaven under our feet—to make Christ second best, and to make Mammon chief and lord in our affections. Surely this will never do.

But, Christian men, that I may have your hearts warmed this morning; may the Spirit of God take these things and lay them like hot coals to your souls. Remember, my beloved brethren, what solemn things you and I have to deal with. We have to deal with the souls of men, immortal, infinitely precious; we have to deal under God with the eternal interests of heaven and hell; we have dealings with the sinner's sin, and long to see it washed away with the precious blood of Christ; we have dealings with man's natural death in sin, and long that men may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Now, if the soul be what Scripture tells us it is—if there be heaven and hell—if Christ has made an atonement for sin these are things that cannot be trifled with. As well dance upon the altar of God, or dabble a harlot's garments in the blood of the Paschal Lamb, as trifle and be half-hearted when we have to deal with such awful things as these.

Consider *the greatness of the work we have to deal with*. Have any of you a glimpse of an idea of this one city of London? Three millions! Three millions! as many as the Scottish nation, with some sixty thousand added to the number every year; more added than we add accommodation in places of worship to receive them, so that if our churches grow, still not in the same ratio as the population. It is said that we have more than half-a-million of inhabitants in this city heathens—as positively heathens as though they lived under the sway of the king of Dahomey, or dwelt in the very centre of Tartary—without God and without Christ, never

listening to the gospel, never entering a place of worship from the beginning of the year to the end of it. This is the work for which we must gird up our loins. O, dear brethren! we cannot afford to be half-hearted here. If there be some happy city somewhere in the world, where all men hear the Word, and where the most are converted, even there coldness were inexcusable; but here, here in this awful city with so much to do, asleep!! Oh! God forgive us that we are not more awake! Think how few there are to do the work. There are, perhaps, many so-called labourers, men who wear the robes of priesthood, but who know not Christ in the power of His gospel. How few there are of the faithful among men who are ready to spend and be spent! When I look at the great harvest—enlarge your thoughts for a moment, the field is the world—when I see corn-field after corn-field, a thousand millions of immortal souls; and in some countries one missionary to two millions, and in others, not one even to ten millions of immortal souls, one may wipe the sweat from his brow in the hot and sultry day, but only the cold-hearted will stop to rest, for there is so much to do. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few." And shall those labourers sleep? O Lord, we beseech Thee have pity upon us, and help us never to sleep again, but to be in earnest for poor souls.

Bethink you, I pray you, how earnest Satan is. If *we* slumber, *he* never does; if we are idle, certainly me never is. As Hugh Latimer said, the devil is the most busy prelate in the land; he traverses his diocese; he is always visiting his flock; he is instant in season and out of season to destroy. See the activity of the infidel and the Romanist, of those who hold false doctrines, how zealously do they compass sea and land to make one proselyte. What are we doing? I say brethren, what are we doing? Call it nothing, and you have not called it by too small a name; they are alive, and we are half dead; they are boiling in fervent heat, and we are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm.

And, O! I pray you, my hearers, think, and let this move you; think of the responsibilities which lie upon us as a Church. I speak not egotistically to glorify either myself personally or myself in you. But there has never been a congregation—certainly never a dissenting congregation—which has been more favoured than we have been. What has God wrought! What a dew from heaven has rested upon the Word! What multitudes have been added to the Church! What manner of people ought we to be! Indeed, brethren, I do not need to censure, for your obligations are felt, and the Holy Spirit is helping you to fulfil them. There are men in the midst of this Church of whom I dare speak in any and in every company, and say that apostolic days scarcely produced men superior to them. I have the felicity and the honour to see some in this Church who are patterns of everything that is good, and who not only spend their time for Christ, but who beyond what I ever expected to see of mortal men, give labour, substance, and talent to Christ and His cause. Those I always look upon with joy as being the honourable product of truth fully, fairly, and faithfully preached. But there are many others of whom this could not be said. Oh, we were speaking lies in hypocrisy if we said of all of you that you were doing what you could do, or half what you can do, aye, and in some cases a hundredth part of what you will wish you had done when you come to lie upon your beds. God has been pleased to give a congregation, and to give to that congregation a ministry upon which the Spirit has rested, as is manifested in the many, the very many conversions which daily take place in our midst. The Christian world has looked upon us and said, "How God has favoured that Church!" And if *we* sleep, what base ungrateful wretches shall we be? If God has brought us to the kingdom for such a time as this, and we prove unworthy, deliverance will come from some other quarter to this land, but we shall have to write Ichabod upon these walls, for the glory will depart; God will leave us to our own devices. We have had opportunities of doing good that have been seldom offered to any body of Christians, and if we do not avail ourselves of them, the most withering curse that ever came upon a Christian community must most certainly fall upon us. Oh! may God help us to be found faithful to our charge.

Do you need aught else to stir you up? Behold before you to-day the stream of death washing away myriads of souls: behold, I say, before you this morning the dying souls of men. Hark! their moans are going up to heaven now, the groans which they utter in their last agonies are accusing you before the Most High. "None cared for my soul," is the cry of many. "Great God, I lived in a Christian land but none cared for my soul. I lived in a court or in an alley, and Christian people passed the entrance of that alley to go to chapel but they never thought about me; I lived next door to a Christian man but he never prayed for me; I lived in a top room of the very house where there lived a man of God but he never thought of *me*!". Oh! hear those last cries, I say, as the Spirit for the last time reflects upon the cold Church which cared not for her children. Hear the accusation of the angel as he cries, "The sea-monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them." Hear, I beseech you, and let it startle you into earnestness—hear the shrieks of the damned spirits for a moment. Another soul has gone to hell, and while we speak, another, and another, and another. Listen to the solemn fall, the moving of the black waters as they close around the sinking spirit. As roll the masses of water down Niagara's steep, so roll the waves of souls into perdition; and ye, ye are the men whom God has sent to be the saviours of the world; will ye waste the moments and neglect your charge? Black night has settled upon the nations, and ye, ye only are the men who carry the flaming torch into the thick darkness—followers of Christ, disciples of Jesus; ye are to be the deliverers of those who sit in the valley of the shadow of death bound in affliction and iron, and will you sit still, will you fold your arms, will you give to the world and self that which belongs to Christ? Let my tears conjure you. But what are these if shrieks of doomed souls cannot awake us. What hearts of adamant we must have not to feel while the terrors of hell are around us! What granite bowels must we have received if we believe that men are being lost, and yet never care for them! Oh! sits there a Christian man anywhere around me, above, or beneath, who is careless, for man's soul? I pray God to send into his ears one piercing shriek from Tophet, and let that abide in his memory, and

ring in his soul until he says, "I *must* do something to win sinners to Christ."

But once more, and if I fail here I break down altogether. I conjure myself and you to serve God with all our hearts, because of that love which we have received of Jesus. See, there He hangs: my eye beholds Him. His head is crowned with thorns; His feet are pierced with nails; His hands are dropping with blood. Jesus! Master! Thou art dying for me; that precious heart's blood of Thine is flowing for my redemption and for my cleansing. At Thy feet I fall and kiss Thee. O Thou Lover of my soul, I cannot but love Thee, Thou hast won my heart. The love of Christ constraineth me! And dost Thou, Lord, for sinners bleed, for rebels, for enemies, for those who would not have Thee to reign over them, and shall I not adore Thee? Yes, but when I rise from my knees, shall I go forth into the world and forget Thee? Thorn-crowned head, shall I forget Thee? Pierced hands and feet, shall I forget ye? Mangled body, shall I forget Thee? Slaughtered Emmanuel, shall I forget Thee? God forbid.

> "Sooner than not my Saviour love,
> Oh! may I cease to be."

Beloved, what say you, will you look into His face and never weep for souls? Will you look upon His wounds and your heart never be wounded for poor dying men? Will ye live unto yourselves and die unto yourselves? Sirs, the infidel is not far wrong when he tells us that our religion is hypocrisy, if we can be half-hearted over it. Go, go thou enemy of the Church, tell it in Gath; publish it in the streets of Ascalon, till we become a hissing and a reproach if thou shalt find us living, as though truth were a lie, and as though the doctrines revealed of God were but a delusion and an imposture! Wake up, Church of God, wherefore art thou given to slumber? Oh for a voice like thunder! How would I conjure thee to wake! But what am I, more than half asleep myself? As I read the life of such men as Alleine of Taunton, and Baxter of Kidderminster, Grimshaw of Haworth, and Whitfield of Everywhere, I blush at my cold heart. Especially when perusing the life of our apostle Paul, I blush a thousand times to think how idly I have lived. Sinners, these were men: the tears streamed down their cheeks when they thought of sinners lost for ever; their words froze not like icicles upon their lips, they spake, and every word was power. Oh how they pleaded! How Paul could say, "Night and day with tears," (hear how he puts it,) "as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." *He* surely could not accuse himself that he had not poured out his soul for men. No, these men *lived*. We dare not say we live. Oh! the long-suffering, and the tender mercy of God, that He has had compassion on such a Church as that of the present day, and that He continues to have mercy upon us, when we are so dull and sluggish in the service of Christ.

Even while I am preaching thus I feel sorry that we should have need of such a sermon. When the Spartans went to battle every Spartan marched with songs, willing to fight; but when the Persians went to the conflict, you could hear as the regiments came on the crack of whips, as the officers drove their soldiers to the fight. You need not wonder that a few Spartans were more than a match for thousands of Persians, that in fact they were like lions in the midst of sheep. So let it be with the Church; never needing to be flogged to action, but full of an irrepressible life which longs for conflict against everything which is contrary to God. Then we should be like lions in the midst of herds of our enemies, and nothing, through God, should be able to stand against us. Play no longer, men! Cease your pipings and dancings in the market places. Come, lift up your hands from those childish toys, come away men, come away from the dormitories where you sleep so luxuriously, and from the playgrounds where you sport so merrily! Get to something that is worth doing, to something that is high and noble, and heavenly, befitting your birth. "What is this you are calling play?" say you. Why your work, your business, your cares, unless they are sanctified to God. I tell you, sirs, that in the light of eternity all things else save serving God are mere child's-play, mere theatricals, mere masquerading. They are but the mummeries of a carnival, the jests of a comedy, the laughter of a pantomine. It is only serving God that is doing immortal work; it is only living for Christ that is living at all.

III. And now I must draw to a conclusion; may God give me fresh grace while I undertake the solemn work of DEALING WITH CARELESS AND UNCONVERTED SOULS.

When Mr. Whitfield was preaching in the parish church of Haworth, he said when he came to the point of self-examination, "I was about to address the ungodly, but I suppose that after the faithful ministry to which you have listened in this church, there is very little need for me to say anything about this." Mr. Grimshaw thereupon rose and said, "Brother Whitfield, don't flatter them, I fear that half of them are going to hell with their eyes open." And I must say this morning, blessing God for all the conversions that have taken place here, yet for God's sake we dare not flatter you, there are many of you still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, as far from God as ever you were; though we have wept over you and preached to you again and again, yet your hard hearts will not break. Hitherto ye have been proof against all that we can do, and until the Spirit of God shall come upon you, we fear that you will remain the same; but now in God's name let us talk to you.

And so, my hearers, you think that the things of God are not worth serious thought, at least not yet, if they are not altogether trifling things, they are of such secondary importance that any time will do. The scrag end of your life will suffice, you think for them. Now let me remind you who may be sporting with these things, that this is inconsistent with reason and sense. You will find dying to be very earnest work. It will be no amusement to be smitten by the hand of death, to go to your death-bed with your physician's voice in your ear, "Nothing can be done for you, you may linger for a little while, but you must die." When the death-struggle comes on, when death gets you, when the grim monster shakes you till you feel every bone rattle, when they wipe the death sweat of the last conflict from your brow, when the darkness steals over your eyes, when your extremities chill with death, when the voice is choked, when the death-rattle is in your throat, oh! sirs, you will not laugh then, you will not say these things are fancies, you will have no hard words in those last moments against those who warned you. Men

laughed at Noah when he built his ark upon dry land, but when they were climbing to the mountain tops to escape the inundating waves, they had no material for jest and satire. Then their tears, and cries, and groans proved that they felt the truth of Noah's preaching of righteousness. It will be so with you; mark, whosoever shall be the witness of it; you will find death no child's play. And then comes the judgment. The heavens are on fire, the earth is shaking; the Judge is sitting and the books are opened, will you laugh then when you hear your name proclaimed with the addition "Come to judgment, come away?" When the fire-eye of the Judge shall be fixed upon you, and He shall turn to that page which records your deeds, and shall solemnly read them while men and angels hear. Sinner! Sinner! it is enough to drive the laughter out of thee this morning if thou wouldst but hear even the distant echo of the awful Voice which shall pronounce the sentence, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels." After the judgment, what comes then, sinner? Then cometh wrath without end. God will deal with thee. His bare arm shall smite you. Beware, lest He tear you to pieces, and there be none to deliver you. In eternity, mercy's gates are shut; God's longsuffering is now over. Justice commences its awful work. Soul, thou wilt have no merry jests in hell; thou wilt find no laughter there at God's mysteries. O, ye may go on trifling now, my hearers, but then ye will not. Ye may say, a little more sleep, and a little more slumber, but there will be none of it then. Oh, how you will look back upon the misspent past and wish, but wish in vain, that you had never been created, sooner than that ye should have lived to lose your only hope of salvation, your only time in which you might find salvation. O God, my God. I beseech Thee plead with men, for we are weak; plead with them, and make them feel that neither death, nor judgment, nor hell, are things to be trifled with! Will you remember, ye who are the butterflies of the day, the insects who flit from flower to flower, remember that Christ did not trifle when He came into the world to save souls. His was no life spent in the polished refinements of gaiety; His was stern awful life; His was a zeal that ate Him up. When He sweat great drops of blood, it was no light burden He had to carry upon those blessed shoulders, and when He poured out His heart, it was no weak effort He was making for the salvation of His people. Ah, sinner! ah, sinner! was Christ in earnest, and are you foolish? Was Christ in earnest, I say, and do you despise, do you forget, do you neglect this great salvation? I may add, the ministers whom God sends are in earnest. I can say at this moment, I do feel a longing for the conversion of my hearers, such as I cannot describe. I would count it a high privilege if I might sleep in death this morning, if that death could redeem your souls from hell. But why is it that we can feel—Oh that we felt more!—why is it that we can weep when you do not? What is your soul to us compared with what it must be to you? If we warn you and you perish, your blood will not be required at our hand; it is only if we are cold and indifferent, that we shall be held responsible; but when we have poured out our heart unto you, when we have stretched out our arms, and like a loving mother with a child, have sought to bring you to the arms of Jesus, we have done all that we can do, we must leave the rest with God. But how is it, why is it that *you* can trifle? It is your own salvation, not mine; it is your own eternal state; it is you that will lie for ever in the pit, or joyously climb to heaven; it is you sinner, yourself, not your neighbour, not the person that is sitting next to you, but you, standing there in the crowd, or you yonder—each of you personally. Oh! why should *we* be earnest and *you* be dull? God forgive you this sin, and forbid you to trifle longer.

But lastly, you will find God to be in earnest when He comes to punish you; when He lets loose His terrors on you, you shall find it no sport; when the arrow which is to-day fitted to the string shall be let fly, ye shall find it to be no babe's toy; when the sword which has been long in furbishing, and which is bathed in heaven, shall begin to cut, ye may say to it, "Oh, sword, when wilt thou rest, when wilt thou be quiet"; but it will know no rest, for it will be awfully and solemnly in earnest with you, punishing you for your sins. Would now that one could awake you; would that every heart here felt the need of whole-heartedness towards God; but you will not mind it, you will go away, and I shall be unto you as one that playeth a tune upon a goodly instrument, and it will all be forgotten. There was a tear just now—perhaps rather a tear of sympathy excited by earnestness than a tear from your own hearts, for your own case, but you will go away and forget it all, and you will come again and forget it again; and we shall go on praying with you, and preaching to you, but you will forget it; and one day it will be said, "So-and-so is dead, he died without a hope," and though it will be some consolation, yet what a sad one for the minister to be able to say, "Well, as in the sight of God, I did all I could, I did warn, teach, exhort, and plead with him." Oh! how much better if God shall bless the Word to you, and we shall hear you tell that He took you up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock and established your goings. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Faith in Christ is the great way of salvation. Trust Jesus, trust Him with all thy heart, and thou art saved this morning, and thy sins are gone; and when thou art saved thyself, I pray thee forget not what I have tried to instil this morning—that if we serve God with all our heart we shall prosper in His ways; and that we cannot expect to see His blessing upon anything that we do, unless we do it as unto the Lord and not unto men.

MANASSEH

"Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God."—2 Chronicles xxxiii. 13.

MANASSEH is one of the most remarkable characters whose history is written in the sacred pages. We are accustomed to mention his name in the list of those who greatly sinned, and yet found great mercy—side by side with Saul of Tarsus, with that great sinner who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and with the thief that died upon the cross—a forgiven sinner at the eleventh hour, we are wont to write the name of Manasseh, who "shed innocent blood very much," and notwithstanding that, was forgiven and pardoned, finding mercy through the blood of a Saviour who had not then died, but whom God foresaw should die, and the merits of whose sacrifice He therefore imputed to so great a transgressor as Manasseh.

Without preface we shall enter on the history of Manasseh this morning, and consider him in a three-fold light: first, as *a sinner*, then as *an unbeliever*, and thirdly, as *a convert*. It may be there shall be some Manasseh within these walls now, and if in describing the case of this ancient king of Israel I shall in some degree describe him, I trust he will take to himself the same consoling truths which were the means of the comfort of Manasseh when in the dungeon of repentance.

I. First, then, we shall consider MANASSEH IN HIS SIN.

1. And we note, first, that he belonged to that class of sinners who stand first in the phalanx of evil—namely, those *who sin against great light, against a pious education and early training*. Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah, a man who had some faults, but of whom it is nevertheless said, "He did right in the sight of the Lord." To a great degree he walked before God with a perfect heart, even as did David his father. We cannot suppose that he neglected the education of his son Manasseh. He was the son of his old age. You will remember that at a time of heavy sickness God promised him that he should have his life prolonged fifteen years. Three years after that event Manasseh was born, and he was, therefore, only twelve years old when his father died; still he was old enough to remember the pious prayer of a father and a mother, and had arrived at sufficient maturity to understand right from wrong, and to have received those early impressions which we believe are, in most cases, eminently useful for after-life. And yet Manasseh pulled down what his father had built up, and built up the idol temples which his father had pulled down. Now, it is a notorious fact, that men who do go wrong after a good training are the worst men in the world. You may not know, but it is a fact, that the late lamented murder of Williams at Erromanga, was brought about by the evil doings of a trader who had gone to the island, and who was also the son of a missionary. He had become reckless in his habits, and treated the islanders with such barbarity and cruelty, that they revenged his conduct upon the next white man who put his foot on their shore; and the beloved Williams, one of the last of the martyrs, died a victim of the guilt of those who had gone before him. The worst of men are those who, having much light, still run astray. You shall find amongst the greatest champions of the camp of hell, men who were brought up and educated in our very ranks. It is not necessary that I should mention names; but any of you that are acquainted with those who are the leaders of infidelity at the present time will at once recognize the fact. And such men actually make the very worst of infidels; while the best of Christians often come from the very worst of sinners. Our John Bunyans have come from the pot-house and the tap-room, from the bowling-alley, or places lower in the scale; our best of men have come from the very worst places, and have been the best adapted to reclaim sinners, because they themselves had stepped into the kennel, and had nevertheless been washed in a Saviour's cleansing blood. And so it is true that the worst of the enemies of Christ are those who are nourished in our midst, and like the viper of old, which the husbandman nursed in his bosom, turned round to sting the bosom which has nurtured them. Such an one was Manasseh.

2. In the next place, *Manasseh as a sinner was a very bold one*. He was one of those men who do not sin covertly, but who, when they transgress, do not seem to be at all ashamed, who are born with brazen foreheads, and lift their faces to heaven with insolence and impudence. He was a man who, if he would set up an idol, as you would see by reading this chapter, did not set it up in an obscure part of the land, but put it in the very temple of God; and when he would desecrate the name of the Most High, he did not privily go to his chapel, where he might worship some evil deity, but he put the deity into the very temple itself, as if to insult God to His very face. He was a desperado in sin, and went to the utmost limit of it, being very bold, and desperately set on mischief. Now, whether it be for right or wrong, boldness is always sure to win the day. Give me a coward—you give me nothing; give me a bold man, and you give me one that can do something, whether for Christ's cause or for the devil's. Manasseh was a man of this kind. If he cursed God, it was with a loud voice; it was not in hole or corner, but upon his throne, that he issued proclamations against the Most High, and in the most daring manner insulted the Lord God of Israel. And yet, dear friends, this man was saved, notwithstanding all this. This greatest sinner, this man who had trampled on his father's prayers, who had wiped from his brow the tears which had been shed there by an anxious parent, who had stifled the convictions of his conscience, and had gone to an extremity of guilt, in bold, open, and desperate sin, yet this man was at last, by divine grace, humbled and brought on his knees to acknowledge that God was God alone. Let no man, therefore, despair of his fellow. I never do, since I think and hope that God has saved me. I am persuaded that, live as long as I may, I shall never see the individual of whom I can say, "That man is a hopeless case." I may peradventure meet with the person who has been so exhorted and so warned, and has so put off all the sweet wooings of his con-

science that he has become seared and hardened, and consequently apparently hopeless; but I shall never meet a man who has sinned so desperately that I can say of him he never can be saved. Ah! no; that arm of mercy which was long enough to save me is long enough to save you; and if He could redeem you from transgression, assuredly there are none sunk lower than you were, and therefore you may believe that His arm of mercy can reach them. Above all, let no man despair of himself. Whilst there is life there is hope. Give not up yourselves unto Satan's arms. He tells you that your death-warrant is sealed, that your doom is cast, and that you never can be saved. Tell him to his face that he is a liar, for that Jesus Christ "is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

3. Again, Manasseh was a sinner of that peculiar caste which we suspect is not to be found very frequently. He was one of those who *had the power of leading others* to a very large extent astray from the truth and religion of God. He was a king, and had, therefore, great influence; what he commanded was done. Among the ranks of idolators Manasseh stood first, and it was the song and glory of the false priests that the king of Judah was on the side of the gods of the heathen. He was the leader—the first man in the battle. When the troops of the ungodly went to war against the God of the whole earth, Manasseh led the vanguard, and cheered them on. He was their great Goliath, challenging all the armies of the living God. Many amongst the wicked stood back and feared the conflict; but he never feared. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast"; and therefore he was bold and arrogant in leading others astray. There are some such still alive—men not content with treading the broad road themselves, but seeking to entice others into it. And oh, how active they are in their efforts! They will go from house to house, and distribute those publications which are impure and polluting; they will stand in our streets, and endeavour to draw around them the young, aye, men and women just fresh come from the house of God, or going to God's sanctuary, to tell them that dreary story that there is no God, or the dismal falsehood that there is no future, but that we must all die like dogs and suffer annihilation. There are some such who never seem to be happy unless they are leading others astray. It is not enough for them to go alone against God, but they must sin in company. Like the woman in the Proverbs, they hunt for precious life, and like hounds thirsting for blood, they are seeking after men to destroy them. Society now is like Prometheus: it is, to a great extent, bound hand and foot by the very customs that surround us, and like Prometheus, we have upon us the winged hound of hell perpetually tapping at our heart and swallowing the life-blood of our spirit. I mean we have that accursed infidelity which seeks to lead men from God and drive them from their Maker. But, nevertheless, leaders amongst them have yet been saved. Manasseh, the leader of those who hated God, was yet humbled, and made to love the Most High.

Do you ask me whether such cases ever occur now? I answer, yes they do; too rarely, but yet they do happen. Yesterday I received something which cheered my heart very much, and made me bless my God, that notwithstanding all opposition, He had still made me of some little use in the world. I received a long letter from a certain city, from one who has been one of the leaders of the secular society in that place. The writer says, "I purchased one of the pamphlets entitled 'Who is this Spurgeon?' and also your portrait (or a portrait sold as yours) for 3d. I brought these home, and exhibited them in my shop window. I was induced to do so from a feeling of derisive pleasure. The title of the pamphlet is, naturally, suggestive of caricature, and it was especially to incite that impression that I attached it to your portrait and placed it in my window. But I also had another object in view. I thought by its attraction to improve my trade. I am not at all in the book or paper business, which rendered its exposure and my motive the more conspicuous. I have taken it down now: *I am taken down too.* . . . I had bought one of your sermons of an infidel a day or two previous. In that sermon I read these words—'They go on; that step is safe—they take it; the next is safe—they take it; their foot hangs over a gulf of darkness.' I read on, but the word darkness staggered me. It was all dark with me. 'True, the way has been safe so far, but I am lost in bewilderment. No, no, no, I will not risk it.' I left the apartment in which I had been musing, and as I did so, the three words, 'Who can tell?' seemed to be whispered at my heart. I determined not to let another Sunday pass without visiting a place of worship. How soon my soul might be required of me I knew not, but felt that it would be mean, base, cowardly, not to give it a chance. Aye, my associates may laugh, scoff, deride, call me coward, turncoat, I will do an act of justice to my soul. I went to chapel; I was just stupified with awe. What could I want there? The doorkeeper opened his eyes wider, and involuntarily demanded, "It's Mr. —— isn't it?' 'Yes,' I said, 'it is.' He conducted me to a seat, and afterwards brought me a hymn-book. I was fit to burst with anguish. 'Now,' I thought, 'I am here, if it be the House of God, heaven grant me an audience, and I will make a full surrender. O God, show me some token by which I may know that Thou art, and that Thou wilt in no wise cast out the vile deserter who has ventured to seek thy face and Thy pardoning mercy.' I opened the hymn-book to divert my mind from feelings that were rending me, and the first words that caught my eyes were—

> "Dark, dark indeed the grave would be
> Had we no light, O God, from Thee."

After giving some things which he looks upon as evidences that he is a true convert of religion, he closes up by saying, "O sir, tell this to the poor wretch whose pride, like mine, has made him league with hell; tell it to the hesitating and to the timid; tell it to the cooling Christian, that God is a very present help to all that are in need. . . . Think of the poor sinner who may never look upon you in this world, but who will live to bless and pray for you here, and long to meet you in the world exempt from sinful doubts, from human pride, and backsliding hearts." Ah, he need not ask my forgiveness, I am happy, too happy, in the hope of calling him "brother" in the Christian Church. This letter is from a place many miles from this city, and from a man who had no small standing among the ranks of those who hate Christ. Ah! there have been Manassehs saved, and there shall be yet. There have

been men who hated God, who have leaped for joy, and said—

> "I'm forgiven, I'm forgiven,
> I'm a miracle of grace."

and have kissed the very feet which once they scorned and scoffed, and could not bear to hear the mention of.

There is one fact concerning Manasseh which stamps him as being a very prince of sinners, namely this: "He caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom," and dedicated his sons unto Tophet. This was a dreadful sin; for though Manasseh repented, we find that his son Amon followed in the steps of his father in his wickedness, but not in his righteousness. Listen! "Amon was two-and-twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem. But he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more." Children will imitate their fathers in their vices, seldom in their repentance, if parents sin, their children will follow them, without much doubt; but when they repent and turn to God, it is not so easy to lead a child back in the way which it has once forsaken. Are there any here, who, like that ancient Carthagenian, have dedicated their sons to the opposition of their enemy. You remember one who dedicated his son Hannibal from his very birth to be the everlasting enemy of the Romans. There may be such a man here, who has dedicated his offspring to Satan, to be the everlasting enemy of Christ's gospel, and is trying to train up and tutor him in a way which is contrary to the fear of the Lord. Is such a man hopeless? His sin is dreadful, his state is dreary, his sin without repentance will assuredly damn him; but so long as he is here, we still will preach repentance to him, knowing that Manasseh was brought to know God, and was forgiven all his manifold sins.

II. The second aspect in which we are to regard Manasseh is as an UNBELIEVER; for it appears that Manasseh did not believe that Jehovah was God alone; he was, therefore, a believer in false gods, but an unbeliever, so far as the *truth* is concerned. Now, does it not strike you at the outset, that while Manasseh was an unbeliever in the truth, he must have been a very credulous person to believe in all the imaginary deities of the heathen? In fact, the most credulous persons in the world are unbelievers. It takes ten thousand times more faith to be an unbeliever than to be a believer in revelation. One man comes to me and tells me I am credulous, because I believe in a great First Cause who created the heavens and the earth, and that God became Man and died for sin, I tell him I may be, and no doubt am very credulous, as he conceives credulity, but I conceive that which I believe is in perfect consistency with my reason, and I therefore receive it. "But," saith he, "*I* am not credulous—not at all." Sir, I say, I should like to ask you one thing. You do not believe the world was created by God. "No." You must be amazingly credulous, then, I am sure. Do you think this Bible exists without being made? If you should say I am credulous, because I believe it had a printer and a binder, I should say you were infinitely more credulous, if you assured me that it was not made at all. And should you begin to tell me one of your theories about creation—that atoms floated through space, and came to a certain shape, I should resign the palm of credulity to you. You believe, perhaps, moreover, that man came to to be in this world through the improvement of certain creatures. I have read that you say, that there were certain monads—that these monads improved themselves until they came to be small animalcules—that afterwards they grew into fishes—that these fishes wanted to fly, and then wings grew—that by-and-by they wanted to crawl, and then legs came, and they became lizards, and by divers steps they then became monkeys, and then the monkeys became men, and you believe yourself to be cousin-german to an orang-outang. Now, I may be very credulous, but really not so credulous as you are. I may believe very strange things; I may believe that, with the jawbone of an ass, Samson slew a thousand men; I may believe that the earth was drowned with water, and many other strange things, as you call them; but as for your creed, your non-creed, "'tis strange, 'tis passing strange, 'tis wonderful," and it as much outvies mine in credulity, if I be credulous, as an ocean outvies a drop. It requires the hardest faith in the world to deny the Scriptures, because the man, in his secret heart, knows they are true, and go where he will, something whispers to him, "You may be wrong—perhaps you are," and it is as much as he can do, to say, "Lie down, conscience! down with you; I must not let you speak, or I could not deliver my lecture to-morrow, I could not go among my friends, I could not go to such-and-such a club; for I cannot afford to keep a conscience, if I cannot afford to keep a God."

And now let me tell you what I conceive to be the reasons why Manasseh was an unbeliever. In the first place, I conceive that the *unlimited power* which Manasseh possessed had a very great tendency to make him a disbeliever in God. I should not wonder if an autocrat—a man with absolute dominion, should deny God; I should think it only natural. You remember that memorable speech of Napoleon's. He was told that man proposed, but that God disposed. "Ah!" said Napoleon, "I propose and dispose too"; and therein he arrogated himself the very supremacy of God. We do not wonder at it, because his victories had so speedily succeeded each other, his prowess had been so complete, his fame so great, and his power over his subject so absolute. Power always, as I believe, except in the heart which is rightly governed by grace, has a tendency to lead us to deny God. It is that noble intellect of such-and-such a man which has led him into discussion; he has twice, thrice, four, five, six, seven times, come off more than conqueror in the field of controversy; he looks round and says, "I am, there is none beside me; let me take up whatever I please, I can defend it; there is no man can stand against the blade of my intellect; I can give him such a home-thrust as will assuredly overcome him"; and then, like Dr. Johnson, who often took up the side of the question he did not believe, just because he liked to get a victory that was hard to win, so do these men espouse what they believe to be wrong, because they conceive it gives them the finest opportunity of displaying their abilities. "Let me," says some mighty intellect, "fight with a Christian; I shall have hard enough work to prove my thesis, I know I shall have a great difficulty to undermine the

bastions of truth which he opposes to bear against me; so much the better; it were worth while to be conquered by so stout an opposition, and if I can overcome my antagonist, if I can prove myself to have more logic than he has, then I can say, 'tis glorious; 'tis glorious to have fought against an opponent with so much on his side, and yet to have come off more than conqueror." I do believe, the best man in the world is very hard to be trusted with power; he will, unless grace keeps him, make a wrong use of it before long. Hence it is that the most influential of God's servants are almost invariably the most tried ones, because our heavenly Father knows that if it were not for great trials and afflictions we should begin to set ourselves up against Him, and arrogate to ourselves a glory which we had no right to claim.

But another reason why Manasseh was an unbeliever, I take it, was *because he was proud.* Pride lieth at the root of infidelity, pride is the very germ of opposition to God. The man saith, "Why should I believe?" The Sunday-school child reads his Bible, and says it is true. Am I, a man of intellect, to sit side by side with him, and receive a thing as true simply at the dictum of God's Word? No, I will not; I will find it out for myself, and I will not believe simply because it is revealed to me, for that were to make myself a child. And when he turns to the page of Revelation, and reads thus, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye can in nowise enter into the kingdom of heaven," he says, "Pshaw! I shall not be converted then; I am not going to be a child; I am a man, and a man I will be, and I would rather be lost a man than saved a child. What! am I to surrender my judgment, and sit down tacitly to believe in God's Word?" "Yes," says God's Word, "thou art; thou art to become as a child, and meekly to receive My Word." "Then," says he in his arrogance and pride, "I will not," and like Satan, he declares it were better to rule in hell than serve in heaven, and he goes away an unbeliever, because to believe is too humbling a thing.

But perhaps the most potent reason for Manasseh's unbelief lies here, *that he loved sin too well.* When Manasseh built the altars for his false gods, he could sin easily, and keep his conscience; but he felt Jehovah's laws so stringent, that if he once believed in the One God he could not sin as he did. He read it thus: "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal"; and so on. Manasseh wanted to do all these things, and therefore he would not believe because he could not believe and keep his sin. The very reason why we have much unbelief is because we have much love of sin. Men will have no God, because God interferes with their lusts. They could not go on in their sins, if they once believed there was an Everlasting God above them, or professed to believe it, for all do believe it, whether they say so or no; and because the thought of God checks them in their impiety and their lust, therefore they cry out, "There is no God," and say it with their lips as well as in their hearts. I believe it was this that led Manasseh to persecute the saints of God; for among his sins it is written, "he shed innocent blood very much." It is a tradition among the Jews that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in sunder by Manasseh, on account of a rebuke which he gave him for his sin. Isaiah was not wont to be very timid, and he told the king of his lusts, and therefore placing him between two planks, he cut him in sunder from head to foot. It is just the reason why men hate God, and hate His servants, because the truth is too hot for them. Send you a preacher who would not tell you of your sins, and you would hear him peaceably; but when the Gospel comes with power, then it is that men cannot bear it; when it trenches upon that pleasure, that sin, or that lust, then they will not believe it. Ye would believe the Gospel, if ye could believe it and live in your sins too. Oh! how many a drunken reprobate would be a Christian, if he might be a drunkard and a Christian too! How many a wicked wretch would turn believer, if he might believe and yet go on in his sins! But because faith in the Everlasting God can never stand side by side with sin, and because the Gospel cries, "Down with it! Down with it! Down with your sin," therefore it is that men turn round and say, "Down with the Gospel!" It is too hot for you, O ye sinful generation; therefore ye turn aside from it, because it will not tolerate your lusts, nor indulge your iniquity.

III. We look, then, at Manasseh as an unbeliever, and now we have our last most pleasing task of looking at Manasseh as a CONVERT. Hear it, O heavens, and listen, O earth! The Lord God hath said it. Manasseh shall be saved. He on his throne of cruelty has just appended his name to another murderous edict against the saints of God; yet he shall be humbled; he shall ask for mercy and shall be saved. Manasseh hears the decree of God; he laughs. "What! I play the hypocrite, and bend my knee? Never! It is not possible; and when the godly hear of it, they all say, 'It is not possible.' What! Saul among the prophets? Manasseh regenerated? Manasseh made to bow before the most High? The thing is impossible." Ah! it is impossible with man, but it is possible with God; God knows how to do it. The enemy is at the gates of the city; a hostile king has just besieged the walls of Jerusalem; Manasseh flees from his palace and hides himself amongst the thorns; he is there taken, carried captive to Babylon, and shut up in prison. And now we see what God can do. The proud king is proud no longer, for he has lost his power; the mighty man is mighty no more, for his might is taken from him; and now in a low dungeon listen to him. It is no more the blasphemer, no more the hater of God; but see him cold on the floor! Manasseh bows his knee, and with the tears rolling down his cheeks, he cries, "O God! my father's God! an outcast comes to thee; a hell-hound stained with blood throws himself at Thy feet, I, a very demon, full of filthiness, now prostrate myself before Thee! O my God, canst Thou, wilt Thou have mercy on such a wretch as I?" Hear it, ye heavens! Listen yet again. See, from the skies the angel flies with mercy in his hand. Ah! whither speeds he? It is to the dungeon of Babylon. The proud king is on his knee, and mercy comes and whispers in his ear—"Hope!" He starts from his knees, and cries, "Is there hope?" And down he falls again. Once more he pleads, and mercy whispers that sweet promise, uttered once by the murdered Isaiah—"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for My name's sake, and will not remember thy sins." Oh! do you see him? His very heart is running over in his eyes. Oh! how he weeps for joy, and yet for sorrow that he ever could have sinned against a God so kind. A moment more, and the dungeon is opened; the king of Babylon, moved by God, bids him go free, and he

returns to his kingdom and throne, a happier and a better man than he had ever been before. I think I see him coming into Jerusalem. There are his statesmen and favourites: they welcome him, "Come in Manasseh; the bowl shall be filled, and we will have a merry night to-night; we will bow before the shrine of Ashtaroth, and thank her that she has set thee at liberty; lo, the horses of the sun are ready; come and pay thy devotions to him that shines on the earth, and leads the host of heaven!" Methinks I see their astonishment when he cries "Stand back! stand back! ye are my friends no longer, until ye become God's friends; I have dandled ye on my knees, and, vipers, ye have stung me with the poison of asps; I made you my friends, and you have led me down to the gulf of hell. But I know it now. Stand back till ye are better men; and I will find others to be my courtiers." And there the poor saints, hidden in the back streets of the city, so frightened because the king has come back, are holding meetings of solemn prayer, crying unto God that no more murderous, persecuting edicts might go forth. And lo, a messenger comes and says "The king is returned"; and whilst they are looking at him, wondering what the messenger is about to say, he adds, "He has returned, not Manasseh as he went, but as a very angel. I saw him with his own hands dash Ashtaroth in pieces; I heard him cry, 'The horses of the sun shall be houghed'; sweep out the house of God; we will hold a passover there; the morning and evening lamb shall again burn on Jehovah's altars, for He is God, and beside Him there is none else." Oh! can ye conceive the joy of believers on that auspicious day? Can ye think how they went up to God's house with joy and thanksgiving? And on the next Sabbath they sung, as they had never sung before, "O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation," whilst they remembered that he who persecuted the saints of God aforetime, now defended that very truth which once he abhorred. There was joy on earth, aye, and there was joy in heaven too; the bells of heaven rang merry peals the day Manasseh prayed; the angels of heaven flapped their wings with double alacrity the day Manasseh repented; earth and heaven were glad, and even the Almighty on His throne smiled gracious approbation, whilst He again said, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for My name's sake, and will not remember thy sins."

And now are you curious to know what were the bases of the faith of Manasseh—what were the rocks on which he built his trust in God? I think they were two. He believed in God, first, *because He had answered his prayer;* and secondly, *because He had forgiven his sin.* I have sometimes said, when I have become the prey of doubting thoughts, "Well, now, I dare not doubt whether there be a God, for I can look back in my Diary and say, on such a day in the depths of trouble I bent my knee to God, and or ever I had risen from my knees the answer was given me." And so can many of you say; and therefore whatever others may say, you know there is a God, because he answered your prayer. You have heard of that holy man, Mr. Müller, of Bristol. If you were to tell George Müller there was not a God, he would weep over you. "Not a God?" he would say, "Why, I have seen His hand. Whence came those answers to my prayers?" Ah! sirs, ye may laugh at us for credulity; but there are hundreds here who could most solemnly assert that they have asked of God for divers matters, and that God has not failed them, but granted their request. This was one reason why Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God.

The other reason was, that *Manasseh had a sense of pardoned sin.* Ah! that is a delightful proof of the existence of a God. Here comes a poor miserable wretch: his knees are knocking together, his heart is sinking within him, he is giving himself up to despair. Bring the physicians to him! They cry, "We fear his mind is infirm. We believe he will at last have to be taken to some lunatic asylum"; and they apply their remedies, but he is none the better, but rather grows worse. On a sudden this poor creature, afflicted with a sense of sin, groaning on account of guilt, is brought within the sound of the Sacred Word; he hears it—it increases his misery; he hears again—his pain becomes doubled; till at last every one says his case is utterly hopeless. Suddenly, on a happy morning which God had ordained, the minister is led to some sweet passage. Perhaps it is this: "Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The Spirit applies it, and the poor man goes home light as air, and says to his wife and children, "Come, rejoice with me." "Why?" say they. "Because," says he, "my sins are forgiven." "How do you know that?" "Oh!" says he, "I had a sense of pardoning love within my heart, which all the doubters in the world could not gainsay; and if all the earth should rise up against me and say I should be condemned, I could say, 'I know there is now no condemnation for me.'" Have you ever felt pardoning blood applied? You will never doubt God, I know, if you have. Why, dear friends, if the poorest old woman in the world should be brought before an infidel of the wisest order, having a mind of the greatest calibre, and he should endeavour to pervert her, I think I see her smile at him, and say, "My good man, it is of no use at all, for the Lord has appeared unto me of old, saying, 'Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love,' and so you may tell me what you please: I have had a sense of blood-bought pardon shed abroad in my heart, and I know that He is God, and you can never beat it out of me." As good Watts says, when we have once such an assurance as that,

> "Should all the forms that men devise
> Assault my faith with treacherous art,
> I'd call them vanity and lies,
> And bind the gospel to my heart."

Oh! if you have a sense that sin is forgiven, you can never doubt the existence of a God; for it will be said of you "Then *he* knew that the Lord He was God."

And now I gather up my strength for just one moment, to speak to those of you who desire to know what you must do to be saved. My hearer, no question can be more important than that; none is so requisite to ask. Alas! there are too many who never ask it, but who go sailing down to the gulf of black despair, listening to the syren song of procrastination and delay. But if you have been brought to ask the question solemnly and seriously, "What must I do to be saved?" I am happy, thrice happy to be able to tell you God's own word, "He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ and is

baptized, shall be saved; he that believeth not," the Scripture saith, "shall be damned." "Not of works, lest any man should boast," "But, sir," you say, "I have many good works, and would trust on them." If you do, you are a lost man. As old Matthew Wilks most quaintly said once, speaking in his usual tone,—"You might as well try to sail to America in a paper boat, as to go to heaven by your own works; you will be swamped on the passage if you attempt it." We cannot spin a robe that is long enough to cover us; we cannot make a righteousness that is good enough to satisfy God. If you would be saved, it must be through what Christ did, and not what you did. You cannot be your own Saviour; Christ must save you, if you are saved at all. How then can you be saved by Christ? Here is the plan of salvation. It is written—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all accepttion, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Do you feel that you are a sinner? Then believe that Jesus Christ came to save you; for so sure as ever you feel you are a sinner, it is a fact that Christ died for you; and if He died for you, you shall not perish, for I cannot conceive that Christ would die in vain. If He did die for you, you shall most assuredly be pardoned and saved, and shall one day sing in heaven. The only question is, Did He die for you? He most certainly did if you are a sinner; for it is written—I will repeat it again—"It is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came to save sinners." Poor sinner, believe! My dear friend, give me thine hand! I wish I could put it inside Christ's hand. Oh! embrace Him! embrace Him! lest haply the clouds of night should come upon thee, and the sun should set ere thou hast found Him. Oh! lay hold on Him, lest death and destruction should overtake thee; fly to this mountain, lest thou be consumed; and remember, once in Christ, thou art safe beyond hazard.

"Once in Christ, in Christ for ever,
Nothing from His love can sever."

Oh! believe Him! believe Him, my dear, dear hearers, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

SELF-HUMBLING

"Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humblest thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord."—2 Chronicles xxxiv. 27.

JOSIAH was very earnestly engaged in a devout work for God: he was cleansing, beautifying, and repairing the Temple at Jerusalem. While this was being done, a copy of the book of the laws being found, it was carried to the king, and the king at once diligently perused it. While reading it he discovered certain terrible penalties threatened to idolaters and other offenders; and, knowing that his subjects had for successive years been guilty of the offences thus condemned, he felt persuaded that the righteous judgments of God would come upon them. Greatly alarmed, though himself personally innocent of the guilt, he rent his clothes, wept, and humbled himself before the Most High. Now, it seemed a strange thing, did it not, that so good a man, personally so clear from blame, engaged in one of the holiest of works, with a sincere heart devoting himself to the cause of His God, should meet with so sad and depressive a discovery just in the very midst of his prosperous labours! Was there not another time that the law could have been sent to him with its condemning power? Were there not other offenders far more grossly erring than he, who might have been humbled? Why need this king, with his large, royal, tender heart, all consecrated to God, to be set a-weeping, and to be made to go softly in the bitterness of his soul, just in the very moment of enthusiastic and successful labour? I take it that the reason was this: God had much love towards Josiah, and, having honoured him to rebuild the Temple, he knew the natural tendency of the human heart to pride, and therefore, with a holy jealousy for one whom He loved so well, He sent him this discovery of the book of the law, to keep him humble at the time when otherwise he might have been exposed to peril by the lifting up of his heart. You remember, beloved friends, the case of Hezekiah, when God raised him up from the sick bed. It is said he rendered not recompense to God according to the benefit received, for his heart was lifted up within him; and then God sent him a message by the prophet to tell him that the treasures of his house should be carried away into Babylon, and his sons should be captives to serve the king of Babylon—thus the Lord administered a check after the sin had broken out. But in the case before us, the Lord preferred a preventive to a cure, and sent a check before the mischief had occurred, and so the holy worker became also the humble penitent—and there was blended in the life of Josiah, like the blending of the drops of rain with the gleams of sunlight, a fair rainbow of many virtues; for you see him toiling for his Lord with all his might, and yet bowing himself in dust and ashes, as an humble suppliant before the throne of heavenly grace. Learn from this, that you and I in the midst of a career of success from God, when our heart is most pure and most right, must not therefore expect that all things will go smoothly, but may rather for that very reason expect to experience humiliating circumstances. Like Paul, when favoured with an abundance of revelations, we may expect a "thorn in the flesh," lest we should be exalted above measure. Disclosures of our own weakness and sinfulness are often made to us at the very time when God is honouring us most. In order that our vessel may be able to endure a strong and fair wind of divine favour, the Lord in infinite wisdom causes us to be ballasted with grief or trial.

This morning I cannot enter into the whole of my text, but I shall ask your attention to Josiah's humbling himself. In this matter we shall note, first, *the acceptable act;* secondly, *the powerful reasons which exist for our imitating it;* and, thirdly, *the encouraging results which followed*—some of them are clear in his case, and others we may expect in our own.

I. First, we have to speak upon THE ACCEPTABLE

ACT which Josiah performed; I say an *act*, not a *grace* or a *state*. It is not said that Josiah was humble. He *was* so, or he would not have trembled at God's word.

All graces are in all Christians in a measure. In every Christian there is the germ of every virtue. Just as in every well-formed child there is every muscle and sinew, and nerve and bone, although all are far from being developed, yet it is there; so in each Christian there exists humility, with all the kindred graces, though it is as yet in some scarcely perceptible and in others is far removed from perfection. Josiah certainly possessed the grace of humility. It is not said that his soul was in a state of habitual humility, although he ought to have been. We ought always to be, in a certain sense, in the valley of humiliation. Pride is never to be excused in the believer. There is never a moment when we may safely be lifted up. Always lowly should we be in our own esteem. He that thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, deceiveth himself: and as we are always nothing in ourselves, it would be well for us to know and to feel this, and not to be self-deceived, or lay a flattering unction to our hearts. What is mentioned in the text is *an act*, not a grace, not a state, but an act. We have before us the grace of humility in Josiah, acting after its own nature to produce the state of humility in his soul. He humbled himself, that is, he set to work to cure himself of any remaining pride, and to educate in himself thehumility which the grace of God had wrought in him. He humbled himself; he confessed his share in the sin which God condemned; he acknowledged on his own part the justice of God in threatening such punishments; he stripped himself of his royal array; he made no mention of services which he had rendered to God in the Temple; he mentioned not his own generosity in having given of his treasures to the decorations of the house of the Lord; but he came as that poor publican is described as coming in our Lord's famous parable not "daring to lift so much as his eyes towards heaven, but smiting upon his breast, and crying, God be merciful to me a sinner." So that brethren, I want you this morning not so much to enquire whether you have humility, for I know that if you are believers, humility is somewhere in your heart; I do not ask you whether you are in an humble state this morning, it may be you are not; but I want you to accompany me in an act of humiliation, in the bowing of your souls before the Lord—each man and each woman, according to the experience of each, bowing low and reverently before the majesty of the Most High, that we may obtain from God the mercies which each of us may need.

1. Concerning this action, then, I have to mention in the first place, that it was a *a real and personal act*. The text says, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself." Thou didst not *talk* about humbling thyself, but thou *didst* humble thyself. Thou didst not *bid others* do it, but thou didst humble *thyself*. It became to thee a personal matter of obligation, and thou didst not postpone that obligation, or look at it, and commend it, and say, "When I have a more convenient season, I will send for thee"; but thou didst humble thyself, really, sincerely, truly, and in very deed; thou didst, in thine own proper person, bow thyself to the very dust before the Most High." Brethren, I fear lest the habit of preaching to you may lead me to forget my personal share in this and other holy exercises. I pray God it may not! And on the other hand, it is very possible that you may criticize the style in which I address you, and so may forget that my style is not the business in hand. We are now to have respect to a very solemn obligation, of which our text reminds us. I pray you let us come honestly to the work, and may God's Holy Spirit help us, and may each one here be willing now to have it said of him, "Thou didst humble thyself."

2. Observe too that as the work was real and personal, so it was *voluntary*. "Thou didst humble thyself." It is not said that God humbled him, by which it is not implied that the grace of God did not assist him, that the Spirit of God was not the author of his humility, but it is implied that God did not by any overt and open judgment of providence cause Josiah to be humbled. Have you ever noticed the difference between being humble and being humbled? Many persons are humbled who are not humble at all. Pharaoh was humbled, oh! how humbled, when he saw that even the flies and lice could vanquish both himself and his men-at-arms! how humbled when he found that the God of heaven could send plague after plague upon him, and make the proud lips that said, "Who is Jehovah that I should obey His voice?" cry, "Intreat the Lord that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail!" He must have been humbled, but he was not humble. And when the chill waters rolled over him in the Red Sea, he died with a proud spirit, but he had been humiliated to the last degree. Even so God may humble some of us; He may take away our property, and we may be humbled by being poor; He may be pleased to strip us of that which is now the object of our boasting, and we may be humbled by its loss; but the duty to which I call you this morning is that of humbling yourselves before judgment comes to deal with you, as, mark you, it surely will, unless you attend to the gracious precept, and humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. We must all either break or bow. Let us bow cheerfully. "Let us kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and we perish from the way." It is a voluntary humiliation of soul which is inculcated by the example of Josiah, and may the Spirit of God make us willing in the day of His power, that we may willingly humble ourselves before God.

3. It was, moreover, *a sincerely devout act* on the part of Josiah. He humbled himself, we are told, "before God." It is true he did put on sackcloth, and rend his clothes, and so far his humiliation was apparent to men, but the soul of his humbling was before God alone. It is vain to put on sackcloth, and to bow your head like a bulrush before man, unless your heart abases itself before God. Outward mourning and fasting are not humiliation, neither doth God care for them if the heart be absent. "Rend your hearts, and not your garments." Let your souls be humbled and your spirits contrite. Dear friends, we want more and more to walk in our religion before God. Away with that holiness which consisteth in respect to the forms and customs of society! Away with that religion which flaunteth itself before the staring eye of a fellow mortal. We want that grace which hath respect to the God who seeth in secret; we want more and more, in fact, of spiritual worship, for they who worship God the Spirit must "worship Him in spirit and in truth." Your hymns are no songs of praise unless they are sung unto God; your prayers are no prayers unless you seek the face of the God of Israel; and your humblings are nothing but

another form of pride unless your souls have a reverent and deep respect unto the Lord.

4. Once again, the act on the part of Josiah was *a very deep and thorough one.* He did not *try* to humble himself, but he *did* it. This I gather from the repetition of the fact in the text. Where inspiration mentions a thing twice, it is because God would have our notice drawn to it. It is written, "Thou didst humble thyself before God"; and again, "and humblest thyself before Me." It was not garment-tearing merely, it was heart-breaking. Josiah was really broken in heart. He did not struggle to get himself down where he should be, but he was down; at the foot of the mercy-seat he cast himself as a true broken-hearted penitent. Brethren beloved, it is an easy thing to say, "I would be humble," but to be humble before God is another thing; and to begin the sacred work of humiliation before the Most High is no great thing, but to continue in it until at last you can say, "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O God"—this is a blessed work, and you need the assistance of the Spirit of God in it. We are all at certain times conscious of our weakness, but we forget the humbling fact; our humility is like the morning cloud and the early dew which passeth away; but to have this inwrought into the spirit till the whole heart becomes thoroughly self-mortified, and pride is excluded and shut out, this it is that we want, and this it is that will win the blessing.

Beloved friends, let me say to you that the grace of humility, of which I spoke in the first place, is exceedingly sweet before God, and where it does not exist, a man cannot humble himself. Let me also remark that the state of humility is much more blessed than the mere act of humiliation, and should be the condition of every Christian at all times. We ought always to walk humbly before the Lord; but if we are not in the state of humility, we must exercise the act of humility in order to bring us into it. We ought always to be clean; but as we are not always so, through contact with this evil world, there must be a time for cleansing: so we ought to be always humble; but as we are not so, there must be a time for humbling ourselves. Now, let no man or woman in this place be exempt from the work before us, for here is a king, an eminent person, and yet he humbles himself! Sons of the earth, will not you do the same? Here is one engaged in the greatest of works, yet he humbles himself! Let no pastor, no minister, no elder, no deacon, let no earnest evangelist, let no successful labourer, as a private Christian, fancy himself excused. Josiah bowed, who dares stand erect? Let each heart in its own place bow before the Most High. Here is one who was pure in his life, who feared God and died in the act of fulfilling his treaty with his eastern allies, and defending his country against the tyrant Pharaoh-necho, who sought to keep him from the battle by pretending to have been sent by God. He lived a saint, and died as a patriot king might wish to die, and yet he humbles himself before the Most High! O friends, do not we perceive that this example demands of us immediate imitation? The Lord lead us unto it.

II. Grant me your earnest attention while I give a few POWERFUL REASONS why we should perform the same act as this which is recorded of Josiah.

1. My brethren, reasons for humbling ourselves are more abundant than the time allowed me in which to urge them upon you. In the first place, *a deep sense and clear sight of sin, its heinousness, and the punishment which it deserves,* should make us lie low before the throne. We have sinned; *we*, have erred and strayed from His ways like lost sheep—*we* who are now present. We have sinned as Christians. Alas! that it should be so. Favoured as we have been, we have yet been ungrateful; privileged beyond most, we have not brought forth fruit in proportion. Who among us, though he may long have been engaged in the Christian warfare, will not blush when he looks back upon the past? As for our days before we were regenerate, may God blot them out—may they be forgiven and forgotten. But since then, though we have not sinned as before, yet there has been this peculiar aggravation of our sins, that we have sinned against light and against love—light which has really penetrated our minds, and love which we have been able to recognise, and in which we have rejoiced. Oh! the atrocity of the sin of a pardoned soul! An unpardoned sinner sins, to my mind, cheaply, compared with the sin of one of God's own elect ones, who has had communion with Christ and leaned his head upon Jesus' bosom. Look, brethren, at David! Many will talk of his sin, but I pray you look at his repentance, and hear his broken bones, as each one of them moans out its dolorous confession! Mark his tears, as they fall upon the ground, and the deep sighs with which he accompanies the softened music of his harp! We have erred: let us, therefore, seek the spirit of penitence. Look, again, at Peter! We speak much of Peter's denying his Master. Remember it is written, "He wept bitterly." Have *we* no such offences to weep over? Are there no denials of our Lord to be lamented with tears? Think, brethren, these sins of ours deserve nothing less than the hottest hell; these sins of ours, before and after conversion, would consign us to the place of inextinguishable fire, if it were not for the sovereign mercy which has made us to differ, snatching us like brands from the burning. Is there no help here towards the work of soul humbling? My soul, bow down under a sense of thy natural filthiness, and worship thy God.

2. Let us reflect upon another humbling subject—*our origin and our end.* Here are we, the offspring of a day; unclean things brought out of an unclean thing; children that are corrupters; the seed of evil doers: what are we at the best but mere animated earth? and ere long we shall be brought into that lowly bed where the worms shall be under us, and the worms shall cover us; we shall become a puff of wind, a handful of brown dust: and shall we glory? We who sprang from nothing, and must go back to nothing, shall we boast ourselves? O worm of the dust, know thyself, and cease from pride!

3. I would remind you also, my dear brethren of that *sovereign grace* which has made us to differ. I frequently find that a sense of God's amazing love to me has a greater tendency to humble me than even a consciousness of my own guilt. Think, my brethren, what you are by grace! You were chosen of God according to His purpose; chosen, not for good in you, but chosen because *He would* choose you; because "He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion." You were "not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ." You were so lost that nothing could save you but the sacrifice of God's Only Begotten. Think of that; and, as Jesus stooped for you, bow yourselves in lowliness at His feet. You are now a child of God; a favourite of the skies, on

the road to glory, with a heritage beyond the black river which shall be yours when suns and moons have paled their waning light. You are to dwell for ever near to God, and to be like Him. Surely the thoughts of such amazing goodness will make the vessel, laden so heavily with mercy, sink in the water, even to its bulwarks. Surely you will feel that you must bless and magnify God, because you are less than the least of all His mercies.

4. Further, let me ask you to think of *the greatness of God.* It is not in my power by words to bring before you that tremendous subject; but if I could put you in the position of Job, when he said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee," you would be certain to add with that patriarch, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

> "Great God, how infinite art Thou!
> What worthless worms are we!"

5. Once more, think of *the life and death of the Saviour.* See your Master taking a towel and washing His disciples' feet; and, follower of Christ, wilt thou not humble thyself; nay, see Him all His life long. Is not this sentence the compendium of His biography—"He humbled Himself?" Was He not here on earth always stripping—taking off first one robe of honour and then another, till, naked, He was fastened to the cross, and then emptied out His inmost self, pouring out the floods of His life-blood from His heart, and giving up all for us, till they laid Him penniless in a borrowed grave?"

> "His honour and His breath
> Were taken both away,
> Joined with the wicked in His death,
> And made as vile as they."

How low was our dear Redeemer brought! How then can we be proud? Stand, my beloved brethren and sisters, at the foot of the cross, and count the purple drops by which you have been cleansed; see the thorn-crown; mark still the relics of the spittle on those blessed cheeks; go round the cross and mark His scourged shoulders, still gushing with encrimsoned rills; see hands and feet given up to the rough iron, and His whole self to mockery and scorn; see the bitterness, and the pangs, and the throes of inward grief, showing themselves in His outward frame; hear the thrilling shriek, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and if you do not lie prostrate on the ground before that cross, you have never seen it; if you are not humbled in the presence of Jesus, you do not know Him. I pray the Lord bring us in contemplation to Calvary, and I know our position will no longer be that of the inflated, pompous man of pride, but we shall take the humble place of one who loves much, because much has been forgiven him.

I would, however, warn the inexperienced believer concerning this act of humbling—*do not make mistakes about it.* Do not mistake sham humility for real humility. There is a cant of humility which is infamous. People will say in prayer, "Thy poor dust," and use all sorts of depreciating expressions, when they are as proud as Lucifer; they will say before the Lord things concerning themselves which they are very far from believing, for from their manner and bearing, it is clear that their estimate of themselves is far from being too low. There are others who think that laziness is humility; they cry, "Oh, I could not do this! I could not do the other!" when they might do it, and should do it, and ought to do it, and could do it, God the Holy Ghost helping them; but they shirk every duty because they have a sense of inability, and they cover their idleness with the mantle of supposed humility. Moses was rebuked by God very strongly when he made excuses, and would fain have avoided going into the great work to which the Lord had called him. Let us not raise questions with our God when He calls us to labour, but let us say, "Here I am, send me." Do not fall into that miserable counterfeit humility, but like men, use all your strength for Jesus. Again, do not mistake unbelief for humility. "I hope I am," "I trust I am," and expressions of that kind, savour far more of distrust of God than of humility of spirit, for the best form of humility is compatible with the highest degree of faith. In fact, that is not true faith, but spurious, which is not humble; and that is not genuine humility of the loveliest type which is not confident in God. Faith and humility should always walk together. Let the grace in you be real grace, and to that end ask the Spirit of God to work it in you.

Let me add, dear friend, if you find it difficult to humble yourself before God, stand to it more earnestly, for the more difficult it is, the more you need it. If your soul were humble, it would easily humble itself; but because it is proud, it needs humbling; and for this reason it finds the duty irksome and displeasing to the flesh. Mortify your pride, my brethren; let your souls be mortified on account of sin; and if you cannot yourself do it, you know where your strength lieth, fly to the Strong for strength, and you shall have enabling grace.

Again, let me say, in order to humble yourselves, exercise all your faculties. Let the memory bring before you your past offences. Let your understanding form a proper judgment of your position as a creature, as a sinner, and now as a dependent servant. Your understanding will greatly help you, for true humility is forming a just estimate of oneself, and to humble oneself, is to bring oneself down to the place where one ought to be. Let your hopes and your fears, let your affections and your passions, let all the powers of your intellect and heart agree to this—that now before God you will humble yourself as Josiah did. I have given you the reasons. May God apply those reasons with power by His Holy Spirit!

III. Lastly, I have to encourage our friends to this duty by ENCOURAGING RESULTS.

I think it was Bernard, or one of the preachers of the middle ages, who said, "There is one thing to be said for humility, that it never can by any possibility do one harm." For if a man goes through a door, and he has the habit of stooping his head, it may be the door is so high there is no need for stooping, but the stooping is no injury to him; whereas if the door should happen to be a low one, and he has the habit of holding up his head, he may come into sharp contact with the top of the door. True humility is a flower which will adorn any garden. This is a sauce with which you may season every dish of life, and you will find an improvement in every case. Whether it be prayer or praise, whether it be work or suffering, the salt of humility cannot be used in excess.

1. But there are positive advantages connected with it, for, first, *humiliation will often avert judgment.* How many times in the history of the Israelites, when they were given over to their enemies, their humbling themselves at once drove away the invaders, and set them free from the scourge! Perhaps some of the

most remarkable cases which I can quote are those of wicked men, for their cases show the power of humiliation with God where there is nothing else to work upon him. Rehoboam had set up a false worship and "did evil in the sight of the Lord"; therefore God was provoked with Rehoboam and with Judah; and Shishak, the king of Egypt, came up and ravaged Judea, and was about to capture Jerusalem; but we read that Rehoboam and Judah humbled themselves before God, and the Lord said that Shishak should not touch Jerusalem; and, moreover, the Lord visited the land with favour, and it is said "also in Judah things went well." This mercy was granted, not because of any good thing in Rehoboam or his people, but only because they humbled themselves. A more remarkable case still is that of Ahab. Ahab had killed Naboth to obtain his vineyard; but when he entered that vineyard, stained with innocent blood, Elijah met him with the cutting question, "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?" And Ahab's proud and haughty spirit was cowed with fear of Elijah, and he cried, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!" Elijah delivered the terrible sentence of God to him, that the whole of his household should die, and that Jezebel should be eaten by dogs in that very vineyard. Ahab could no longer, after hearing that sentence, keep up his brazen countenance; but we read, "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." Then the Lord said unto Elijah, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days." So that this basest of all men, this wicked Ahab, whose name stands infamous in the Chronicles of the Kings, yet obtained a blessing from God when he humbled himself. As for God's people, when the Lord has been about to smite them, he has usually stayed his hands when they have humbled themselves. See the case of Hezekiah which we have already mentioned. Hezekiah humbled himself, it is said, because of the pride of his heart, and the Lord said this evil should not be brought upon him in his day. And Josiah, in this case, also turned aside the sword of the Lord from the Israel of his own day, because he humbled himself. My dear friend, you are under the paternal discipline of God, and He will make you feel His chastening rod; but if you humble yourselves, you put the rod away. You know, with your own children, if you feel compelled to chasten yet, when you see softness and tenderness of heart, and a sweet readiness to confess the fault, it goes against your heart that the rod should be used, and you put it away, for humble sorrow is all that you wanted to produce; and if the effect be there already, there is no need of further sternness. So the Lord turns away the chastisement from His people when they humble themselves.

2. Humiliation of soul always *brings a positive blessing with it.* The old philosophers were wont to assert, as a law of matter, "Nature abhors a vacuum." This old dictum is out of date nowadays; but, still it is true spiritually. So, then, if you and I empty ourselves, depend upon it, God will fill us. Divine grace seeks out and fills a vacuum. Make a vacuum by humility, and God will fill that vacuum by His love. He who desires sweet communion with Christ, should remember the word of the Lord, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word." "He hath respect unto the lowly: but the proud He knoweth afar off." Stoop, my dear friend, if you would climb to heaven. Do we not say of Jesus, "He descended that He might ascend?" so must you. You must go downwards, that you may grow upwards; for the sweetest fellowship with heaven is to be had by humble souls, and by them alone. I believe that God will deny no blessing to a thoroughly humbled spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," with all its riches and treasures. The whole exchequer of God shall be made over by deed of gift to the soul which is humble enough to be able to receive it without growing proud because of it.

3. Further, my dear brethren, the act of humiliation will be very blessed to you and to me, because *it will improve our spiritual health.* To humiliate yourself is as necessary in this wicked world as it is for travellers through African jungles to take, every now and then, a draught of quinine. The bitterness of humility is a tonic to the spirit. I know of no man who is so courageous before his fellow-man as he that bows before his God. My knee shall bend to God, and God alone; but if my knee never bends to God, you may depend upon it, it will soon be bending when I do not want it to do so—it will tremble before the face of man. If you fear God with a deep and powerful fear, you shall fear nobody else; you should be able to say before a fierce tyrant like Nebuchadnezzar, with the three holy children, "Be it know unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." The fear of God is the death of every other fear; like a mighty lion, it chases all other fears before it. Nothing makes a man so vigorous and strong, with the exception of faith, as humility and even faith itself cannot be strong where humility is weak.

4. Once more, *usefulness will be promoted by humility.* There are some professors whom God cannot bless, because they would grow intolerably proud if they were blessed. I heard a dear brother say that he believed God blessed us all up to the full measure and extremity of what it was safe for Him to do, and I believe He does so. If you do not get a blessing, it is because it is not safe for you to have one. If our heavenly Father were to let you be successful in His holy war, you would run away with the crown yourself, and meeting with an enemy you would fall a victim, so that you are kept low for your own safety. When a man is sincerely humble, and never ventures so much as to touch a grain of the praise, there is scarcely any limit to what God will do for him. Humility makes us ready to be blessed by the God of grace, and fits us to deal with our fellow-men. Everybody gets as far as ever he can from a proud man. I confess myself I have a great pleasure in seeing proud men, when I can hardly discern them with a powerful telescope, nearer than this would be far less agreeable. We mind not how near we come to gentle and meek spirits, for these are company for angels. Proud spirits do not like to deal with great sinners. "Stand by, I am holier than thou" is not the language for a man who would be useful. What think you, would a Pharisee make a city missionary? Look at the fine gentleman, bloated with self-importance! What a useful preacher he would make, would he not? Send him after the poor fallen girls at midnight meetings! Better send a peacock! "Stand by, I am holier than thou"; why, the man who feels thus is out of place in the service of God; he is more fit to play lacquey to the world's vanities, than to talk of being

a soldier of the cross. Just as the excess of pride disables, so an abundance of humility of spirit will fit you for any kind of Christian work to which the Holy Spirit may call you. Let us humble ourselves then, dear friends, that God may exalt us in due time by giving us to see the result of our work.

I know not how to plead any further, but I commend to the Holy Spirit for fulfilment my deeply anxious desire for myself and for you my brethren in the common faith, that we may all be brought like Josiah to humble ourselves before God.

There is yet a word which I desire to speak to those who are not saved. I do not say to you, begin with humbling yourselves: your hope lies in Jesus Christ. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." That is the gospel. Your salvation lies not in you but in Jesus. At the same time, an humble and a contrite spirit will be a very ready way of leading you to Christ, and therefore I beseech you cultivate this spirit. There is a story narrated in the classic history of Augustus Cæsar, that a most troublesome pirate had destroyed many of the Roman vessels, and therefore Cæsar, having hunted him in vain for some time, offered a reward of ten thousand talents for the pirate's head. Now the pirate, knowing the case to be hopeless, and perhaps somewhat relenting, came himself before Cæsar, and laying his head down before him in the dust, he said, "Ten thousand talents! I have brought the pirate's head." Cæsar looked at him with astonishment, but said, "You have trusted the generosity of Cæsar, and no man shall trust that in vain. You are pardoned. There are the ten thousand talents too." Now, sinner, I would advise thee to follow his example. Shrewd and sensible was that: be thou as wise. God will have thy head of thee, nay, thy soul; but go thyself with it, submit thyself. After that evil May-day in our English history, when the apprentices had done so much mischief by destroying the foreigners' houses and burning them, in a riot, a commission sat to try them, and a number of them were summoned to the Guildhall; but when they appeared with ropes about their necks, confessing that they deserved to be hanged, a free pardon was accorded to very many of them. Come, poor soul, the Lord will never swing thee up if thou wilt put the rope round thine own neck. If thou wilt bring thine own head, He will never take it off thy shoulders. Come just as thou art, confess the wrong, and trust to the liberality of God in Jesus Christ, and thou shalt not find Him fail.

You proud ones who are self-righteous will perish, but you who are humble, by trusting in Jesus, shall be saved. Yonder is a sinking ship! The vessel is going down rapidly, and I see two men equally anxious for life. One of them puts on his garments, heavy with gold lace, loads himself with jewels, fills his pockets with his gold and his silver, and springs into the sea. You know what will become of him: he has weighted himself for destruction. But here is another who takes off not only such jewelry as he may have upon him, but he strips himself even to his last rag, and then casts himself naked into the sea. If any man can swim, it is he. So do thou poor soul. If thou hast a rag of self-righteousness, off with it. If thou hast anything whatever of thine own to depend upon, off with it; and if any man can swim in the sea of divine love, thou art the man; and, let me add, a naked spirit was never drowned there. Lay thou hold on Jesus with nothing of thine own in thy hands, and "thou shalt never perish, neither shall any man pluck thee out of His hands." May God bless these words to us all for His love's sake. Amen.

CHEER UP, MY COMRADES!

"And Josiah set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord."—2 Chronicles xxxv. 2.

JOSIAH, as you remember, in the early part of his reign set his face against the idolatries that prevailed, to root them out of the land. He then bent his thoughts upon repairing and beautifying the temple. After that it was his heart's aim to restore the sacred services, to observe the solemn feasts, and to revive the worship of God after the due order, according to the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. Our text tells us something of the method with which he went to work; and it may well serve us as a model.

The first thing is to get every man into his proper place; the next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place, so as to occupy it worthily. I will suppose, dear friends, that in the providence of God you are in your place, and that by the direction of God's Spirit you have also sought and found the precise form of usefulness in which you ought to exercise yourself. To-night it shall not be my business to arrange you; but assuming that it is well for you to keep where you are, my object shall be to encourage you to do your work for your Lord without being cast down. I am hardly going to preach so much as to talk to different persons who are discouraged in the work of the Lord, that we may rouse them up, rally them round us, and encourage them to keep rank.

I. And, first, I would speak a little to THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN DO NOTHING. They will tell me that in such a sermon not a sentence can concern them: if I am to encourage men to the service of the house of the Lord, it will be in vain for them, as they can do nothing at all. Well, dear friends, you must not take that for granted; you must make quite sure that you cannot do anything before I may venture to speak to you as if it were a matter of fact; for sometimes there is a want of way because there is a want of will. Though I do not go so far as to allege that this is your case, we know too well that "cannot" often does mean "will not," and not to have triumphed may mean that you have not tried. You have been so discouraged that you have excused yourself for inaction, and your inaction has

grown into indolence. If a man, under the notion that he could not lift his right hand, constantly kept it still, I should not wonder if, after weeks and months, it would become a matter of fact that he had not the power to use it. It might actually stiffen for no reason but because he had not moved it. Do you not think that, before your muscles get rigid, it would be well to exercise them by attempting some kind of service? Especially you younger folk, if you do not work for the Lord almost as soon as you are converted it will be very difficult afterwards to make you take to it. Aptitude, I have often noticed, comes with employment, and through negligence and sloth people become enervated and helpless. You say that you cannot move your arm, and so you do not move it; take heed, for by-and-by your pretence will become the parent of real powerlessness.

But I will take what you have said as being true. You are ill; the vigour you felt in the bright days of health fails you now; you have to suffer pain, weariness, and exhaustion; you are often detained at home; and home seems now to you a gloomy hospital all the day long, rather than a genial hostelry when evening shadows fall. Little indeed, therefore, can you do; so little that you are apt to reckon it as nothing at all. The thought is a burden to you. You wish you could serve the Lord. How constantly you have dreamed of the pleasure since you have been denied the privilege! How willing your feet would be to run; how ready your hands would be to labour; how glad would your tongue be to testify! You envy those who are able, and you would fain emulate and excel them; not indeed that you harbour ill-will against them, but you devoutly wish that you could do some personal service in the cause of your Master.

Now, I want to encourage you first by reminding you that the law of the Son of David is the same as the law of David himself; and you know the law of David about those that went to the battle. There were some that were lame, and some that were otherwise incapable of action, and he left them with the baggage. "There," he said, "you are very weary and ill: stop in the camp: take care of the tents, and the ammunition, while we go and fight." Now, it happened once on a time that the men that went to fight claimed all the spoil. They said, "These people have done nothing: they have been lying in the trenches: they shall not carry off a share of the booty." But King David there and then made a law that they should share and share equally—those that were in the trenches and those that engaged in the fray. "As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel." Nor is the law of the Son of David less gracious. If by sickness you are detained at home,—if for any other reason, such as age or infirmity, you are not able to enter into actual service, yet if you are a true soldier and would fight if you could, and your heart is in it, you shall share even with the best and bravest of those who, clad in the panoply of God, encounter and grapple with the adversary.

And, brethren, you have no reason to envy, though you may admire to your heart's content, all who are diligent and successful in the service of Christ. Let me remind you of a law of the kingdom of heaven with which you are all familiar—"He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." In truth, it is a splendid appointment to be a servant of the Lord. David thought so, for you often read at the commencement of his psalms—"A prayer of David, the servant of God," though you never read, "A prayer of David, the king of Israel," for he thought more of being enrolled a servant of God than of being entitled a king of Israel. Health and strength, ability and opportunity to fulfil a mission for the Master are much to be desired, but these are not always to be taken as reliable evidence of personal salvation. A man may preach admirably, and he may work marvelsin the church, and yet himself not be a partaker of saving grace. Hence, when the disciples came back from preaching, and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through Thy name," the Lord said, "Nevertheless, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Judas was amongst them; Judas cast out devils; Judas preached the gospel; and yet Judas was a son of perdition, and is lost for ever. Because you cannot do much you must not infer that therefore you are not saved; for if you were to be among the chief of Christian workers it would not prove that you were certainly a child of God. Do not fret, then, because you are shut out from the cheerful activities in which others share; for, as long as your name is written in heaven, and your heart truly follows after the Lord, you shall have an abundant recompense at the last great day, even though here you are doomed to be a sufferer rather than a worker.

But to me it seems more than possible that some of you, dear friends, whose minds are tinged with melancholy, have painted your own lot in deeper shades than the justice of the case deserves. Is your life indeed a dull routine, which, for lack of busy change and lively enterprise, leaves no record behind? Not so, methinks. "The rich relics of a well-spent hour" do sometimes pour around your path a stream of light that cheers *our* eyes, though it may escape your notice. Are you patient under your sufferings? Do you try to keep the flesh in subjection, to govern your spirit, to refrain from murmuring, and to foster cheerfulness? That, my friend, is doing a great deal. I am sure that the holy serenity of a suffering child of God is one of the best sermons that can ever be preached in a family. A sick saint has often been more serviceable in a house than the most eloquent divine could have been. They see how sweetly you submit to the divine will, how patiently you can bear painful operations, how the Lord gives you songs in the night. Why, you are greatly useful. I have sometimes been called to visit bedridden persons who have been unable to rise for many, many years, and it has been within my knowledge that their influence has extended over whole parishes. They have been known as poor pious women or as experienced Christian men, and many have gone to visit them. Christian ministers have said that they derived more benefit from sitting half-an-hour talking to poor old Betsy than they did from all the books in their library, and yet Betsy said that she was doing nothing. Look at your case in that light, and you will see that you can praise God upon your bed, and make your chamber to be as vocal for God as this pulpit ever can be.

Besides, dear friends, do you not think we

frequently limit our estimate of serving God to the public exercises of the sanctuary, and forget the strong claims that our Lord has upon our private fidelity and obedience? You say, "I cannot serve God," when you cannot teach in the school or preach in the pulpit, when you are unable to sit on a committee or speak on a platform: as if these were the only forms of service to be taken into account. Do you not think that a mother nursing her baby is serving God? Do you not think that men and women going about their daily toil with patient industry discharging the duties of domestic life are serving God? If you think rightly you will understand that they are. The servant sweeping the room, the mistress preparing the meal, the workman driving a nail, the merchant casting up his ledger, ought to do all in the service of God. Though, of course, it is very desirable that we should each and all have some definitely religious work before us, yet it is much better that we should hallow our common handicraft, and make our ordinary work chime with the melodies of a soul attuned for heaven. Let true religion be our life, and then our life will be true religion. That is how it ought to be. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him." So, then, let the stream of your common life as it flows on, obscure, unobserved, be holy and courageous; you will find that while "they also serve who only stand and wait," you shall not be neglected or overlooked who simply sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His words when you can do no more. This is service done for Him which He can appreciate; complain who may.

Know, too, my dear sister, that by thy sorrows the Lord has drawn out thy sympathies. Thou, my dear brother, know that by the discipline which has chastened thee, thou hast learned to be a comforter. Say you, then, that you cannot do anything? I know a few secrets about you that you forget. You do not reckon yourself up as we reckon you. Did you not try to cheer a poor neighbour the other day by telling of the Lord's goodness to you when you were very sick yourself? How started from your eye that tear most sacred, shed for a fellow-creature's pain? Is it not your habit, poor sufferer as you are, to let drop just a few words for your Master to others in a like condition whenever you can? You tell me that you cannot do anything. Why, dear hearts, the refreshing of God's saints is one of the highest works in which anyone can be occupied. God will send *prophets* to His servants at times when they need to be rebuked; if He wants to comfort them He generally sends an *angel* to them, for that is angel's work. Jesus Christ Himself, we read, had angels sent to minister to Him. When? Was it not in the garden of Gethsemane, when He was bowed down with sorrow? Comforting is not ordinary work: it is a kind of angelic work. "There appeared unto Him an angel strengthening Him." A prophet was sent to warn the Israelites of their sin; but when a Gideon was to be encouraged to go and fight for his country, it was the angel of the Lord that came to him. So I gather that comforting work is angel's work. You, dear kind Christian men and women, who think that you are not able to do anything but to condole or to console with cheery words some souls cast down and sore dismayed, you are fulfilling a most blessed office, and doing work which many ministers find it difficult to perform. I have known some who have never known suffering or ill-health, and when they try to comfort God's weary people they are dreadfully awkward over it. They are like elephants picking up pins: they can do it, but it is with a wonderful effort. God's tried people comfort each other *con amore;* they take to the work as a fish to water. They understand the art of speaking a word in season to him that is weary, and when this is the case they may not complain that they are doing nothing.

And yet, beloved, you who thought that you did nothing, and now perceive that you are really useful, will, I hope, perceive that there is still a wider region into which you may advance. Breathe to-night the prayer of Jabez, who was more honourable than his brethren, because he was the child of his mother's sorrow; and this was the prayer—"Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!" Ask God to open up to you a larger region of usefulness, and He will do it.

II. Now let me address a few words to another class of workers WHO THINK THAT THEY ARE LAID ASIDE.

"Dear sir," says one, "I wish you would encourage me. I used to be useful once; at least, I was recognized as one of a band of men who worked together right heartily, but since I have changed my residence I am unknown in the neighbourhood where I am living, and I seem to have dropped out of the ranks. I have done little or nothing lately, and I feel uneasy about it. I wish that I could get to work." My dear brother, I hope you will; but do not waste five minutes in thinking it over. These times need so much Christian effort that when a man asks me, "How shall I do work for Christ?" I am accustomed to say, "Go and do it." "But what is the way to do it?" Start at once. Get at it, my brother. Do not be out of harness a minute. But suppose that you are obliged to desist awhile, do not let your interest in the cause of our Lord and Master decline. Some of the best of God's workers have been laid aside for long periods. Moses was forty years in the desert, doing nothing. A greater than he, our blessed Saviour Himself, was thirty years,—I will not say doing nothing, but certainly doing no public work. When you are in a retired and inactive position, be preparing for the time when God brings you out again. If you are put away on the shelf, do not rust there, but pray the Master to brighten you up so that when He comes to use you again you may be fully fitted for the work which He has in hand for you.

While you must be laid aside, I want you to do this,—pray for others that are at work. Help them; encourage them. Do not get into that peevish, miserable frame of mind which grudges and undervalues other men's works. Be not like the dog in the manger. Some people, when they cannot do anything themselves, do not like anybody else to be diligent and laborious. Say, "If I cannot help, I will never hinder, but I will cheer my brethren."

Spend your time in prayer that you may be fit for the Master's use, and, meanwhile, be prompt in helping others. You remember that, at the siege of Gibraltar, when the fleet surrounded it and determined to storm the old rock, the governor fired red-hot shot down upon the men of war. The enemy did not at all admire the governor's warm reception. Think how it was done. Here were gunners on the ramparts firing away, and every man in the garrison

would have liked to do the same. What did those do who could not serve a gun? Why, *they heated the shot;* and that is what you must do. I am master gunner here generally: heat my shot for me, if you will. Keep the furnace going, so that when we do fire off a sermon it may be red-hot, through your earnest prayers. When you see your friends sitting in the Sunday-school, or standing out in the street working for God, if you cannot join them yet say, "Never mind: I will heat the shot for them. My prayers shall not be wanting, if I can contribute nothing else." That is counsel for you who are for awhile laid on the shelf.

III. Others there are who are much discouraged because THEY HAVE BUT SMALL TALENT. "Oh," they say, "I wish I could serve Jesus Christ like Paul, or like Whitefield—that I could range the country through proclaiming His dear name and winning thousands of converts. But I am slow of speech and dull of thought, and what I attempt produces little or no effect." Well, brother, mind that you do what you can. Do you not recollect the parable of the men who had talents entrusted to them? I do not want to lay undue stress upon the fact that it was the man who had one talent who buried it. Yet why is he represented as doing so? I think it was not because the men of two and five talents do not sometimes bury theirs, but because the temptation lies most with the one talent people. They say, "What can I do? What is the use of me? I may be excused." That is the temptation. Brother, do not be entangled in that snare. If your Lord has only given you one talent He does not expect you to make the same interest upon it as the man does with five; but still He does expect His interest, and therefore do not wrap your talent in a napkin. It is but with strength imparted that any of us can serve Him. We have nothing to consecrate to Him but the gift we have first received from Him. You are weak. You feel it; but what says your God to you? "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." He can make you useful though you have no extraordinary endowments. Grape-shot may do great execution, though it cannot compare with grenade or bomb-shell. A sinner may be brought to Christ by the simple earnestness of a peasant or an artisan, without calling in the aid of a professor's learning or a preacher's eloquence. God can bless you far above what you think to be your capacity, for it is not a question of your ability but of His aid. You have no self-reliance, you tell me. Then take refuge in God, I entreat you, for you evidently want more of the divine succour. Go and get it; it is to be had. He girds the weak with strength. "The young men shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Why, I think *you* are more likely to do good than if you had five talents, for now you will pray more and you will depend more upon God than you would have done if you had possessed strength of your own.

One other word. As you are not enriched with many talents, mind you economize those you have. Do you know how merchants and tradesmen who have only a small capital in business manage to compete with those who have larger means? They try to turn their money over every day. The costermonger cannot afford to deal out his goods to gentlemen who will pay him in three months. Not he. He must get his ready money at the door, and then go and buy another stock to-morrow morning, and turn it over, or else he could not pick up his living with so small a capital. If you have only ninepence, make it "nimble," and you will get as much profit out of a nimble ninepence as another out of a lazy crown. Activity often makes up for lack of ability. If you cannot get force by the weight of the ball, get it by the velocity with which it travels. A little man with one talent all ablaze may become a perfect nuisance to the devil, and a champion for Christ. As for that great divine with his five talents, who marches on so sleepily, Satan can always overmarch him and win the day. If you can but turn over your one talent again and again, in the name of God, you may achieve great wonders. So I would encourage you in the work of the Lord.

IV. With workers WHO ARE UNDER GREAT DIFFICULTIES I would now have a word. I have known the day when perplexities pleased me, dilemmas afforded me delight, and instead of declining a difficult task I rather liked it. Even now I enjoy puzzling over a problem, and attempting what others decline. Nothing good in this world can be effected without difficulty. The biggest diamonds lie under heavy stones which sluggards cannot turn over. That which is easy to do is hardly worth doing. In the face of difficulty the man of ardent, persevering spirit braces up his nerves, sharpens his wits, and brings all his powers into play to achieve an object that will reward his efforts. Have you great difficulties, dear friend? You are not the first worker for God who has had difficulties to encounter. Let us go back to Moses again. He was to bring Israel out of Egypt; but his path did not appear very plain. He must go before Pharaoh and issue God's command. Pharaoh looked him through when he said, "Let my people go." The haughty monarch was greatly surprised to hear anybody, especially a Hebrew, talk like that; and so he bade him begone. But Moses returns with, "Thus saith the Lord, Let My people go"; and his courage was not even then crowned with immediate success. There must be plague upon plague, plague upon plague, till at last proud Pharaoh's heart was broken, the Israelites were saved from the hand of him that hated them; and Egypt was glad when they departed. This, however, was but the beginning of the mission of Moses. His was a life of difficulty—the meekest man, but the most provoked; and until he got to the top of Pisgah, and his gracious Master kissed away his soul, the prophet of Horeb had never done with difficulties. Any good thing, I say, especially any good thing done for God, must be surrounded with difficulties, and resisted by adversaries. Look at Nehemiah, and Ezra, and Zerubbabel, and those that built Jerusalem the second time. These good men wrought zealously, but Sanballat and Tobiah were jeering and jesting, and trying to throw down the wall. If you build a city without difficulty, it is not Jerusalem. Be sure of that. As soon as ever you begin working for God you will find a great power working against you. If you encounter opposition, take it as a good sign. When our young men go to a provincial town to preach, and I want to know how they are getting on, after listening to their story, I ask, "Has somebody slandered you yet? Do the newspapers denounce you as a fool?" If they say "No," I conclude that they are not getting on much. If Christ's cause is prospering the world will reproach

the soul-winner; if you do damage to the devil's kingdom he will roar at you. Should your course be smooth it is because he says, "There is nothing to disturb me in that man's monotonous talk. I need not let fly the fiery dart of calumny at him: he is a chip in the porridge, I will let him alone." Such a man generally goes through life very comfortably. People say, "He is a quiet, inoffensive sort of man." We do not want such soldiers in the service of Christ. "What a disagreeable person!" said a king once of an officer whose sword rattled on the floor. "That sword of his is most offensive." "Sire," said the officer, "that is exactly what your majesty's enemies think." When ungodly persons say that we are troublesome, we are not broken-hearted at being out of their good books. If the king's enemies think us troublesome, we reckon it to be high praise. When you, my dear brother, meet with opposition, encounter it with prayer. Exercise more faith. Antagonists ought never to hinder your going forward in the cause of Christ. Diamond must cut diamond. There is nothing so hard in this world but you can cut it with something harder. If you ask God to steel your soul up to the conquering point, and to make your resolution like an adamant stone, you can cut your way through an alp of diamond in the service of your Lord and Master.

Let me inspirit you in the face of assailants. The forces ranged against you might be stumbling-blocks to fools, but they shall only prove a stimulus to men. One day your honour shall be the greater and your reward shall be the higher because of these adverse elements. Therefore, be brave and fear not, but advance in the strength of God.

V. Fain would I now speak a passing word of comfort to another class of workers—THOSE THAT ARE NOT APPRECIATED. I am not going to say much, because I have not much sympathy with them. Yet I know that the smallest slight chafes those who are over sensitive. They murmur, "I do my best, and nobody thanks me." You think yourself a martyr, and complain that you are misrepresented. Be it so, dear friend; that was your Master's lot, and it is the lot of all His servants. This is a cross we must all carry, or we shall never wear the crown. Do you fancy that this is a new experience? Look at Joseph. His brethren could not bear him, and yet it was he that saved the family and fed them in time of famine. Look at David. His brothers asked why he had left the charge of the sheep to come down to the battle, suspecting that the pride of his heart had brought him among the soldiers and the standards. Yet nobody could bring back Goliath's head but that young David. Take a lesson from the ruddy hero: take no notice of what your brethren say about you. Go and bring back the giant's head. A good adventure is the best answer to evil accusations. If you are serving the Master let their scandal stir you up to more self-consecration. If they cry out against you as too forward, serve the Lord with more vigour and you will antidote the venom of their tongues. Did you enter into Christ's work in order to be honoured among men? Then retire from it, for you came with a bad motive. But if you enlisted purely to bring honour to Him, and to win His smile, what more do you want? What more do you want? Be not therefore disheartened because you are not applauded. Be certain of this, that to be kept in the rear rank is often necessary to future eminence. If you take a man and put him in front, and pat him on the back and say, "What a great man he is!" he will make a false step before long, and there will be an end of your hero; but when a man is brought forward by God, he is often one whom everybody criticizes, finds fault with, and declaims as an impostor, but the banter he is exposed to serves as ballast for his mind. When he comes off with success he will not be spoiled with conceit, for the grace of God will make him bow with gratitude. The sword that is meant for a princely hand, to split through skull and backbone in the day of battle, must be annealed in the furnace again and again: it cannot be fit for such desperate work until it has passed through the fire full many a time. Do not ask to be appreciated. Never be so mean as that. Appreciate yourself in the serenity of conscience, and leave your honour with your God.

VI. I must speak now, in the last place, a little more at length to THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE THEY HAVE HAD SO LITTLE SUCCESS.

It was my great delight a few evenings ago to meet a splendid band of men and women who are the Sunday-school teachers of this church. You will think it strange that I did not till then thoroughly estimate the extent of their work, as I had never added up the total of the various schools; but when I did so, and found that they mounted up to six thousand children, I felt full of joy. I shall run over with delight if they increase to twelve thousand in another twelve months. For so large a district this would not be too many, but still our present number is most encouraging. Now, I know that some of our teachers are working away in back streets, in rooms not connected with any place but this, and we hardly knew of them, because they were pursuing their simple, unobtrusive labours so quietly. Are there any of you who fear that you have toiled in vain and spent your strength for nought? I would entreat you, dear friends, not to be satisfied with casting in the seed unless you reap some good results; yet do not be so faint-hearted as to give up because of a little disappointment. Though you cannot be satisfied without fruit, yet do not cease to sow because one season proves a failure. I would not have our friends the farmers abandon agriculture because this year they have a bad crop: if they were to measure their future prospects by the present failure, it would be a great pity. If you have preached or taught, or done work for Christ with little success until now, do not infer that you will always be unsuccessful. Regret the lack of prosperity, but do not relinquish the labour of seeking it. You may reasonably be sorrowful, but you have no right to despair. Non-success is a trial of faith which has been endured by many a trusty servant who has been triumphant in the issue. Did not the disciples toil all night, and catch nothing? Did we not read just now of some who cast the net, and yet took no fish? Did not our Lord say that some seed would fall on stony ground, and some among the thorns, and that from these there would be no harvest? What good did Jeremiah do? I have no doubt he laboured, and God blessed him, but the result of his preaching was that he said, "The bellows are burned in the fire." He had blown up the fire till he had burnt the bellows, but no man's heart was melted. "Woe is me!" said he. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears!" I do not know what

was the result of Noah's ministry, but I do know that he was a preacher of righteousness for a hundred and twenty years, and yet he never brought a soul into the ark except his own family. Poor preaching we may count it judging by the influence it exerted: and yet we know that it was grand preaching, such as God commended. Do not, then, grudge the time, or the strength, you lay out in the service of our great Lord because you do not see your efforts thrive, for better men than you have wept over failure.

Remember, too, that if you really do serve the Lord thoroughly and heartily, He will accept you and acknowledge your service, even though no good should come of it. It is your business to cast the bread on the waters: if you do not find it after many days, that is not your business. It is your business to scatter the seed; but no farmer says to his servant, "John, you have not served me well, for there is no harvest." The man would say, "Could I make a harvest, sir? I have ploughed, and I have sowed. What more could I do?" Even so our good Lord is not austere, nor does He demand of us more than we can do. If you have ploughed and if you have sowed, although there should be no harvest, you are clear and accepted. Did it never strike you that you may be now employed in breaking up ground and preparing the soil from which other labourers who come after you will reap very plentifully. Perhaps your Master knows what a capital ploughman you are. He has a large farm, and He never means to let you become a reaper because you do the ploughing so well. Your Master does not intend you to take part in the harvest because you are such a good hand at sowing; and as He has crops that need sowing all the year round He keeps you at that work. He knows you better than you know yourself. Perchance if He were once to let you get on the top of a loaded wagon of your own sheaves, you would turn dizzy and make a fall of it; so He says, "You keep to your ploughing and your sowing, and somebody else shall do the reaping." Peradventure when your course is run you will see from heaven, where it will be safe for you to see it, that you did not labour in vain nor spend your strength for nought. "One soweth and another reapeth." This is the divine economy. I think that every man that loves his Master will say, "So long as there does but come a harvest, I will not stipulate about who reaps it. Give me faith enough to be assured that the reaping will come, and I will be content." Look at William Carey going to India, his prayer being "India for Christ." What did Carey live to see? Well, he saw good-speed enough to rejoice his heart: but certainly he did not see the fulfilment of all his prayer. Successive missionaries have since gone and spent their life on that vast field of enterprise. With what result? A result amply sufficient to justify all their toil, but, as compared with the millions that sit in heathendom, utterly inadequate to the craving of the church, much less to the crown of Christ. It does not much matter how any one man fares. The mighty empire will revert to the world's Redeemer, and I can almost trace in the records of the future the writing of "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had," as the valiant deeds of his heroes are chronicled by our Lord. When old St. Paul's cathedral had to be taken down in order to make room for the present noble edifice, some of the walls were immensely strong and stood like rocks. Sir Christopher Wren determined to throw them down by the old Roman battering-ram. The battering-ram began to work, and the men worked at it for hours and hours, day after day, without apparent effect. Blow after blow came on the wall; tremendous thuds that made the bystanders tremble. The wall continued to stand till they thought it was a useless operation. But the architect knew. He continued working his battering-ram till every particle of the wall felt the motion, and at last over it went in one tremendous ruin. Did anybody commend those workmen who caused the final crash, or ascribe all the success to them? Not a bit of it. It was the whole of them together. Those who had gone away to their meals, those who had begun days before, had as much honour in the matter as those who struck the last blow. And it is so in the work of Christ. We must keep on battering, battering, battering, and at last—though it may not be for another thousand years—the Lord will triumph. Though Christ cometh quickly He may not come for another ten thousand years, but in any case idolatry must die, and truth must reign. The accumulated prayers and energies of ages shall do the deed, and God shall be glorified. Only let us persevere in holy effort, and the end is sure. When a certain American general was fighting they said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I am not doing much, but I keep pegging away." That is what we must do. We cannot do much at any one time, but we must keep on. We must keep on pegging away at the enemy, and something will come of it by-and-by.

Possibly, dear friends, some of you who think you have had slender success may have had a great deal more than you know of. Others there may be whose want of success should suggest to them to try somewhere else, or else to try some other method. If we cannot do good in one way we must do it in another. Bring the matter before God in prayer. Cry mightily to Him, for He will help you yet to do it, and His shall be the glory. When He has laid you low, when He has taught you how inefficient you are, when He has driven you in despair to rely implicitly upon Himself, then it may be that He will give you more trophies and triumphs than you ever dreamed of. Anyhow, whether I prosper in life or not is not my question. To bring souls to Christ is my main endeavour, but it is not the ultimate proof of my ministry. My business is to live for God, to lay aside self, and give myself up wholly to Him, and if I do that I shall be accepted whatever else may happen. I wish we had the spirit of that brave old man who was condemned to the stake. They were going to burn him. He knew that the sentence was to be carried out the next morning, but with a soul full of courage, and with a merry heart, he sat the last thing at night talking with his friends—faggots and fire to face in the morning, recollect—and he said to one of them, "I am an old tree in my Master's orchard. When I was young I bore a little fruit by His grace. It was unripe and sour, but He bore with it: and I have grown mellow in my older days, and brought forth some fruit for Him by His grace. Now the tree has grown so old that my Master is going to cut it down and burn the old log. Well, it will warm the hearts of some of His family while I am burning"; and he even smiled for joy to think that he might be put to so good a purpose. I want you to have that spirit, and to say, "I will live for Christ while I am young: I will live for Him till I die,

and if I die a painful death, I will pray to die for Him, and warm the hearts of my brethren. You know that the persecutions of those martyr days begat such heroism and gallantry among disciples as prudent people in peaceful times can scarcely credit. It is said of the old Baptist church over in the City that the members went to Smithfield early one morning to see their pastor burnt and when some one asked the young people what they went there for, they said that they went *to learn the way*. That is splendid! They went to learn the way. Oh, go to the Master's cross to learn the way to live and die! See how He spent Himself for you, and then sally forth and spend yourselves for Him. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall ye be glorious in the sight of the Lord." Though you may think that you do not succeed, your whole-hearted consecration shall be your honour in the day of the Lord. By your hallowed life, and your humble service, you shall bring glory to His name. O Lord, set us in our charges, and encourage us in the service of Thy house! "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; establish Thou the work of our hands: yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it." May the blessing of our covenant God rest upon you, my brethren, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

GOOD CAUSE FOR GREAT ZEAL

"Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king."—Ezra iv. 14.

THE facts of the case were these. Under Zerubbabel, the Jews, who had returned from Babylon, commenced to rebuild Jerusalem. There were in the land certain half-and-half persons, somewhat like the Samaritans, who were neither Jews nor Gentiles; and they asked at first that they might join in the building of Jerusalem. This was refused, the Jews determining to keep themselves pure from all association with the heathen or semi-heathen. So indignant were these people at this that they wrote to Artaxerxes, the king, to tell him that he was very little aware of what was going on in Judea, for the Jews had always been from time immemorial a troublesome people, and now they were beginning to build their city again; and as soon as it was built they would, in all probability, revolt against King Artaxerxes, and give him much trouble, as their fathers had done to kings aforetime. Now, in writing that letter they showed themselves wise in their generation, for they told the king in the words of our text that they were moved by gratitude to write to him. It was false: but hypocrites often use the best of words and employ the best of sense to cover their deceit. They said that they themselves were sustained from the king's palace, and, therefore, they could not bear that the king should be dishonoured; for this reason they had written to tell his majesty that the Jews were building this wall, and they trusted that for his own honour's sake and for his subjects' sake he would stop them.

Now let me take these words right out of those black mouths, and put them into my own and into yours. They will suit us well if we turn them to the great King of kings. We may truly say, "Now because we have maintenance from the King's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the King's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the King."

The text will enable me to speak on three points. First, here is *a fact acknowledged:* "we have maintenance from the King's palace." Here is, secondly, *a duty recognised:* "it was not meet for us to see the King's dishonour;" and, thirdly, here is *a course of action prescribed:* "therefore have we sent and certified the King."

I. Now, beloved fellow believers, the words of our text may be used by us while we acknowledge a very gracious fact—WE HAVE MAINTENANCE FROM THE KING'S PALACE. How true this is of all God's people, in all respects, you will be abundantly ready to acknowledge. Both the upper and the nether springs from which we drink are fed by the eternal bounty of the great King. Hitherto we have been supplied with food and raiment. Sometimes we may have been reduced to a pinch, no doubt, and the question has arisen through the infirmity of our nature, and fermented with the irritability of our unbelief, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" but we have dwelt in the land, and verily we have been fed; and I have no doubt that to many of you it has been peculiarly gratifying to receive the loaf, as it were, immediately from your Father's hand. You have known what poverty has meant; and then there has been to you a peculiar sweetness in the daily bread which, in answer to prayer, has been sent to you. Although we do not drink of the water from the rock, or find the manna lying at our tent-door every morning, yet the providence of God produces for us quite the same results, and we have been fed and satisfied; and at any rate many of us, in looking back, can say, "My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." Hence, we have thus, even in things temporal, been made to feel that we have been maintained from the king's palace.

But it has been in spiritual things, beloved, that our continual experience of the King's bounty has been most notable. We have a new life, and therefore we have new wants and new hunger and a new thirst; and God has maintained us out of His own palace as to this new life of ours. O beloved, we have had great hunger at times after heavenly things, but He has "satisfied our mouth with good things," and our youth has been "renewed like the eagle's." We have had huge wants; bottomless deeps of need we have had. And yet, great God, the treasures of Thy grace have been everlasting mines, deep as our helpless miseries were, and boundless as our sins. Why, sometimes we have been drawn aside from our steadfastness, and we have wanted mighty grace to set us on our feet again, and to make us once more "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might,"

and we have had it; have we not? We have sought it, and we have found it. Our shoes have been iron and brass, and as our days so has our strength been. Up till this moment we have found that underneath us are the everlasting arms. In looking back upon all the way wherein the Lord our God has led us, we can sing of the beginning of it, we can sing of the middle of it, and we believe we shall sing of the end of it; for all through we have been maintained out of the king's palace. This is matter of fact both as to things temporal and things spiritual.

Beloved, it is a great mercy that you and I have been maintained out of the king's palace as believers; because, where else could we have been maintained? Where else, I ask you? As to spiritual things, to whom could we go but unto Him who has been so good to us? What empty wells ministers are, if we look to them! If we look to their Master, then "the rain also filleth the pools," and we find that there is supply in the preached word for our consolation. But have you not often known what it is to find that even God's servant under whom you have been fed, does not meet your case? He is meeting the case of hundreds of others, perhaps, but somehow he misses you: so there is no food for your soul. Aye, and the books you once read with so much comfort appear to have lost their flavour, their aroma, and their sweet savour, and, I may add, even the word of God itself, though it is unchanged, appears to be changed sometimes to you. But God, the God of Israel, your God, oh, how graciously has He still supplied you! "All my springs are in Thee," my God; and had they been elsewhere they long ago had failed. Who else could supply our needs but Jehovah? As the king of Israel said to the woman in the famine of Samaria, "If the Lord do not help thee whence can I help thee, out of the barn-floor or out of the wine-press?" There is no help for the child of God if his heavenly Father should shut the granary door. If out of the King's palace there came no portions of meat in due season, we might lay us down and die of despair. Who could hold us up but God? Who could guide us but God? Who could keep us from falling into perdition but God? Who could from hour to hour supply our desperate wants but God? Is it not, then, right well for us—abundantly well—that we have had our maintenance from the King's palace?

While we turn over this very sweet thought, we may remember that our maintenance from the King's palace has cost His Majesty dear. He has not fed us for nothing. We do not know what was the expenditure in gold of King Solomon every day, to supply all his court with wine and oil, with meal and fine flour, with sheep and fat oxen, harts and roebucks, venison and fatted fowl; but we do know that Solomon's cost was nothing at all compared with the vast expense at which we are sustained by the munificence of God. It cost Him His own dear Son at the very first. We should not have begun to live if He had spared His Son and kept Him back from us; but the choicest treasure in heaven, the Koh-i-noor of God's regalia, He was pleased to spend for our sakes that we might live; and ever since then we have been fed upon Jesus Christ Himself. No other food would be adequate to our necessities. His flesh is meat indeed; His blood is drink indeed. This is the most royal dainty conceivable, for a soul to feed upon the Son of God. And yet we have fed upon Him these many years. Let us bless and magnify our bounteous God, whose infinite favour has thus supplied our wants. But while He spares nothing for us, but gives everything to us, let us not meanly keep back anything from Him. With such a generous God, generosity seems to be so natural that it ought to be spontaneous. The highest—the most ardent—form of service would seem to be but a trifling recompense for the immense expense which the Lord hath been at in supporting us these many years.

May I ask you to think over the kind of portion and maintenance you have had from the King's palace? Such thoughts will stir your gratitude. Beloved, we have had a bountiful supply. God has never stinted us. As the sun throws out his wealth of heat and light, and does not measure it by the consumption of men, but throws it broadcast over all worlds; even so does God flood the world with the sunlight of His goodness, and His saints are made to receive it in abundance. If you have ever been stinted it is not by God; you have stinted yourself. Our receptive faculty may be small, but His giving disposition is abundant. Floods of mercy, oceans of love, has He poured out for us. Oh, what a bountiful maintenance have we had! Enough and to spare. Our imagination could not have conceived greater wealth than is ours in the covenant of grace: for all things are yours—the gift of God. God being ours, the infinite is ours; the omniscient is ours; the omnipotent is ours. Oh, what a bountiful portion we have!

And we have had an unfailing portion. As there has been much of it, so it has always come to us in due season. Times of need have come, but the needed supply has come too. If there be any believer here that has aught to testify against his God, let him do it. Hast thou ever rested on Him, and found Him fail thee? Didst thou ever trust Him in vain? Are His promises false? Has He left thee in the deep waters? When thou passedst through the fires did the flames kindle upon thee? Hast thou found thy God a wilderness? Has He been barrenness in the day of thine extremity? No, beloved, our God has been bountiful, and He has continued His bounty, —not good by fits and starts, but ever gracious to us. I am fain, if this were the proper place, to stop and tell what I know of this; but then, surely many older saints here might interrupt me, and say, "Let me speak of it." I remember once trying to speak of the great goodness of God in the pulpit, when my venerable grandfather, who is now in heaven, was sitting behind me, and he pulled my coat tail and bade me stop, for he thought he could talk upon that better than I could; and, indeed, he could, because of his deep experience of the faithfulness of the living God. It is a great delight and benefit to younger men to hear their grey-headed sires stand up and say what they have known, and what they have proved of God's eternal goodness. But I think we can say, whether young or old, if we have known His name a few years:—

> "When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,
> Has gathered thick and thundered loud,
> He near my soul has always stood,
> His loving-kindness, oh, how good!"

He has been a faithful friend to us: we have been right well maintained from the King's table.

While the supply has thus been bountiful and

continuous, it has ennobled us. For consider how great a thing it is to be supported from a king's palace; but it is the greatest of all privileges to be living upon the bounty of the King of kings: "Such honour have all the saints." Even the feeble Mephibosheths that are lame in their feet shall eat at the King's table. The Lord Jesus, the good Shepherd, makes all His little ones to be like the ewe lamb of the parable, which was fed out of the man's own cup, and did lie in his bosom. Even those that are weakest and meanest have this high honour—to be supplied by royalty itself with all that they need. Lift up your heads, ye that hang them down. Ye poor desponding saints that think yourselves less than the least of all, you are, every one of you, King's sons; you are all gentlemen commoners upon the King of kings. Your diet is better than that of the angels. God will sooner let Gabriel starve than you:

> "Never did angels taste above,
> Redeeming grace and dying love.";

Yet that is your daily bread, your morning meal and evening feast. Be glad. Hast thou little of temporal good? Well, but thy Father sends thee it. Dost thou mourn that thou hast so little spiritual good? Bless Him that thou hast any, for it is God that sends thee it. Thou wouldst have had none if it were not for His infinite grace; therefore praise Him for what thou hast, and confidently ask Him for more.

And there is reason for good cheer, in this, dear friends, that we have such a soul-satisfying portion in God. A soul that gets what God gives him has quite as much as he can hold, and as much as he can want. He has got a portion that might well excite envy. If the world did but know how happy and blessed Christians are, they would count them up in the royal family, and they would envy them beyond all others. There is nothing in the worldling's estate to envy. The more he has the worse it will be for him to leave it. His fine gardens and lawns and parks will make it hard to die. The greater his earthly honour the worse will be his eternal dishonour. It must be to him a horrible thing to have had a high soar, and then to have all the greater fall because of it. "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious because of the prosperity of the wicked." What after all becomes of him that prospereth in his way? "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." The place that has known the ungodly, and the lands they have called by their own name, soon become oblivious of their memory. Their record has perished quickly, and they, themselves, have gone back "to the vile dust from whence they sprang." But thou hast eternity to be thy heritage! Thou hast heaven to be thy portion! The few drops of gall that are in thy cup to-day shall soon be rinsed out, and it shall be full of the nectar of celestial thrones. Be thou content now with thy brown bread and hard fare a little while, for thou shalt eat the delicacies of angels. Yea, and by faith thou dost even now feast upon the fat things full of marrow and the wines on the lees well refined, which thy God sends to thee from the King's palace. Let us rejoice, dear brethren, if we are any of us downcast to-night, for our maintenance is from the King's palace, and what can we want more?

> "Father, I wait Thy daily will,
> Thou shalt divide my portion still.
> Grant me on earth what seems Thee best,
> Till death and heaven reveal the rest."

Thus we acknowledge the fact with lively interest and devout gratitude—"We have maintenance from the King's palace."

II. Now, secondly, here is A DUTY RECOGNIZED: "It was not meet for us to see the King's dishonour."

No doubt you will see the force of the argument without need of much explanation. It is good reasoning: If they were fed from the king's palace it was not meet that they should stand by and see the king dishonoured. The reasoning comes home to us. If we are so favoured—we, who are believers—with such a choice portion, it is not meet for us to sit down and see our God dishonoured. And here I will notice some things which dishonour God, and which we are bound not to put up with.

By every sense of propriety we are bound not to see God dishonoured by ourselves. It is well to begin at home. Art thou doing anything that dishonours they God, professor—anything at home, anything in thy daily avocation, anything in the way of conducting thy business? Is there anything in thy conversation anything in thy actions, anything in thy reading, anything in thy writing, anything in thy speaking, that dishonours God?

Seeing that thou art fed from the King's table, I beseech thee let it not be said that the King got damage from thee. If there be a traitor let him be found somewhere else, but not among the Lord's own chosen. Thou art bought with blood: wilt thou trample on that blood? The Crucified One died for thee: wilt thou crucify Him afresh and put Him to an open shame? Thou wilt soon be where Jesus is. Wouldst thou blush to see His face and to stand in His presence? What, and shall it ever be said that thou dost bring dishonour upon Jesus? God has given thee a portion above the angels: and wilt thou fill the devils' mouths with laughter, and cause them to have whereof to glory against God? That be far from thee, my brother! The Lord grant us grace to feel that if we are maintained from the King's palace it is not meet for us to cause the King dishonour!

Perhaps that dishonour may come from those who dwell under our roof, and live in our own house. I charge you that are parents and masters to see to this. Do not tolerate anything in those over whom you have control that would bring dishonour to God. Remember Eli: he did not restrain his sons, and they behaved shamefully. They were the minister's sons, and because they were not restrained, therefore God overthrew Eli's house, and did such terrible things that the ears of him that heareth thereof might well tingle. Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." We cannot impart to our children new hearts, but we can see to it that there shall be nothing within our gates that is derogatory to the religion of Jesus Christ. I charge you see to it. But you cannot control your children, you say. Then the Lord have mercy upon you! It is your business to do it, and you must do it, or else you will soon find they will control you; and no one knows what judgment will come from God upon those who suffer sin in children and servants to go unrebuked. No, if we are maintained from the King's palace, let us not see the King's dishonour.

Let the same holy jealousy animate us among

those with whom we have influence—as for instance, amongst those who wish to be united with us in church fellowship. It is the duty of every church to try, as far as it can, to guard the honour and dignity of King Jesus against unworthy persons, who would intrude themselves into the congregation of the saints, of those who are called, and chosen, and faithful. We are deceived, and always shall be, for the Church never was infallible; but still let no negligence of our practice supplement the infirmity of our judgment. Because ungodly men will creep in unawares, we are not, therefore, to connive at their entrance. To allow persons to come to the communion-table who do not even profess to be born again, is a clear act of treason against the King of kings. To receive into our membership persons of unhallowed life, unchaste, unrighteous—of licentious life and lax doctrine, such as know not the truth as it is in Jesus—would be to betray the trust with which Christ has invested us. That must not be; and every church member is bound to do his best to guard the Church against that which would render her unclean in the sight of God. If you are maintained from the King's table, it is not meet that you should see the King's dishonour.

Under what sacred obligations do we stand to maintain the statutes and testimonies of the Lord. And, oh, how the King is dishonoured by the mutilation and misrepresentation of His word! Therefore, dear brethren, we are always bound to bear our protest against false doctrine. I am sometimes accused of saying sharp things. The charge does not come home to my conscience with very great power. If anybody said I spoke smooth things I think it would oppress me a great deal more. As long as there are evils in this world, God's ministers are bound to protest against them. That man who, as he goes through the world, can say, "Hail, fellow, well met!" with everybody, and extol the modern Diana of charity—universal charity, false charity, charity towards the false—that man, when he comes to stand before his Maker, will find it hard to give in his account. In these days, when nobody believes anything, when everybody has subscribed to the belief that black is white, and white black, and colours are nothing at all but imaginary distinctions, it is time that somebody should believe something; and a little sharpness of speech might not only be excused, but commended, if we had but men who spoke what they did know, and testified honestly to the truth which they had received. Everyone here present, who is maintained from the King's palace, is bound to fight against every doctrine which insults the King. When I see a man pretending to be a priest, and assuming that he has power to forgive sins and to dispense pardons and indulgences, were I not to do my best to unmask the deceiver and to speak against his imposition, I might be accounted accessory to his crime, chargeable with his guilt, and be made partaker of his condemnation. Therefore, let every Englishman, let every Protestant, and, above all, let every Christian, denounce priestcraft of every sort, and in every church, whether among Romanists, Anglicans, or Dissenters. Down with it! There is only one Priest, and He is in heaven; and none of us have any power to offer any sacrifice for sin, or any power to absolve our fellow-men. Whether ye accuse us of being censorious or not, the profanity appals us, the duplicity that is taken in by it amazes us; and the sincerity with which we love the gospel inflames us to make our protest heard. If we do not speak out about this crying perversion of the truth, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves! Then there be some in these days who deny the divinity of Christ; and there can be no terms of peace between us and them. I remember a remark of a Unitarian doctor, which I thought eminently correct. He said of a certain Calvinist, who was accused of speaking sharply against Unitarians, "Quite right; and so he ought, because if the Calvinist be right the Unitarian is not a Christian at all, but if the Unitarian be right the Calvinist is an idolator, because he worships one who is a man and is not the Son of God." If what we hold be true, it is not possible that the man who denies the deity of Christ can be a Christian, nor can there be for him a hope of salvation. He deliberately refuses the only way of escape from the wrath to come. I can understand a man getting to heaven as a Roman Catholic, notwithstanding all his errors, because he believes in the divinity of Christ and relies on the expiatory sacrifice of His death, with whatever superstitions his creed may be overlaid; but I cannot understand, nor do I believe, that any man will ever enter those pearly gates who, in doubting or discrediting the deity of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, renounces the sheet-anchor of our most holy faith and dares to face his Maker without a Counsellor, without an Advocate, without a plea for mercy! It is time we said so, and spoke out plainly. This is no theme for trifling. Courtesies are thrown away upon antagonists whose cause is treason. Nor are we the men who should practise reserve; for if we are maintained from the King's palace, we are cravens if we do not stand up for our King. Then there have been attacks made in modern times upon the doctrine of substitution. If the doctrine of substitution be not true, I am a lost man; therefore, tooth and nail, will I fight for it. No other hope beneath the skies have I, except in the expiatory substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ. If He did not suffer in my stead, the just for the unjust, then the flames of hell must be my portion. Therefore I can never give up that truth, for it is giving up my own salvation. But it has been revealed, and I cling to it with the most implicit credit. Do you tell me that "modern thought" assails it. How, and with what weapons, I ask? Is it with argument, with proof or with any counter-suggestion? Oh, no, it is merely met with vague questionings, idle quibbles, and impertinent sneers—a style of answer that affects much, though it affirms nothing. I pray you, brethren, wherever you are, defend this fundamental doctrine of our most holy faith—that the Lord Jesus Christ has laid down His life to make atonement for the sins of His people. Or should we be confronted with any other form of false doctrine, or should we be haunted with any kind of scepticism—(scepticism! an anomalous thing, which is without form and void)—are we to stand with mealy mouths, and say, "Yes, brethren, you are of that opinion, and I am of the other." Nay, but opinion is light as a bubble, when judgment is pronounced by the supreme court from which there is no appeal. What, think ye? Is there no fact? Is there no truth? Is the word of God "yea" and "nay"? Has it come to this, that it is to be shuffled like a pack of cards, or shaped like a nose of wax, as every man may please? Oh, no! By the ever-living God there is truth somewhere, and that truth we will find out if we can; and, having

found it, we will hold it fast. Let us, in the day of battle, use our standard, and if our arm be smitten off, we hope the standard will not fall, but that others will be found to hold it up as there were in the brave days of yore—when our fathers burned at the stake for these things, or went to the galleys, or perished amidst the Alps, sooner than the truth of God's own word should be without witnesses among the sons of men! Bear none of these things in your hearts with tolerance; but hold fast to the things which ye have been taught, and hold them fast in faith and love to Christ Jesus.

Those who have their maintenance from the King's palace, ought not to allow the Lord to be dishonoured by a neglect of His ordinances. Brethren, I charge you who are believers, the Lord Jesus has given you only two symbolic ordinances. Take care that you use them well. Follow Him in what He did, when He said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Be baptized in His name. Follow Him to the communion table. He said, "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." Be obedient, I pray you, to His gracious word, and suffer not the King's precept to be trifled with.

Again, if we are indeed His courtiers, let us take care that He be not dishonoured by a general decline of His Church. When churches go to sleep—when the work of God is done deceitfully—for to do it formally is to do it deceitfully;—when there is no life in the prayer-meeting—when there are no holy enterprises afloat for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom: then the world says, "That is your church! What a sleepy set these saints are!" Oh, let not the King be thus dishonoured. Brethren, bestir yourselves! May this church never settle upon its lees, or fall into slumber as it grows older. May God grant it may grow more earnest? May there be ever here regiments of stalwart men who shall fight for King Jesus, and not be ashamed; and may the church be full of life and vigour till Christ Himself shall come. When we sleep with our fathers, may there be others found better than we are to maintain the cause and crown rights of King Jesus.

And oh, dear friends! how can we tolerate it that so many should dishonour Christ by rejecting His gospel. We cannot prevent their doing so, but we can weep for them; we can pray for them; we can plead for them; we can make it uncomfortable for them to reflect that believers are loving them, and yet they are not loving the Saviour. If you are fed from the King's palace it is not meet that you see the King's dishonour with dry eyes; if you hear a man swearing in the streets, mourn and lament it; if you see the Sabbath desecrated, grieve over it; if you behold drunkenness, do not laugh at it; if you hear lascivious songs, do not smile at them. Everything that is evil should be painful to a believer, and it ought to be an incessant sorrow to us that souls are perishing.

> "Did Christ o'er sinners weep,
> And shall our cheeks be dry?"

Privileged as you are, beloved, you ought to love your Master, so that the slightest word against Him should provoke your spirit to holy jealousy.

III. Our last point is this,—A COURSE OF ACTION PURSUED—"Therefore," says the text, "have we sent and certified the king." How shall we do that? Doubtless we act as it well becomes us, when we go and tell the Lord all about it? "Certified the king"! —but does He not know? Are not all things open to Him from whom no secrets are hid? Ah, yes; but when Hezekiah received Rab-shakeh's blasphemous letter he took it and spread it before the Lord. It is a holy exercise of the saints to report to the Lord the sins and the sorrows they observe among the people—the griefs they feel, and the grievances they complain of—to spread before Him the blasphemies they have heard, and appeal to Him concerning the menaces with which they are threatened. Yea, ye may report to the Lord the false doctrine that is preached, and the foul sophistry that is printed in these days. Such plain statements might become mighty pleas with God that He should arise, assert His cause, and do His own work. Lord, thou knowest that this day the deity of Thy Son has been insulted: the inspiration of Thy word has been denied; the power of Thy Holy Spirit has been ridiculed; Thine eternal love has been denied; Thine infinitely blessed sovereignty has been scoffed at; the atoning blood has been made a subject of contempt. Arise, O God, plead Thine own cause! Behold, all over the world men are mad upon their idols! They give themselves to this falsehood and to the other lie. O God of truth, arise and avenge Thyself! Hast Thou not said, "Ah, I will ease Me of Mine adversaries"? Do this, then. Give glory to whom glory is due, and let not the name of Jesus be for ever cast out as evil by ungodly men. This ought to be the constant pleading of the Church: "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" Oh, it ought to be. Day and night cry about all this. The sin of this London, oh, if we felt it, it would weigh us down;—the drunkenness of London, the lust of London, the oppression of London, the wickedness of every shape that reeks, as from a dunghill, from this great city! O God, wilt Thou always bear it? Wilt Thou not rise and change all this? Wilt Thou not give power to Thy gospel that a gracious reformation may be made? Tell the Lord about it! Certify the King!

After those people had certified the king, they took care to plead with him. As I have already told you, they apprized him that the city of Jerusalem was a very troublesome city, and therefore it ought not to be rebuilt. Plead with God: plead with God: plead with God! That praying is poor shift that is not made up of pleading. "Bring forth your reasons," saith the Lord. Bring forth your strong arguments Oh, what prayers were those of John Knox, when he seemed to say to God, "Save Scotland for this reason—for that reason—for another reason—for yet one more reason,"—the number of his motives still multiplying with the fervour of his heart. So did he labour with God as though he pleaded for his life, and would not let Him go until he had gained his suit for Scotland. Why, Scotland's knowledge of the truth is due doubtless, beyond everything else to John Knox's prayers, which even now are ringing in heaven. He "being dead, yet speaketh." Oh, for men of that calibre and that mind in this country, thus to plead for London! Oh, what a gem would London be in Christ's crown! If Christ had but London, surely out of this great city, which is the very heart of the world in many respects, there would go streaming forth rivers of health and life and blessing to the utmost ends of the earth. Spread

London's case, then, before God, and plead with the Most High. And when you have done it, do not go away and make your prayers into a lie by contrary actions, or by refraining from any action at all. He that prays hard must work hard, for no man prays sincerely who is not prepared to use every effort to obtain that which he asks of God. We must put our shoulder to the wheel while we pray for strength to put it in motion. All success depends upon God; yet he uses instruments, and he will not use instruments that are useless and unfitted to the work. "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. But our sufficiency is of God, who hath made us able ministers,"—therefore let us be up and be stirring, for if we are maintained from the King's palace, it is not meet that we see the King's dishonour, but it is due to Him that we should seek His glory.

Now, I would that every one of you knew what it was to be maintained from the King's palace; but alas! there are some here that have never eaten the King's bread, and will be banished from the King's presence if they die as they are. But, oh remember, the King is always ready to receive His rebel subjects, and He is a God ready to pardon. "Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little." "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." That is the way of reconciliation—to put your trust in Him; and if you do put your trust in His dear Son, you are reconciled to Him; you shall be maintained out of His palace; and then, I trust, you will live to His glory. Amen and amen.

EJACULATORY PRAYER

"So I prayed to the God of heaven."—Nehemiah ii. 4.

As we have already seen in the reading of the Scripture, Nehemiah had made enquiry as to the state of the city of Jerusalem, and the tidings he heard caused him bitter grief. "Why should not my countenance be sad," he said, "when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" He could not endure that it should be a mere ruinous heap—that city which was once beautiful for situation and the joy of the whole earth. Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak to other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise; but it occurred to him that he would do something himself. This is just the way that practical men start a matter. The unpractical will plan, arrange, and speculate about what may be done, but the genuine, thorough-going lover of Zion puts this question to himself—"What can you do? Nehemiah, what can you do yourself? Come, it has to be done, and you are the man that is to do it—at least, to do your share. What can you do?" Coming so far, he resolved to set apart a time for prayer. He never had it off his mind for nearly four months. Day and night Jerusalem seemed written on his heart, as if the name were painted on his eyeballs. He could only see Jerusalem. When he slept he dreamed about Jerusalem. When he woke, the first thought was "Poor Jerusalem!" and before he fell asleep again his evening prayer was for the ruined walls of Jerusalem. The man of one thing, you know, is a terrible man; and when one single passion has absorbed the whole of his manhood something will be sure to come of it. Depend upon that. The desire of his heart will develop into some open demonstration, especially if he talks the matter over before God in prayer. Something did come of this. Before long Nehemiah had an opportunity. Men of God, if you want to serve God and cannot find the propitious occasion, wait awhile in prayer and your opportunity will break on your path like a sunbeam. There was never a true and valiant heart that failed to find a fitting sphere somewhere or other in His service. Every diligent labourer is needed in some part of His vineyard. You may have to linger, you may seem as if you stood in the market idle, because the Master would not engage you, but wait there in prayer, and with your heart boiling over with a warm purpose, and your chance will come. The hour will need its man, and if you are ready, you, as a man, shall not be without your hour. God sent Nehemiah an opportunity. That opportunity came, 'tis true, in a way which he could not have expected. It came through his own sadness of heart. This matter preyed upon his mind till he began to look exceedingly unhappy. I cannot tell whether others remarked it, but the king whom he served, when he went into court with the royal goblet, noticed the distress on the cupbearer's countenance, and he said to him, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." Nehemiah little knew that his prayer was making the occasion for him. The prayer was registering itself upon his face. His fasting was making its marks upon his visage; and, though he did not know it, he was, in that way, preparing the opportunity for himself when he went in before the king. But you see when the opportunity did come there was trouble with it, for he says, "I was very sore afraid." You want to serve God, young man: you want to be at work. Perhaps you do not know what that work involves. It is not all pleasure. You are longing for the battle, young soldier: you have not smelt powder yet, but when you have been in a battle, and have had a few cuts, or a bullet or two have pierced you, you may not feel quite so eager for the fray. Yet the courageous man sets those things aside, and is ready to serve his country or his sovereign, and so the courageous Christian puts all difficulty aside, and he is ready to serve his comrades and his God, cost what it may. What if I should be sore afraid? yet so let it be, my God, if thus there shall be an opportunity to seek and to secure the welfare of Jerusalem for thy servant, who longs to promote it with all his heart.

Thus we have traced Nehemiah up to the particular point where our text concerns him. The king, Artaxerxes, having asked him why he was sad, he had an opportunity of telling him that the city of his fathers was a ruin. Thereupon the king asks him what he really wishes; by the manner of the question he would seem to imply an assurance that he means to help him. And here we are somewhat surprised to find that, instead of promptly answering the king—the answer is not given immediately—an incident occurs, a fact is related. Though he was a man who had lately given himself up to prayer and fasting, this little parenthesis occurs—"So I prayed to the God of heaven." My preamble leads up to this parenthesis. Upon this prayer I propose to preach. Three thoughts occur to me here, on each of which I intend to enlarge—*the fact that Nehemiah did pray just then; the answer of his prayer;* and, *the excellent kind of prayer he used.*

I. THE FACT THAT NEHEMIAH PRAYED CHALLENGES ATTENTION. He had been asked a question by his sovereign. The proper thing you would suppose was to answer it. Not so. Before he answered he prayed to the God of heaven. I do not suppose the king noticed the pause. Probably the interval was not long enough to be noticed, but it was long enough for God to notice it—long enough for Nehemiah to have sought and have obtained guidance from God as to how to frame his answer to the king. Are you not surprised to find a man of God having time to pray to God between a question and an answer? Yet Nehemiah found that time. We are the more astonished at his praying, because he was so evidently perturbed in mind, for, according to the second verse, he was very sore afraid. When you are fluttered and put out you may forget to pray. Do you not, some of you, account it a valid excuse for omitting your ordinary devotion? At least, if anyone had said to you, "You did not pray when you were about that business," you would have replied, "How could I? There was a question that I was obliged to answer. I dared not hesitate. It was a king that asked it. I was in a state of confusion. I really was so distressed and terrified that I was not master of my own emotions. I hardly knew what I did. If I did not pray, surely the omission may be overlooked. I was in a state of wild alarm." Nehemiah, however, felt that if he was alarmed it was a reason for praying, not for forgetting to pray. So habitually was he in communion with God that as soon as he found himself in a dilemma he flew away to God, just as the dove would fly to hide herself in the clefts of the rock.

His prayer was the more remarkable on this occasion, because *he must have felt very eager about his object.* The king asks him what it is he wants, and his whole heart is set upon building up Jerusalem. Are not you surprised that he did not at once say, "O king, live for ever. I long to build up Jerusalem's walls. Give me all the help thou canst?" But no, eager as he was to pounce upon the desired object, he withdraws his hand until it is said, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." I confess I admire him. I desire also to imitate him. I would that every Christian's heart might have just that holy caution that did not permit him to make such haste as to find ill-speed. "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey." Certainly, when the desire of our heart is close before us, we are anxious to seize it; but we shall be all the surer of getting the bird we spy in the bush to be a bird we grasp in the hand if we quietly pause, lift up our heart and pray unto the God of heaven.

It is all the more surprising that he should have deliberately prayed just then, because *he had been already praying for the past three or four months* concerning the selfsame matter. Some of us would have said, "That is the thing I have been praying for; now all I have got to do is to take it and use it. Why pray any more? After all my midnight tears and daily cries, after setting myself apart by fasting to cry unto the God of heaven, after such an anxious conference, surely at last the answer has come. What is to be done but to take the good that God provides me with and rejoice in it?" But no, you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man to pray more. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." If you do but know the sweet art of prayer, you are the man that will be often engaged in it. If you are familiar with the mercy-seat you will constantly visit it.

> "For who that knows the power of prayer
> But wishes to be often there?"

Although Nehemiah had been praying all this while, he nevertheless must offer another petition. "So I prayed to the God of heaven."

One thing more is worth recollecting, namely, that *he was in a king's palace,* and in the palace of a heathen king too; and he was in the very act of handing up to the king the goblet of wine. He was fulfilling his part in the state festival, I doubt not, amongst the glare of lamps and the glitter of gold and silver, in the midst of princes and peers of the realm. Or even if it were a private festival with the king and queen only, yet still men generally feel so impressed on such occasions with the responsibility of their high position that they are apt to forget prayer. But this devout Israelite, at such a time and in such a place, when he stands at the king's foot to hold up to him the golden goblet, refrains from answering the king's question until first he has prayed to the God of heaven.

II. There is the fact, and I think it seems to prompt further enquiry. So we pass on to observe—THE MANNER OF THIS PRAYER.

Well, very briefly, it was what we call *ejaculatory prayer*—prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then it is done. It was not the prayer which stands knocking at mercy's door—knock, knock, knock; but it was the concentration of many knocks into one. It was begun and completed, as it were, with one stroke. This ejaculatory prayer I desire to commend to you as among the very best forms of prayer.

Notice, how *very short* it must have been. It was introduced—slipped in—sandwiched in—between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer; and, as I have already said, I do not suppose it took up any time at all that was appreciable—scarcely a second. Most likely the king never observed any kind of pause or hesitation, for Nehemiah was in such a state of alarm at the question that I am persuaded he did not allow any demur or vacillation to appear, but the prayer must have been offered like an electric flash, very rapidly indeed. In certain states of strong excitement it is wonderful how much the mind gets though in a short time. You

may, perhaps, have dreamed, and your dream occupied, to your idea, an hour or two at the very least, yet it is probable—nay, I think certain—that all the dreaming is done at the moment you wake. You never dreamed at all when you were asleep: it was just in that instant when you woke that the whole of it went through your mind. As drowning men when rescued and recovered have been heard to say that while they were sinking they saw the whole panorama of their lives pass before them in a few seconds, so the mind must be capable of accomplishing much in a brief space of time. Thus the prayer was presented like the winking of an eye; it was done intuitively; yet done it was, and it proved to be a prayer that prevailed with God.

We know, also, that it must have been *a silent prayer;* and not merely silent as to sounds but silent as to any outward signs—perfectly secret. Artaxerxes never knew that Nehemiah prayed, though he stood probably within a yard of him. He did not even move his lips as Hannah did, nor did he deem it right even to close his eyes, but the prayer was strictly within himself offered unto God. In the innermost shrine of the temple—in the holy of holies of his own secret soul—there did he pray. Short and silent was the prayer. It was a prayer on the spot. He did not go to his chamber as Daniel did, and open the window. Daniel was right, but this was a different occasion. Nehemiah could not have been permitted to retire from the palace just then. He did not even turn his face to the wall or seek a corner of the apartment. No, but there and then, with the cup in his hand, he prayed unto the God of heaven, and then answered the question of the king.

I have no doubt from the very wording of the text that it was *a very intense and direct prayer.* He says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." That was Nehemiah's favourite name for God—the God of heaven. He knew whom he was praying to. He did not draw a bow at a venture and shoot his prayers anyhow, but he prayed to the God of heaven—a right straight prayer to God for the thing he wanted; and his prayer sped, though it occupied less, perhaps, than a second of time.

It was a prayer of *a remarkable kind.* I know it was so, because Nehemiah never forgot that he did pray it. I have prayed hundreds of times, and thousands of times, and not recollected any minute particular afterwards either as to the occasion that prompted or the emotions that excited me; but there are one or two prayers in my life that I never can forget. I have not jotted them down in a diary, but I remember when I prayed, because the time was so special and the prayer was so intense, and the answer to it so remarkable. Now, Nehemiah's prayer was never, never erased from his memory; and when these words of history were written down he wrote that down, "So I prayed to the God of heaven"—a little bit of a prayer pushed in edgeways between a question and an answer—a mere fragment of devotion, as it seemed, and yet so important that it is put down in an historical document as a part of the history of the restitution and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, and a link in the circumstances which led up to that event of the most important character. Nehemiah felt it to be so, and therefore he makes the record—"So I prayed to the God of heaven."

III. Now, beloved friends, I come, in the third place, to recommend to you THIS EXCELLENT STYLE OF PRAYING.

I shall speak to the children of God mainly, to you that have faith in God. I beg you often, nay, I would ask you always to use this method of ejaculatory prayer. And I would to God, also, that some here who have never prayed before would offer an ejaculation to the God of heaven before they leave this house—that a short but fervent petition, something like that of the publican in the temple, might go up from you—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

To deal with this matter practically, then, *it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to have set times of prayer.* I cannot understand a man's keeping up the vitality of godliness unless he regularly retires for prayer morning and evening at the very least. Daniel prayed three times a day, and David says, "Seven times a day will I praise Thee." It is good for your hearts, good for your memory, good for your moral consistency that you should hedge about certain portions of time and say, "These belong to God. I shall do business with God at such-and-such a time, and try to be as punctual to my hours with Him as I should be if I made an engagement to meet a friend." When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor of London the banquet somewhat troubled him, for Sir Thomas always had prayer with his family at a certain time. The difficulty was how to quit the banquet to keep up family devotion; but so important did he consider it that he vacated the chair, saying to a person near that he had a special engagement with a dear friend which he must keep. And he did keep it, and he returned again to his place, none of the company being the wiser, but he himself being all the better for observing his wonted habit of worship. Mrs. Rowe used to say that when her time came for prayer she would not give it up if the apostle Paul were preaching. Nay, she said, if all the twelve apostles were there, and could be heard at no other time, she would not absent herself from her closet when the set time came round. Well, I do not feel very sure that my scruples would go quite so far, for, I think, if I had the opportunity of hearing the apostle at the time when I am wont to pray, and could not at any other time hear him, I should postpone my prayer to hear the sermon, not would there be any impropriety in the arrangement; probably it would show a little shrewd sense. Yet, as a general principle, it is desirable to be punctual and punctilious in respect to your private as well as your public devotions. Be not negligent but vigilant; never remiss, but always regular in keeping up your appointed seasons of prayer.

But now, having urged the importance of such habitual piety, I want to impress on you the value of another sort of prayer: namely, *the short, brief, quick, frequent ejaculations* of which Nehemiah gives us a specimen. And I recommend this, because it hinders no engagement and occupies no time. You may be measuring off your calicoes, or weighing your groceries, or you may be casting up on account, and between the items you may say, "Lord, help me." You may breathe a prayer to heaven and say, "Lord, keep me." It will take no time. It is one great advantage to persons who are hard pressed in business that such prayers as those will not, in the slightest degree, incapacitate them from attending to the business they may have in hand. It requires you to go to no particular place. You can stand where you are,

ride in a cab, walk along the streets, be the bottom sawyer in a saw pit, or the top one either, and yet pray just as well such prayers as these. No altar, no church, no so-called sacred place is needed, but wherever you are, just such a little prayer as that will reach the ear of God, and win a blessing. Such a prayer as that can be offered anywhere, under any circumstances. I do not know in what condition a man could be in which he might not offer some such prayer as that. On the land, or on the sea, in sickness or in health, amidst losses or gains, great reverses or good returns, still might he breath his soul in short, quick sentences to God. The advantage of such a way of praying is that you can pray often and pray always. If you must prolong your prayer for a quarter of an hour you might possibly be unable to spare the time, but if it only wants the quarter of a minute, why, then, it may come again and again and again and again—a hundred times a day. The habit of prayer is blessed, but the spirit of prayer is better; and the spirit of prayer it is which is the mother of these ejaculations; and therefore do I like them, because she is a plentiful mother. Many times in a day may we speak with the Lord our God.

Such prayer may be suggested by all sorts of surroundings. I recollect a poor man once paying me a compliment which I highly valued at the time. He was lying in a hospital, and when I called to see him he said, "I heard you for some years, and now, whatever I look at seems to remind me of something or other that you said, and it comes back to me as fresh as when I first heard it." Well, now, he that knows how to pray ejaculatory prayers will find everything about him helping him to the sacred habit. Is it a beautiful landscape? Say, "Blessed be God who has strewn these treasures of form and colour through the world, to cheer the sight and gladden the heart." Are you in doleful darkness, and is it a foggy day? Say, "Lighten my darkness, O Lord." Are you in the midst of company? You will be reminded to pray, "Lord, keep the door of my lips." Are you quite alone? Then can you say, "Let me not be alone, but be Thou with me, Father." The putting on of your clothes, the sitting at the breakfast table, the getting into the conveyance, the walking the streets, the opening of your ledger, the putting up of your shutters—everything may suggest such prayer as that which I am trying to describe if you be but in the right frame of mind for offering it.

These prayers are commendable, *because they are truly spiritual.* Wordy prayers may also be windy prayers. There is much of praying by book that has nothing whatever to recommend it. When you have found the benefit of a manual of French conversation to anyone travelling in France without a knowledge of the language, then try how much good a manual of prayers will do a poor soul who does not know how to ask our heavenly Father for a boon or benefit that he needs. *A manual,* a handbook, forsooth! Tush! Pray with your heart, not with your hands. Or, if you would lift hands in prayer, let them be your own hands, not another man's. The prayers that come leaping out of the soul—the gust of strong, emotion fervent desire, lively faith—these are the truly spiritual; and no prayers but spiritual prayers will God accept.

This kind of prayer is free from any suspicion that it is prompted by the corrupt motive of being offered to please men. They cannot say that the secret ejaculations of our soul are presented with any view to our own praise, for no man knows that we are praying at all; therefore do I commend such prayers to you, and hope that you may abound therein. There have been hypocrites that have prayed by the hour. I doubt not there are hypocrites as regular at their devotions as the angels are before the throne of God, and yet is there no life, no spirit, no acceptance in their pretentious homage; but he that ejaculates—whose heart talks with God—he is no hypocrite. There is a reality, and force, and life about it. If I see sparks come out of a chimney I know there is a fire inside somewhere, and ejaculatory prayers are like the sparks that fly from a soul that is filled with burning coals of love to Jesus Christ.

Short, ejaculatory prayers are of great use to us, dear friends. Often times they check us. Bad-tempered people, if you were always to pray just a little before you let angry expressions fly from your lips, why many times you would not say those naughty words at all. They advised a good woman to take a glass of water and hold some of it in her mouth five minutes before she scolded her husband. I dare say it was not a bad receipt, but if, instead of practising that little eccentricity, she would just breathe a short prayer to God, it would certainly be more effectual, and far more scriptural. I can recommend it as a valuable prescription for the hasty and the peevish; for all who are quick to take offence and slow to forgive insult or injury. When in business you are about to close in with an offer about the propriety of which you have a little doubt or a positive scruple, such a prayer as "Guide me, good Lord" would often keep you back from doing what you will afterwards regret.

The habit of offering these brief prayers would also check your confidence in yourself. It would show your dependence upon God. It would keep you from getting worldly. It would be like sweet perfume burnt in the chamber of your soul to keep away the fever of the world from your heart. I can strongly recommend these short, sweet, blessed prayers. May the Holy Ghost give them to you!

Besides, they *actually bring us blessings from heaven.* Ejaculatory prayers, as in the case of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, as in the case of Jacob when he said even in dying, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O God,"—prayers such as Moses offered when we do not read that he prayed at all, and yet God said to him, Why cryest thou unto Me?; ejaculations such as David frequently presented, these were all successful with the Most High. Therefore abound in them, for God loves to encourage and to answer them.

I might thus keep on recommending ejaculatory, prayer, but I will say one more thing in its favour. I believe it is very suitable to some persons of a peculiar temperament who could not pray for a long time to save their lives. Their minds are rapid and quick. Well, dear friends, time is not an element in the business, God does not hear us because of the length of our prayer, but because of the sincerity of it. Prayer is not to be measured by the yard, nor weighed by the pound. It is the might and force of it—the truth and reality of it—the energy and the intensity of it. You that are either of so little a mind or of so quick a mind that you cannot use many words, or continue long to think of one thing, it should be to your comfort that ejaculatory prayers are acceptable. And it may be, dear friend, that you are in a condition of body in which you cannot pray any other way. A

headache such as some people are frequently affected with the major part of their lives—a state of body which the physician can explain to you—might prevent the mind from concentrating itself long upon one subject. Then it is refreshing to be able again and again and again—fifty or a hundred times a day—to address one's self to God in short, quick sentences, the soul being all on fire. This is a blessed style of praying.

Now, I shall conclude by just mentioning a few of the times *when* I think we ought to resort to this practice of ejaculatory prayer. Mr. Rowland Hill was a remarkable man for the depth of his piety, but when I asked at Wotten-under-Edge for his study, though I rather pressed the question, I did not obtain a satisfactory reply. At length the good minister said, "The fact is, we never found any. Mr. Hill used to study in the garden, in the parlour, in the bedroom, in the streets, in the woods, anywhere." "But where did he retire for prayer?" They said they supposed it was in his chamber, but that he was always praying—that it did not matter where he was, the good man was always praying. It seemed as if his whole life, though he spent it in the midst of his fellow-men doing good, was passed in perpetual prayer. You know the story of his being over there in Walworth at Mr. George Clayton's chapel, where our brother Paul Turquand now is the pastor, and of his being seen in the aisles after everybody was gone, while he was waiting for his coachman. There was the good old man toddling up and down the aisles, and as some one listened, he heard him singing to himself—

> "And when I shall die, receive me I'll cry,
> For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why;
> But this thing I find, we two are so joined,
> He won't be in heaven and leave me behind."

And with such rhymes and ditties, and choice words, he would occupy every moment of his life. He has been known to stand in the Blackfriars' road, with his hands under his coat-tails, looking in a shop window, and if you listened you might soon perceive that he was breathing out his soul before God. He had got into a constant state of prayer. I believe it is the best condition in which a man can be—praying always, praying without ceasing, always drawing near to God with these ejaculations.

But if I must give you a selection of suitable times I should mention such as these. Whenever you have a great joy, cry, "Lord, make this a real blessing to me." Do not exclaim with others, "Am I not a lucky fellow?" but say, "Lord, give me more grace, and more gratitude, now that Thou dost multiply Thy favours." When you have got any arduous undertaking on hand or a heavy piece of business, do not touch it till you have breathed your soul out in a short prayer. When you have a difficulty before you, and you are seriously perplexed, when business has got into a tangle or a confusion which you cannot unravel or arrange, breathe a prayer. It need not occupy a minute, but it is wonderful how many snarls come loose after just a word of prayer. Are the children particularly troublesome to you, good woman? Do you seem as if your patience was almost worn out with the worry and harass? Now for an ejaculatory prayer. You will manage them all the better, and you will bear with their naughty tempers all the more quietly. At any rate your own mind will be the less ruffled. Do you think that there is a temptation before you? Do you begin to suspect that somebody is plotting against you? Now for a prayer, "Lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies." Are you at work at the bench, or in a shop, or a warehouse, where lewd conversation and shameful blasphemies assail your ears? Now for a short prayer. Have you noticed some sin that grieves you? Let it move you to prayer. These things ought to remind you to pray. I believe the devil would not let people swear so much if Christian people always prayed every time they heard an oath. He would then see it did not pay. Their blasphemies might somewhat be hushed if they provoked us to supplication. Do you feel your own heart going off the lines? Does sin begin to fascinate you? Now for a prayer—a warm, earnest, passionate cry, "Lord, hold Thou me up." Did you see something with your eye, and did that eye infect your heart? Do you feel as if "your feet were almost gone, and your steps had well nigh slipped?" Now for a prayer—"Hold me, Lord, by my right hand." Has something quite unlooked for happened? Has a friend treated you badly? Then like David say, "Lord, put to nought the counsel of Ahithophel." Breathe a prayer now. Are you anxious to do some good? Be sure to have a prayer over it. Do you mean to speak to that young man as he goes out of the Tabernacle to-night about his soul? Pray first, brother. Do you mean to address yourself to the members of your class and write them a letter this week about their spiritual welfare? Pray over every line, brother. It is always good to have praying going on while you are talking about Christ. I always find I can preach the better if I can pray while I am preaching. And the mind is very remarkable in its activities. It can be praying while it is studying: it can be looking up to God while it is talking to man; and there can be one hand held up to receive supplies from God while the other hand is dealing out the same supplies which He is pleased to give. Pray as long as you live. Pray when you are in great pain; the sharper the pang then the more urgent and importunate should your cry to God be. And when the shadow of death gathers round you, and strange feelings flush or chill you, and plainly tell that you near the journey's end, then pray. Oh! that is a time for ejaculation. Short and pithy prayers like this: "Hide not Thy face from me, O Lord"; or this, "Be not far from me, O God"; will doubtless suit you. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," were the thrilling words of Stephen in his extremity; and "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." were the words that your Master Himself uttered just before He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. You may well take up the same strain and imitate Him.

These thoughts and counsels are so exclusively addressed to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that you will be prone to ask, "Is not there anything to be said to the unconverted?" Well, whatever has been spoken in their hearing may be used by them for their own benefit. But let me address myself to you, my dear friends, as pointedly as I can. Though you are not saved, yet you must not say, "I cannot pray." Why, if prayer is thus simple, what excuse can you have for neglecting it? It wants no measureable space of time. Such prayers as these God will hear, and ye have all of you the ability and opportunity to think and to express them, if you have only that elementary faith in God which believes "that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Cornelius had, I suppose, got about as far as this, when he was admonished by the angel to send

or Peter, who preached to him peace by Jesus Christ o the conversion of his soul. Is there such a strange eing in the Tabernacle to-night as a man or a woman hat never prays ? How shall I expostulate with you ? Iay I steal a passage from a living poet who, though e has contributed nothing to our hymn books, hums note so suited to my purpose, and so pleasant to my ar that I like to quote it—

" More things are wrought by prayer
Then this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain, flowing night and day :
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

do not suspect there is a creature here who never rays, because people generally pray to somebody or ther. The man that never prays to God such prayers s he ought, prays to God such prayers as he ought not. t is an awful thing when a man asks God to damn im ; and yet there are persons that do that. Sup- ose He were to hear you ; He is a prayer-hearing od. If I address one profane swearer here I would ke to put this matter clearly to him. Were the lmighty to hear you. If your eyes were blinded and your tongue were struck dumb while you were uttering a wild imprecation, how would you bear the sudden judgment on your impious speech ? If some of those prayers of yours were answered for yourself, and some that you have offered in your passion for your wife and for your child, were fulfilled to their hurt and your distraction, what an awful thing it would be. Well, God does answer prayer, and one of these days He may answer your prayers to your shame and everlasting confusion. Would not it be well now, before you leave your seat, to pray, " Lord have mercy upon me ; Lord, save me ; Lord, change my heart ; Lord, give me to believe in Christ ; Lord, give me now an interest in the precious blood of Jesus ; Lord, save me now ? " Will not each one of you breathe such a prayer as that ? May the Holy Spirit lead you so to do, and if you once begin to pray aright I am not afraid that you will ever leave off, for there is a something that holds the soul fast in real prayer. Sham prayers—what is the good of them ? But real heart pleading—the soul talking with God—when it once begins will never cease. You will have to pray till you exchange prayer for praise, and go from the mercy-seat below to the throne of God above.

May God bless you all ; all of you I say ; all who are my kindred in Christ, and all for whose salvation I yearn. God bless you all and every one, for our dear Redeemer's sake. Amen.

THE BROAD WALL

" The broad wall."—Nehemiah iii. 8.

IT seems that, around Jerusalem of old in the time of her splendour, there was a broad wall, which was her defence and her glory. Jerusalem is a ype of the Church of God. It is always well when ve can see clearly, distinctly, and plainly, that around he Church to which we belong there runs a broad wall.

This idea of a broad wall around the Church uggests three things, *separation*, *security*, and *njoyment*. Let us examine each of these in its turn.

I. First, the SEPARATION of the people of God, rom the world is like that broad wall surrounding he holy city of Jerusalem.

When a man becomes a Christian, he is still in he world, but he is no longer to be of it. He was an eir of wrath, but he has now become a child of race. Being of a distinct nature, he is required to eparate himself from the rest of mankind, as the ord Jesus Christ did, who was " holy, harmless, ndefiled, and separate from sinners." The Lord's hurch was separated in His eternal purpose. It as separated in His covenant and decree. It was eparated in the atonement, for even there we find hat our Lord is called " the Saviour of all men, pecially of those that believe." An actual separation made by grace, is carried on in the work of sanctiication, and will be completed in that day when the eavens shall be on fire, and the saints shall be caught p together with the Lord in the air ; and in that ast tremendous day, He shall divide the nations as shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, and then here shall be a great gulf fixed, across which the ngodly cannot go to the righteous, neither shall the ighteous approach the wicked.

Practically, my business is to say to those of you who profess to be the Lord's people, *take care that you maintain a broad wall of separation between yourselves and the world.* I do not say that you are to adopt any peculiarity of dress, or to take up some singular style of speech. Such affectation gendereth, sooner or later, hypocrisy. A man may be as thoroughly worldly in one coat as in another ; he may be quite as vain and conceited with one style of speech as with another ; nay, he may be even more of the world when he pretends to be separate than if he had left the pretence of separation alone. The separation which we plead for is moral and spiritual. Its foundation is laid deep in the heart, and its substantial reality is very palpable in the life.

Every Christian, it seems to me, should be more scrupulous than other men *in his dealings.* He must never swerve from the path of integrity. He should never say, " It is the custom : it is perfectly understood in the trade." Let the Christian remember that custom cannot sanction wrong, and that its being " understood " is no apology for misrepresentation. A lie " understood " is not therefore true. While the golden rule is more admired than practised by ordinary men, the Christian should always do unto others as he would that they should do unto him. He should be one whose word is his bond, and who, having once pledged his word, sweareth to his own hurt, but changeth not. There ought to be an essential difference between the Christian and the best moralist, by reason of the higher standard which the gospel inculcates, and the Saviour has exemplified. Certainly, the highest point to which

the best unconverted man can go might well be looked upon as a level below which the converted man will never venture to descend.

Moreover, the Christian should especially be distinguished *by his pleasures*, for it is here, usually, that the man comes out in his true colours. We are not quite ourselves, perhaps, in our daily toil, where our pursuits are rather dictated by necessity than by choice. We are not alone; the society we are thrown into imposes restraints upon us; we have to put the bit and the bridle upon ourselves. The true man does not then show himself; but when the day's work is done, then the "birds of a feather flock together." It is with the multitude of traders and commercial men as it was with those saints of old, of whom, when they were liberated from prison, it was said, "Being let go, they went unto their own company." So will your pleasures and pastimes give evidence of what your heart is, and where it is. If you can find pleasure in sin, then in sin you choose to live; and, unless grace prevent, in sin you will not fail to perish. But if your pleasures are of a nobler kind, and your companions of a devouter character; if you seek spiritual enjoyments, if you find your happiest moments in worship, in communion, in silent prayer, or in the public assembling of yourselves with the people of God, then your higher instincts become proof of your purer character, and you will be distinguished in your pleasures by a broad wall which effectually separates you from the world.

Such separation should be carried, I think, *into everything which affects the Christian.* "What have they seen in thine house?" was the question Isaiah asked of Hezekiah. When a stranger comes into our house, it should be so ordered that he can clearly perceive that the Lord is there. A man ought scarcely to tarry a night beneath our roof without gathering that we have a respect unto Him who is invisible, and that we desire to live and move in the light of God's countenance. I have already said that I would not have you cultivate singularities for singularity's sake; yet, as the most of men are satisfied if they do as other people do, you must never be satisfied until you do more and better than other people, having found out a mode and course of life as far transcending the ordinary worldling's life as the path of the eagle in the air is above that of the mole which burrows under the soil.

This broad wall between the godly and the ungodly *should be most conspicuous in the spirit of our mind.* The ungodly man has only this world to live for; do not wonder if he lives very earnestly for it. He has no other treasure; why should he not get as much as he can of this? But you, Christian, profess to have immortal life, therefore your treasure is not to be amassed in this brief span of existence. Your treasure is laid up in heaven, and available for eternity. Your best hopes overleap the narrow bounds of time, and fly beyond the grave; your spirit must not, therefore, be earthbound and grovelling, but soaring and heavenly. There should be about you always the air of one who has his shoes on his feet, his loins girded, and his staff in his hand,—the air of a pilgrim ready to be off and away to a better land. You are not to live here as if this were your home. You are not to talk of this world as though it were to last for ever. You are not to hoard it, and treasure it up, as though you had set your heart upon it; but you are to be on the wing as though you had not a nest here, and never could have, but expected to find your resting-place amongst the cedars of God, in the hill-tops of glory.

Depend upon it, the more unworldly a Christian is, the better it is for him. Methinks I could mention several reasons why this wall should be very broad. *If you are sincere in your profession, there is a very broad distinction between you and unconverted people.* Nobody can tell how far life is removed from death. Can you measure the difference? They are as opposite as the poles. Now, according to your profession, you are a living child of God, you have received a new life, whereas the children of this world are dead in trespasses and sins. How palpable the difference between light and darkness! Yet you profess to have been "sometimes darkness," but now you are made "light in the Lord." There is, therefore, a great distinction between you and the world if you are what you profess to be. You say, when you put on the name of Christ, that you are going to the Celestial City, to the New Jerusalem; but the world turns its back upon the heavenly country, and goes downward to that other city of which you know that destruction is its doom; your path is different from theirs. If you be what you say you are, the road you take must be diametrically opposite to that of the ungodly man. You know the difference between their ends. The end of the righteous shall be glory everlasting, but the end of the wicked is destruction. Unless then you are a hypocrite, there is such a distinction between you and others as only God Himself could make,—distinction which originates here, and is to be perpetuated throughout eternity. When the social diversities occasioned by rank and dependency, riches and poverty, ignorance and learning, shall all have passed away, the distinctions between the children of God and the children of men, between saints and scoffers, between the chosen and the castaway, will still exist. I pray you, then, maintain a broad wall in your conduct, as God has made a broad wall in your state and in your destiny.

Remember again, *that our Lord Jesus Christ had a broad wall between Him and the ungodly.* Look at Him, and see how different He is from the men of His time. All His life long you observe Him to be a stranger and a foreigner in the land. Truly, He drew near to sinners, as near as He could draw, and He received them when they were willing to draw near to Him; but He did not draw near to their sins. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." When He went to His own city of Nazareth, He only preached a single sermon, and they would have cast Him headlong down the hill if they could. When He passed through the street, He became the song of the drunkard, the butt of the foolish, the mark at which the proud shot out the arrows of their scorn. At last, having come to His own, and His own having received Him not, they determined to thrust Him altogether out of the camp, so they took Him to Golgotha, and nailed Him to the tree as a malefactor, a promoter of sedition. He was the great Dissenter, the great Nonconformist of His age. The National Church first excommunicated, and then executed Him. He did not seek difference in things trivial; but the purity of His life and the truthfulness of His testimony roused the spleen of the rulers and the chief men of their synagogues. He was ready in all things to serve them and to bless them, but He never would blend with them. They would have made Him a king.

Ah! if He would but have joined the world, the world would have given Him the chief place, as the world's prince said on the mountain, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." But He drives away the fiend, and stands immaculate and separate even to the close of His life. If you are a Christian, be a Christian. If you follow Christ, go without the camp. But if there be no difference between you and your fellow-man, what will you say unto the King in the day when He cometh and findeth that you have on no wedding garment by which you can be distinguished from the rest of mankind?

Moreover, dear friends, you will find that *a broad wall of separation is abundantly good for yourselves.* I do not think any Christian in the world will tell you that, when he has given way to the world's customs, he has ever been profited thereby. If you can go and find an evening's amusement in a suspicious place, and feel profited by it, I am sure you are not a Christian; for, if you were a Christian indeed, it would pain your conscience, and unfit you for devouter exercises of the heart. Ask a fish to spend an hour on dry land, and I think, did it comply, the fish would find that it was not much to its benefit, for it would be out of its element; and it will be so with you in communion with sinners. When you are compelled to associate with worldly people in the ordinary course of business, you find much that grates upon the ear, that troubles the heart, and annoys the soul. You will be often like righteous Lot, vexed with the conversation of the wicked, and you will say with David,—

> "Woe's me that I in Mesech am
> A sojourner so long;
> That I in tabernacles dwell
> To Kedar that belong."

Your soul will pine and sigh to come forth and wash your hands of everything that is impure and unclean. As you find no comfort there, you will long to get away to the chaste, the holy, the devout, the edifying fellowship of the saints. Make a broad wall, dear friends, in your daily life. If you begin to give way a little to the world, you will soon give way a great deal. Give sin an inch, and it will take an ell. "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves," is an apt motto of economy. So, too, guard against little sins, if you would be clear of "the great transgression." Look after the little approaches to worldliness, the little givings-in towards the things of ungodliness, and then you will not make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Another good reason for keeping up the broad wall of separation is, that *you will do most good to the world thereby.* I know Satan will tell you that, if you bend a little, and come near to the ungodly, then they also will come a little way to meet you. Aye, but it is not so. You lose your strength, Christian, the moment you depart from your integrity. What do you think ungodly people say behind your back, if they see you inconsistent to please them? "Oh!" say they, "there is nothing in his religion but vain pretence; the man is not sincere." Although the world may openly denounce the rigid Puritan, it secretly admires him. When the big heart of the world speaks out, it has respect to the man that is sternly honest, and will not yield his principles,—no, not a hair's breadth. In such an age as this, when there is so little sound conviction, when principle is cast to the winds, and when a general latitudinarianism, both of thought and of practice, seems to rule the day, it is still the fact that a man who is decided in his belief, speaks his mind boldly, and acts according to his profession, is sure to command the reverence of mankind. Depend upon it, woman, your husband and your children will respect you none the more because you say, "I will give up some of my Christian privileges," or, "I will go sometimes with you into that which is sinful." You cannot help them out of the mire if you go and plunge into the mud yourself. You cannot help to make them clean if you go and blacken your own hands. How can you wash their faces then? You young man in the shop, and you young woman in the workroom, if you keep yourselves to yourselves in Christ's name, chaste and pure for Jesus, not laughing at jests which should make you blush, not mixing up with pastimes that are suspicious; but, on the other hand, tenderly jealous of your conscience as one who shrinks from a doubtful thing as a sinful thing, holding sound faith, and being scrupulous of the truth,—if you will so keep yourselves, your company in the midst of others shall be as though an angel shook his wings, and they will say to one another, "Refrain from this or that just now, for So-and-so is here." They will fear you, in a certain sense; they will admire you, in secret; and who can tell but that, at last, they may come to imitate you?

Would ye tempt God? Would ye challenge the desolating flood? Whenever the Church comes down to mingle with the world, it behoves the faithful few to fly to the ark, and seek shelter from the avenging storm. When the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair to look upon, then it was that God said it repented Him that He had made men upon the face of the earth, and He sent the deluge to sweep them away. A separate people God's people must be, and they shall be. It is His own declaration, "The people shall dwell alone; they shall not be numbered among the nations." The Christian is, in some respects, like the Jew. The Jew is the type of the Christian. You may give the Jew political privileges, as he ought to have; he may be adopted into the State, as he ought to be; but a Jew he is, and a Jew he must be still. He is not a Gentile, even though he calls himself English, or Portuguese, or Spanish, or Polish. He remains one of the people of Israel, a child of Abraham, a Jew still; and you can mark him as such,—his speech bewrayeth him in every land. So should it be with the Christian; mixing up with other men, as he must in his daily calling; going in and out among them, like a man among men; trading in the market; dealing in the shop; mingling in the joys of the social circle; taking his part in politics, like a citizen, as he is; but, at the same time, ever having a higher and a nobler life, a secret into which the world cannot enter, and showing the world, by his superior holiness his zeal for God, his sterling integrity, and his unselfish truthfulness, that he is not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world. You cannot tell how concerned I am for some of you, that this broad wall should be kept up; for I detect in some of you, at times, a desire to make it very narrow, and, perhaps to pull it down altogether. Brethren, beloved in the Lord, you may depend upon it that nothing worse can happen to a church than to be conformed unto this world. Write "Ichabod" upon her walls then

for the sentence of destruction has gone out against her. But, if you can keep yourselves as—

" A garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground,"—

you shall have your Master's company; your graces shall grow; you shall be happy in your own souls; and Christ shall be honoured in your lives.

II. Secondly, the broad wall round about Jerusalem INDICATED SAFETY.

In the same way, a broad wall round Christ's Church indicates her safety too. Consider who they are that belong to the Church of God. A man does not become a member of Christ's Church by baptism, nor by birthright, nor by profession, nor by morality. Christ is the door into the sheepfold; every one who believes in Jesus Christ is a member of the true Church. Being a member of Christ, he is a member, consequently, of the body of Christ, which is the Church. Now, around the Church of God,—the election of grace, the redeemed by blood, the peculiar people, the adopted, the justified, the sanctified,—around the Church there are bulwarks of stupendous strength, munitions which guard them safely. When the foe came to attack Jerusalem, he counted the towers and bulwarks, and marked them well; but after he had seen the strength of the holy city, he fled away. How could he hope ever to scale such ramparts as those? Brethren, Satan often counts the towers and bulwarks of the New Jerusalem. Anxiously does he desire the destruction of the saints, but it shall never be. He that rests in Christ is saved. He who hath passed through the gate of faith to rest in Jesus Christ may sing, with joyful confidence,—

" The soul that on Jesus hath lean'd for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

The Christian is surrounded by *the broad wall of God's power.* As God is omnipotent, Satan cannot defeat Him. If God's power be on my side, who then shall hurt me? " If God be for us, who can be against us? "

The Christian is surrounded by *the broad wall of God's love.* Who shall prevail against those whom God loves? I know that it is vain to curse those whom God hath not cursed, or to defy those whom the Lord hath not defied; for whomsoever He blesseth is blessed indeed. Balak, the son of Zippor, sought to curse the beloved people, and he went first to one hill-top and then to another, and looked down upon the chosen camp. But, aha! Balaam, thou couldst not curse them, though Balak sought it! Thou couldst only say, " They are blessed, yea, and they shall be blessed! "

God's law is a broad wall around us, and so is *His justice.* These once threatened our destruction, but now the justice of God demands the salvation of every believer. If Christ has died instead of me, it would not be justice if I had to die also for my sin. If God has received the full payment of the debt from the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, then how can He demand the debt again? He is satisfied, and we are secure.

The immutability of God, also, surrounds His people like a broad wall. " I am God, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." As long as God is the same, the rock of our salvation will be our secure hiding-place.

Upon this delightful truth, we might linger long, for there is much to cheer us in the strong security which God has given in covenant to His people. They are surrounded by the broad wall of *electing love.* Doth God choose them, and will He lose them? Did He ordain them to eternal life, and shall they perish? Did He engrave their names upon His heart and shall those names be blotted out? Did He give them to His Son to be His heritage, and shall His Son lose His portion? Did He say, " They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I make up My jewels," and shall He part with them? Has He who maketh all things obey Him no power to keep the people whom He has formed for Himself to be His own peculiar heritage? God forbid that we should doubt it! Electing love, like a broad wall, surrounds every heir of grace.

And oh, how broad is the wall of *redeeming love!* Will Jesus fail to claim the people He bought with so great a price? Did He shed His blood in vain? How can He revive enmity against those whom He hath once reconciled unto God, not imputing their transgressions unto them? Having obtained eternal redemption for them, will He adjudge them to everlasting perdition? Has He purged their sins by sacrifice, and will He then leave them to be the victims of Satanic craft? By the blood of the everlasting covenant, every Christian may be assured that he cannot perish, neither can any pluck him out of Christ's hand. Unless the cross were all a peradventure, unless the atonement were a mere speculation, those for whom Jesus died are saved through His death. Therefore " He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

As a broad wall which surrounds the saints of God is *the work of the Holy Spirit.* Does the Spirit begin and then not finish the operations of His grace? Ah, no! Does He give life which afterwards dies out? That is impossible; hath He not told us that the Word of God is the incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever? And shall the powers of hell or the evil of our own flesh destroy what God has pronounced immortal, or cause dissolution to that which God says is incorruptible? Is not the Spirit of God given to us to abide with us for ever, and shall He be expelled from that heart in which He has taken up His everlasting dwelling-place? Brethren, we are not of their mind who are led by fear or fallacy to hazard such conjectures. We rejoice to say with Paul, " Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." We delight to sing—

" Grace *will* complete what grace begins,
To save from sorrows or from sins;
The work that wisdom undertakes
Eternal mercy ne'er forsakes."

Almost *every doctrine of grace* affords us a broad wall, a strong bastion, a mighty bulwark, a grand munition of defence. Take, for instance, Christ's suretyship engagements. He is Surety to His Father for His people. When He brings home the flock, think you that He will have to report that some of them are lost? Not so!

" Here am I," will He say, " and the children that Thou hast given Me. Of all whom Thou hast given Me I have lost none." He will keep all the saints even to the end. *The honour of Christ* is involved in this matter. If Christ loses one soul that leans upon

Him, the integrity of His crown is gone; for if there should be one believing soul in hell, the prince of darkness would hold up that soul, and say, "Aha! Thou couldst not save them all! Aha! Thou Captain of Salvation, Thou wast defeated here! Here is one poor little Benjamin, one Ready-to-halt, that Thou couldst not bring to glory, and I have him to be my prey forever!" But it shall not be. Every gem shall be in Jesu's crown. Every sheep shall be in Jesu's flock. He shall not be defeated in any way, or in any measure; but He shall divide the spoil with the strong, He shall establish the cause He undertakes, He shall eternally conquer; glory be unto His great and good name!

III. The idea of a broad wall—and with this I close,—SUGGESTS ENJOYMENT.

The walls of Nineveh and Babylon were broad, so broad that there was found room for several chariots to pass each other. Here men walked at sunset, and talked and promoted good fellowship. If you have ever been in the city of York, you will know how interesting it is to walk around the broad walls there. But our figure is drawn from the Orientals. They were accustomed to come out of their houses, and walk on the broad walls. *They used them for rest from toil*, and for the manifold pleasures of recreation. It was very delightful, when the sun was going down, and all was cool, to walk on those broad walls. And so, when a believer comes to know the deep things of God, and to see the defences of God's people, he walks along them, and he rests in confidence. "Now," saith he, "I am at rest and peace; the destroyer cannot molest me; I am delivered from the noise of archers in the place of the drawing of water, and here I can exercise myself in prayer and meditation. Now that salvation is appointed for walls and bulwarks, I will sing a song unto Him who hath done these great things for me; I will take my rest and be quiet, for he that believeth hath entered into rest. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Broad walls, then, are for rest, and so are our broad walls of salvation.

Those broad walls were also *for communion*. Men came there and talked with one another. They leaned over the wall, and whispered their loving words, conversed of their business, comforted one another, related their troubles and their joys. So, when believers come unto Christ Jesus, they commune with one another, with the angels, with the spirits of just men made perfect, and with Jesus Christ their Lord, who is best of all. Oh! on those broad walls, when the banner of love waves over them, they sometimes rejoice with a joy unspeakable, in fellowship with Him who loved them, and gave Himself for them. It is a blessed thing, in the Church of Christ, when you get such a knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel that you can have the sweetest communion with the whole Church of the living God.

And then the broad walls were also intended *for prospects and outlooks*. The citizen came up on the broad wall, and looked away from the smoke and dirt of the city within, right across to the green fields, and the gleaming river, and the far-off mountains, delighted to watch the mowing of hay, or the reaping of corn, or the setting sun beyond the distant hills. It was one of the common enjoyments of the citizen of any walled city to come to the top of the wall in order to take views afar. So, when a man once gets into the altitudes of gospel doctrines, and has learned to understand the love of God in Christ Jesus, what wide views he can take! How he looks down upon the sorrows of life! How he looks beyond that narrow little stream of death! How, sometimes, when the weather is bright, and his eye is clear enough to let him use the telescope, he can see within the gates of pearl, and behold the joys which no mortal eye hath seen, and hear the songs which no mortal ear hath heard, for these are things, not for eyes and ears, but for hearts and spirits! Blessed is the man who dwelleth in the Church of God for he can find on her broad walls places from which he can see the King in His beauty, and the land which is very far off!

Ah! dear friends, I wish that these things had to do with you all, but I am afraid they have not; for many of you are outside the wall; and when the destroyer comes, none will be safe but those who are inside the wall of Christ's love and mercy. I would to God that you would escape to the gate at once, for it is open. It will be shut,—it will be shut one day, but it is open now. When night comes, the night of death, the gate will be shut; and you will come then, and say, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But the answer will be,—

> "Too late, too late!
> Ye cannot enter now."

But it is not too late yet. Still Christ saith, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Oh, that thou hadst the will to come and put thy trust in Jesus; for if thou dost so, thou shalt be saved. I cannot speak to some of you about security, for there are no broad walls to defend you. You have run away from the security. Perhaps you have been patching up with some untempered mortar a righteousness of your own, which will all be thrown down as a bowing wall and as a tottering fence. Oh, that you would trust in Jesus! Then would you have a broad wall which all the battering-rams of hell shall never be able to shake. When the storms of eternity shall beat against that wall, it shall stand fast for ay.

I cannot speak to some of you about rest, and enjoyment, and communion, for you have sought rest where there is none, you have got a peace which is no peace, you have found a comfort which will be your destruction. God make you to be distressed, and constrain you by sore stress to flee to the Lord Jesus, and so to get true peace, the only peace, for "He is our peace." Oh, that you would close in with Christ, and trust Him! Then you would rejoice in the present happiness which faith would give you; but the sweetest thing of all would be the prospect which should then unfold to you of the eternal happiness which Christ has prepared for all those who put their trust in Him.

KING'S GARDENS

"The king's garden."—Nehemiah iii. 15.

THERE have been many very famous king's gardens, such as those "hanging gardens" in Nineveh, wherein Sardanapalus delighted himself, and that remarkable garden of Cyrus, in which he took such great interest, because, as he said, every tree and every plant in it had been both planted and tended by his own royal hand. Imagination might bid you wander among the beauties of the celebrated villas and gardens of the Roman emperors, or make you linger amid the roses and lilies of the voluptuous gardens of the Persian caliphs, but we have nobler work in hand. I call you to come with me to the orchard of pomegranates, to beds of spices, camphire with spikenard, calamus and cinnamon, myrrh and aloes, with trees of frankincense. I am not about to speak of the gardens of any earthly monarch, for we can find far fairer flowers and rarer fruits in the gardens of the King of kings, the resorts of His Son, the Prince Immanuel.

There are six of these "King's gardens" to which I shall conduct you, but we shall not have time to tarry in more than one of them.

I. The first of these King's gardens was THE GARDEN OF PARADISE, which was situate in the midst of Eden.

You will read of it in the book of Genesis. It was doubtless a fairer place than we have ever seen, and much more marvellous for beauty than we can imagine. It was full of all manner of delights, a fruitful spot wherein the man who was set to keep it would have no need to toil, but would find it a happy and refreshing exercise to train the luxurious plants. No sweat was ever seen upon his happy brow, for he cultivated a virgin soil. Abundance of luscious fruits ministered to his necessities. He could stretch himself upon soft couches of moss, and no inclemencies of weather disturbed his repose. No winter's wind scattered the leaves of Eden, no summer's heat burned up its flowers. There were sweet alternations of day and night, but the day brought no sorrow and the night no danger. The beasts were there; yet not as beasts of prey, but as the obedient servants of that happy man whom God had made to have dominion over all the works of His hands. In the midst of the garden grew that mysterious tree of life, of which we know so little literally, but of which, I trust, we know so much in its spiritual meaning, for we have fed upon its fruits, and have been healed by its leaves. Hard by it stood the tree of knowledge of good and evil, placed there as the test of obedience. Adam's mind was equally balanced, it had no bias to evil, and God left him to the freedom of his will, giving this as the test of his loyalty, that, if obedient, he would never touch the fruit of that one tree. Why need he? There were tens of thousands of trees, all of which bowed down their branches with abundant fruit for his hunger or his luxury. Why need he desire that solitary tree which God had fenced and hedged about? But, in an evil hour, at the serpent's base suggestion, we know not how soon after his creation, he put forth his hand and plucked from the forbidden tree! The mere plucking of the fruit seems little to the thoughtless, but the breaking of the Maker's law was a great offence to heaven, for it was man's throwing down the gage of battle against his Creator, and breaking his allegiance to his Lord and Master; this was great, great in itself and in its mischievous effects, for Adam fell that day, and out of Eden he was driven to till the thankless, thorn-bearing soil, and you and I fell in him, and were banished with him. We were in his loins. He was "the father of us all," and on us he has brought the curse of toil, and in us all he has sown the seeds of iniquity. Let it never be forgotten, in connection with the garden of Eden, that we are not now a pure and sinless race, and cannot be by nature, however civilized we may become. Men are born no longer with balanced minds, but a heavy weight of original sin in the scale. We are averse to that which is good. The bias of the mind of man, when he is born into the world, is towards that which is evil, and we as naturally go astray as the serpent naturally learns to hiss, or the wolf to tear and to devour.

Ah! brethren and sisters, beware of thinking too little of the fall. Slight thoughts upon the fall are at the root of false theologies; the mischief that has been wrought in us is not a trifling matter, but a thing to be trembled at. Only the divine hand can reclaim us. The house of manhood has been shaken to its foundations; each timber is decayed; the leprosy is in the tottering wall. Man must be made new by the same creating Hand that first made him, or he never can be a dwelling place fit for God. Let those who boast of their natural goodness look to the garden of Eden and be ashamed of their pride, and then examine their own actions by the glass of God's most holy law, and be confounded that they should dream of purity. How can he be pure that is born of woman? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? Not one." As our mothers were sinful, such are we, and such will our children be; as long as men are brought into the world by natural generation, we shall be "born in sin and shapen in iniquity"; and, if we are to be accepted by God, we must be born again, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Alas! then, alas! for that first King's garden! The flowers are gone; the birds have ceased to sing! The winter's winds howl through it, and the summer's sun scorches it! The beasts of prey are there. Perhaps the very site of it, which is now unknown, may be a den of dragons, an habitation for the pelican of the wilderness, and the bittern of desolation! Fit image, if it be so, of our natural estate, for we were altogether given up to desolation and destruction, unless One mighty to save had espoused our cause and undertaken our redemption.

II. The second King's garden to which I will introduce you is very different from the first, but it yields more fragrant spices and healthier herbs by far. It is THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE—the garden of the olive-press, wherein the Lord Jesus Christ was the olive, and God's anger against sin was the press.

Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place

whereon you stand is holy ground! 'Tis night. Yonder are twelve men walking, and talking sweetly as they walk. Observe one, a mysterious majestic, Person, who is evidently superior to the rest. It is the Son of man. Hush! It is the Son of God, and as He talks you can hear words like these, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches; abide in Me and I in you." We will conceal ourselves behind that group of olives, and will see what is to happen here. This is the place where that mysterious Son of God was often to be found with His disciples. Just as God walked in the first garden in Eden, so the Son of God walked in the second garden; and as God in the first garden communed with man, so of the second garden it is written Jesus ofttimes resorted thither with His disciples. See, He has dismissed eight of them. He has told them to wait yonder, and on He goes with only three—Peter, and James, and John—the chosen out of the eleven—and speaking to them, and bidding them watch, He leaves them, and is all alone. Let us draw as near as we may; we see the Son of God in prayer, and as He prays, His earnestness gathers strength. He is striving with an unseen enemy—struggling like a man who would overcome an adversary, wrestling so vigorously that He sweats; but it is a strange sweat! "His sweat was, as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground." He is beginning to drink the cup of Jehovah's wrath, which was due to our sins, a cup which we could not have emptied even through eternity, though every drop of it had been a hell. Christ is quaffing the wrath-cup, and as He trembles under the fiery influence of the draught of worse than wormwood and gall, He cries, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." But He recovers Himself, and His prayer is, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Backwards and forwards you see Him go like a man distracted. Three times He looks to the disciples for comfort, but they are slumbering, and then again He returns to His God and casts Himself upon His face, with strong crying and tears, pouring out His soul in blood before high heaven, such is the anguish of His tortured heart.

Herein behold the beginning of our redemption. Jesus then began to suffer in our room and stead, atoning for our iniquity. The mischief of Eden fell upon Gethsemane. The mist of sin rose up in the garden of Paradise, and as it rose it gathered and collected into a black, tremendous storm cloud, and anon it burst, with flashes of lightning and with claps of thunder, upon the great Shepherd of the sheep, that we, who deserved to be overwhelmed by the tempest, might find fair weather in the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

Perhaps no sight that was ever beheld of men or angels, except the crucifixion, was more tremendous than the anguish of Gethsemane. It must have been a terrible spectacle to have seen martyrs in the fire, or men and women devoured by lions and bears in the Roman amphitheatre, but then to the Christian's eye there was a pleasure mingled with these ghastly sights, or God sustained His faithful ones. They clapped their hands amidst the fire. They sang when the wild beasts were leaping upon them. Such holy joy beamed from their countenances, that their brethren were comforted rather than distressed, and saints wished to be there with them, that they might die as they died and win the martyr's crown. But, when you look at Christ in the garden, you miss the help which the martyrs had. God forsakes Him. He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people there must be none with Him. Aye! and yet, dark as that night was, the darkest night that ever fell upon this world, it was the mother of that gospel light of finished redemption which now enlightens the Gentiles and brings glory unto Israel.

Let us leave the King's garden, then, with feelings of deep repentance that we should have made Jesus suffer so, and yet with holy gladness to think that thus hath He redeemed us from the ruins of the fall.

III. I claim a moment's thought for the GARDEN OF THE BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION.

In Joseph's garden, in the new tomb, the Beloved of our souls slept for awhile, and thence arose to His glory-life. Detained of death He could not be, for He was no longer a lawful Captive, He had finished His work and earned His reward, and therefore the imprisoning stone was rolled away. He is not here, for He is risen; the seal is broken, the watchmen are dispersed, the stone is removed, the Captive is free. What comfort is here, for, as Jesus rose, so all His slumbering saints shall likewise leave the tomb. His resurrection is the resurrection of all the saints. Wait but awhile, and the tomb shall be no longer the treasury of death. So surely as the Lord came forth from the sepulchre to glory and immortality, all His saints are justified and clean. None can accuse us now that the Lord has risen indeed no more to die. His one offering hath perfected for ever all the chosen ones, and His glorious uprising is the guarantee of their acceptance. Faith delights in the garden where Magdalene found her unknown, yet well-known Lord, and where angels kept watch and ward over the couch which the immortal Sufferer had relinquished. Henceforth it is to us a King's garden, abounding with pleasant fruits and fragrant flowers.

IV. And now I desire to take you to a fourth King's garden. You will not have far to go. Put your hand into your bosom and your finger will be on the latch of its door. It is THE GARDEN OF THE HUMAN HEART.

The heart is a little garden, little apparently, but yet so extensive that it is all but infinite, for who can tell the limit of the heart of man, or how far-darting the imaginations and the affections of the soul of man may be? Now, this little-great thing, the human heart, is meant to be a garden for God. Did I say it was a garden? It should be so, but alas! by nature it scarcely deserves the name, for I perceive it to be all overgrown with weeds; thistle and briar, deadly nightshade, and nettles, and I know not what besides, spring up everywhere. I see trees, but they drop with poison, like the deadly upas, whose drip is death. There are no luscious fruits, but instead thereof grapes of Gomorrha and apples of Sodom; this loathsome den of festering evils is what should have been God's garden, but lo! it is a tangled wilderness of all manner of noisome things; thorns, also, and thistles doth it bring forth.

What must be done to this neglected garden? What heavenly horticulture can be used upon it to reclaim it from its desert state? God, the great Husbandman, must come and turn it over after His own fashion. The rough plough of conviction must be dragged through it. The spade of trouble must break up the surface and smash in pieces the clods,

and kill the weeds, and fire must burn up the rubbish. Has that ever been done in the garden of your heart, dear hearer? Have you ever had your soul ploughed and cross ploughed and harrowed with sorrow till you were driven well-nigh to despair? Have you seen your sweet sins killed, so that you could not take pleasure in them any longer, but desired to be clean rid of them? That must be done if the garden is to be reclaimed and made worthy of the Divine Owner.

Then when the soil is broken up, and the clods are turned, there must be seed-sowing, and the planting of slips from the tree of life, seeds from the nurseries of heaven, seeds that shall turn to flowers which shall be full of sweet perfume, acceptable to Christ. The seeds of faith, and love, and hope, and patience, and perseverance, and zeal, must be carefully cast into prepared soil by the Holy Spirit's hand, and fostered by the same kindly care. Ere the heart can be called a garden fit for the King of kings, these must bud, and blossom, and yield their fruits. When I regard attentively that garden which was so lately covered over with weeds, but which is now sown and planted, I perceive that the plants grow not well unless the soil be drained. There must be always drained out of us much superfluity of naughtiness and excess of carnal confidence, or our heart will be a cold swamp, a worthless plant-killing bog. Affliction drains us. We do not like to have our money or our friends taken from us, and yet the love of these might ruin us for all fruit-bearing if God did not remove them. Besides the draining, there must also be constant hoeing, and raking, and digging. After a garden is made, the flower-beds are never left long alone, the gardener must have his eye upon them or they run to riot. If they were left to themselves, they would soon breed weeds again and return to the old confusion, but the hoe must be constantly kept going, if the garden is to be clean. So with the garden of the heart; cleansing and pruning must be done every day, and God must do it through ourselves, and we must do it by constant self examination and repentance, striving in the power of the Holy Spirit to keep ourselves free from the sins which do so easily beset us. I find that the weeds grow fast enough in my soul, and keep me in full employment to check their growth. Cowper talks about

> "The dear hour which brought me to Thy foot,
> And cut up all my follies by the root."

Surely, good Cowper must have made a mistake! I know mine were never cut up by the roots. When they have been cut down, the root soon sprouts again. They will come up by the root one day, as I believe and hope, and till then I must be incessantly watchful; but the roots are there still; alas! alas! alas! that it should be so! O Lord Jesus, help us, or we shall be overgrown with our besetting sins. Corruption still remaineth even in the heart of the regenerate, and the garden of the King of kings is often overgrown with weeds. But still for God it is a garden now, a garden for Jesus to walk in, and there are happy times when He deigns to sit down in the arbour of our souls. What a royal garden our poor heart then becomes! It may be the body is covered with poor garments, it may be our whole outward man is very sick and faint; but still our manhood is a King's garden when Christ is within, and we are kings and priests unto our God when Jesus holds fellowship with us. The angels come into that garden too, and when the air is still, and the noise of outside cares is hushed, we have often enjoyed a little heaven within our heart, the beginning of the heaven to which we hope soon to go. Dear hearer, do you know what we mean by paradise within, glory beaming in the heart, heaven in the soul? Jesus can teach you this.

The heart is a King's garden, beloved. Jesus bought it with His precious blood, and He has now by His grace come into it and claimed it to be His own. My friend, if He has not come to you yet, I hope He will. If you have not given your heart to Him, I hope you may be led to do so by His gracious Spirit. But, if your heart be His, oh, keep it for your Beloved! Do not give the keys to anyone else. The love of husband, wife, and child, each of these is to have its proper place, but the heart's core is the King's garden. Mark you, it is not the husband's garden, nor the wife's garden, nor the child's garden; the dearest idols we have known must not be set up there; it is the King's garden. I hope you will say to-night, before you go to rest, "O King, come into my garden, and eat my pleasant fruit! Awake, O heavenly wind, and blow upon the garden of my soul, and let all the plants of my new nature give forth their sweetness, that my Beloved may be charmed with my company, and that I may be filled with His sweet love."

V. However, I want you to spend most of your time in a fifth garden, and that is THE GARDEN OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH—*our* garden, and yet the King's garden, planted and flourishing in this place.

Follow me in each word of the text. What is it? *A garden.* The church of God is a garden. Many thoughts are gathered in that one metaphor like bees in a hive. It is called a garden in the book of Solomon's Song, so I know that we are not wrong in using the illustration. But what does a garden mean?

In the first place, it implies *separation.* A garden is not the open waste, the heath, or the common; it is not a wilderness; it is walled around; it is hedged in. Ah! Christian, when you join the church, remember you, too, become by profession hedged in for King Jesus. I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the church and the world made broader and stronger. Believe me, nothing gives me more sorrow than when I hear of church members saying, "Well, there is no harm in this; there is no harm in that," and getting as near to the world as possible. It does not matter what you may think of it, but I am certain that grace is at a low ebb in your soul when you even raise the question of how far you may go in worldly conformity. We are to avoid the very appearance of evil, and especially just at this festive season of the year, this Christmas, when so many of you are having your parties, your children's sports, and all that kind of thing. I would have you doubly jealous, do recollect, church members, that you are to be Christians always, if Christians at all, we do not grant dispensations to sin, as the Roman Catholics did in Luther's day. You are always to wear your regimentals as Christian soldiers, and never, at any time, to say, "Well, I shall do this just now; it is only once a year; I shall do as the world does; I cannot be out of the fashion." You must be either out of the fashion, or out of the true church, recollect that, because the place for Christ's Church is altogether out of the fashion. You are called to go forth with-

out the camp, bearing His reproach. If you want to be in the camp, you cannot be Christ's disciple, for the love of the world is enmity to Christ. You *must* be a separated one or be lost. If you want to be the common, you cannot be the garden; and if you are willing and anxious to be the garden, why, then, do not attempt to be the common. Keep the hedges up; keep the gates well bolted; King's gardens must not be left open to thieves and robbers. Be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. The King's garden, is a separated place—keep it so.

The King's garden is *a place of order*. You do not, when you go into your garden, find the flowers all put in anyhow, but the wise gardener arranges them according to their tints and hues, so that in the midst of summer the garden shall look like a rainbow that has been broken to pieces and let down upon the earth, delightful to gaze upon. All the walks are regular, the beds are in proportion, and the plants well arranged, just as they should be. Such should the Christian Church be—pastor, deacons, elders, members, all in their proper places. We are not a load of bricks, but a house. The church is not a mere heap, but it is to be a palace built for God, a temple in which He manifests Himself. Let us all try to maintain order in the household of Christ, and above all things hate discord and confusion. Let us be men who know how to keep rank, maintaining a decent order and regularity in all things. We seek not the order which consists in all sleeping in their places, like corpses in the catacombs, but we desire the order which finds all working in their places for the common cause of the Lord Jesus. May we never become a disorderly, disunited, irregular church. May there be order in the garden, preserved by the power of love and grace.

A garden is *a place of beauty*. Such should the Christian Church be. You gather together the fairest flowers from all lands, and put them in your garden, and if you see no beauties in the streets, you expect to see them in the florist's beds. So, if there be no holiness, no love, no zeal, no prayerfulness outside in the world, yet we should see these things in the church. We are not to take the world to be our guide, but we are to excel it. We must do more than others. The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples that *their* righteousness *must* exceed that of even the Scribes and Pharisees, or they could not enter the kingdom; and the genuine Christian must seek to be more excellent in his life than the best moralist, because Christ's garden ought to have the best flowers in all the world. Even the best is poor compared with Christ's deservings; let us not put Him off with withered and dying plants. The rarest, richest, choicest lilies and roses ought to bloom in the place which Jesus calls His own.

The King's garden is *a place of growth*, too. I do not suppose the florist would think that soil fit to be a garden in which his plants would not grow. It would be a dead loss to him if the slips remained slips, and if the buds never turned to flowers. So in the Church of God. We are not introduced into fellowship to be always the same, always little children and babes in grace. We should grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The prayer-meeting should be a school of practical education for our beloved young members, a place for the young nestlings to try their callous wings. If they try to pray, at first they may almost break down, perhaps, but if they will not give way to a foolish timidity, they will soon get over it, and find themselves useful, not merely in public prayer, but in a thousand works of usefulness besides. Growth should be rapid where Jesus is the Husbandman, and the Holy Spirit the dew from above.

Again, a garden, is *a place of retirement*. When a man is in his garden, he does not expect to see all his customers walking down between the beds to do business with him. "No," saith he, "I am walking in the garden, and I expect to be alone." So the Lord Jesus Christ would have us reserve the church to be a place in which He can manifest Himself to us, as He doth not unto the world. Oh! I wish that Christians were more retired, that they kept their hearts more shut up for Christ! I am afraid we often worry and trouble ourselves, like Martha, with much serving, so that we have not the room for Christ that Mary had, and do not sit at His feet as we ought to do. The Lord grant us grace to keep our hearts as closed gardens for Christ to walk in.

This, then, is a poor description of what the church is; and now, very briefly, *whose is it?*

The church is a garden, but it is *the King's* garden. The church is not mine, nor yours, but the King's. It is the King's garden, because He chose it for Himself.

> "We are a garden walled around,
> Chosen, and made peculiar ground;
> A little spot enclosed by grace
> Out of the world's wide wilderness."

We are the King's, because He bought us. Naboth said he would not give up his vineyard, because he inherited it. So doth Christ inherit us by an indefeasible title. We are His heritage, and He has so dearly bought us with His own blood that He will never give us up, blessed be His name! We are His, because He has conquered us. He won us in fair fight, and now we acknowledge the validity of His title-deeds, and confess, every one of us, as the members of His Church, that we are His, and that He is ours.

What a nobility this gives to Christ's Church! I have sometimes heard people talk disparagingly of church meetings; there may be but few persons present, some of those may be young members, some may be very old, yet I have been much grieved when I have heard people despise such a church meeting, for Christ would not despise it. Let such beware. Whenever the church meets, either as a whole or representatively, there is a solemn dignity cast about that assembly which is not to be found in a parliament of kings and princes. Aye, I will say it—if Louis Napoleon could call a senate of all the potentates in this world in Paris, and hold a congress there, the whole of them put together would not be worth the snap of a finger compared with half-a-dozen godly old women who meet together in the name of Christ as a church, in obedience to the Lord's command; for God would not be there with the potentates—what cares He for them?—but He would be with the most poor and despised of His people who meet together as a church in Jesus Christ's name. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," is more glorious than ermine, or purple, or crown. Constitute a church in the name of Christ, and meet together as such, and there is no assembly upon the face of the earth that can be compared with it, and even the assembly of the first-born in heaven is but

a branch of the grand whole of which the assemblies of the Church on earth make up an essential part. The Church is *the King's* garden.

I am going to ask, now, if the church be a garden, *what does it need?*

One thing is certainly requires, is *labour*. You cannot keep a garden in proper order without work. We want more labourers in this church, especially of one sort. We want some who will be *planters*. I had a letter last week from a young woman; I do not know who she is; I do not know where she sits; it may be in the top gallery, it is quite as likely to be in the second—perhaps more likely; and in the area, quite as likely again. She says that she has been here two years; that she has been very anxious about her soul, and she has often wished that somebody would speak to her, but nobody has done so. Now, if I knew where she sat, I should say to the friends who sit there, that I am ashamed of them! As I do not know where she sits, will those of you who do love Christ, but who have not been in the habit of looking after others, be so kind as to be ashamed of yourselves, because there is somebody or other to be blamed in this business. If you love Jesus at all, I cannot tell how you can let a person come to this Tabernacle for two years and not speak to them. Somebody has been negligent, very negligent; whoever it may be, let him see to it. I do not say you can speak upon the best things the first time you see them, though you might try to do that at any rate; but how can you have been silent for two years? How is this? You have been here twice on the Sunday, and that young woman has been here twice; well, there are two hundred times—two hundred opportunities that you have lost; two hundred times that you have let that poor soul go away burdened without speaking to her! I want labourers very badly, real hard-working soul-winners. I want planters who can get the young slips and put them where they will grow. I want helpers who will gather up the young lambs just as they are born, and carry them in their bosom a little while; spiritual nurses who will give comfort to the broken-hearted, and pour in the oil of consolation into the wounds of poor trembling sinners.

In every church there ought to be some *to watch over those who are planted*. When we receive members we ought to look after them, and as one person cannot do it thoroughly, as even the elders and deacons are hardly numerous enough for so great a work, it should be the aim and duty of all the experienced Christians in the church to fondly tend the younger ones. I believe that many of you do this, and I am very thankful to zealous friends who are not in office in the church, but who do a great deal in visiting the sick and watching over the younger members. Only I want *all of you* to do it. Oh! if everybody were duly anxious about keeping this garden in order, how beautifully trimmed all the borders would be, and how few weeds should we find springing up in the beds! May I ask you, members of the church, are you doing your duty by the King's garden? You are yourselves His own chosen ones, and He has worked for you, so that you have no need to work to save yourselves; but still, you must not be idle, for your Lord has said to you, "Go, work to-day in My vineyard." Are you doing it? I thank you if you are. If you are not, blame yourselves.

There should be a little band in every church *to collect the straggling*. Our vines will grow out of order if they can, but we must deal wisely with them, and fasten them up in their places. We must be on the alert where we see backsliding begin. How much can be done by old Christians in trying to stop backsliding amongst the young! I believe that half the cases that have gone badly might have been stopped by a little judicious forethought, if believers had taken them in time. I say again, what can we, who are the officers of this church, do with so many? Why, we number more than three thousand five hundred in church fellowship. But if you will look after each other, and seek wherever you see a little decline, a little coldness, to bring the brother back, the King's garden will be well cared for. The King's garden wants labourers; may you all labour, and its wants in this respect will be met.

Sometimes we need, brethren, *to burn up the rubbish and sweep up the leaves*. In the best church there will always be some falling leaves. Somebody gets out at the elbow with another brother. We are not any of us perfect. We get on far more than reasonably well with one another, as a church. I never saw any church that was really so well knit together in Christian love as we are; but there are always a few leaves about, and not a little dust to be put in the corner and burned. May I ask a brother, whenever he sees any mischief, to sweep it up and say nothing about it. Whenever you find that such-and-such a brother is going a little amiss, talk to him about it quietly; do not spread it all over the church, and make jealousies and suspicions. Pick up the leaf and destroy it. When a brother member has offended you, so that you feel vexed, forgive him; for I dare say *you* will want forgiveness before many days are over. We have none of us, perhaps, the sweetest of tempers, but, if we have the sweetest, the way to prove it is by forgiving those who have not. If every one would seek to make peace, there never could be any great accumulation of discord in the King's garden to annoy Him; but when He came walking in He would find it all beautiful and in good order, and all the flowers blooming delightfully, and He would find His delights with the sons of men.

Now, I have said that the church wants labourers, but, dear friends, it wants something else. *It wants new plants*. I wish I might find some to-night. Our King finds plants for His garden outside the wall. He takes the wild olive branches, and grafts them into the good olive, and then the sap changes the nature. A new thing that! It is not thus in our gardens at home, but wonders are wrought in the garden of the King. He transplants weeds from the dunghill, and makes them to grow as lilies in the midst of his fair garden. Will you be such a plant? May the Master's love constrain you to desire to be such a one, and, if you desire it, you shall have it. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are His. Rest alone upon Him, and you are a plant of His right hand planting, and shall never be rooted up. God grant that you may blossom in the skies.

But, dear friends, all the labourers and all the new plants would not be what the church requires if she had not something else, for every garden wants *rain*, and every garden needs *sunshine*. This church, if it had ever so many labourers, could never prosper without the dew of the Holy Spirit, and the sunshine of the divine favour. We have had these blessings to a very great extent. We must pray that we may have more. I should like to know of some of you,

how long it is since you have been to a prayer-meeting. Shall I stop and let you count? Well, you have not been just lately, because it is Christmas-time. Very well, I did not expect to see you; and if I had expected, I should have been disappointed. But it was not Christmas-time last October, and yet you were not here then. Some of you very seldom come at all. If you are lawfully detained at home, I would never ask you to come, or upbraid you for minding your home duties, for you have no right to leave legitimate business that ought to be done to come here. But I am certain that some of you are idle, and might come if you liked. I pray the Lord to send you a horse-whip in the shape of trouble in your conscience till you do come, for it very much weakens us all in our prayers when our numbers decline; and whenever people come to despise week-night services, be sure of it, farewell to the vital power of godliness, for week-night services are very, very much the stamp of the man. Any hypocrite will come on a Sunday, but a man does need to take some interest in religious services to be found mingling with the people of God in prayer. Am I to believe that some of you do not care whether souls are saved or not? Am I to believe that some of you, our church members, have no care whether our ministry is blessed or not? Am I to believe that you continue members of a church in which you take no interest? Am I to believe that it is nothing to you whether Christ is crowned or despised? I will not believe it, and yet your absence from the meetings for prayer tends to make me fear that it must be so. I beg you correct yourselves in this matter, and as the King's garden wants rain and sunshine, and we cannot expect to have it without prayer, let us not forget the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. Oh! for more prayer, more to pray, and for those who do pray, to pray with more fervour and more constancy in supplication! One favour I would ask. If you cannot come to the prayer-meetings—and many of you, I know, cannot, and I do not speak to you, blaming you—do pray in the family, do pray in the closet for us. Do not let us become poor in prayer. It is a bad thing to become poor in money, because we need it for a thousand causes, and cannot get on without it. But we can do without money better than we can do without prayer. We *must* have your prayers. I had almost said, if you do not give us your daily prayers give up your membership, for it is no good to yourselves, and cannot be of any use to us. The very least thing that a church member can do is to plead with God that the blessing may descend. It is the King's garden, and will you not pray for it? It is the King's own garden wherein He loves to walk, and which He has purchased with His blood; shall not your prayers go up that His Church may flourish, and that His kingdom may come?

And now, lastly, on this point. This King's garden, *what does it produce?* If there had been time, I meant to have waited while you answered the question as to how much *you* produced. Sometimes in our garden we have a tree which is so loaded with fruit that we have to put props under it to keep the branches from trembling; there are one or two in this church of that sort, who bear much fruit for God, and are so weak in body that their very fruitfulness of zeal and earnestness seems as though it would break them. I pray God that with His gracious promise He may prop them up. I am afraid that this is not the picture of most of us. You say to the gardener sometimes, "Will there be any fruit on that tree this season? It is time that it should show." He looks, and looks, and looks again, and at last the good man says, "I think I can see one little one up at the top, sir, but I do not know whether it will come to much." That, I am afraid, is the photograph of many professors. There is fruit, or else they would not be saved ones, but it is "a little one." "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." May your prayer be, not for fruit only, but for much fruit, and may God send it. Remember, if there be any fruit at all, it all belongs to the King. If a soul be saved, *He* shall have the glory of it. If there be any advance made in the great cause of truth and righteousness, the crown shall be put upon His head. The keepers of the vineyard shall have their hundreds, but the King Himself shall have His ten thousand times ten thousand, for He deserves it all.

VI. And now, dear friends, before I send you away, there is one more garden I must mention, but the time is so far past that I shall not keep you to say much about it; it is the GARDEN OF THE PARADISE ABOVE. I shall let God's word speak to you about that garden, and then I have done.

"And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

In that garden of the paradise above may we all be found at the last. Amen.

RUBBISH

"There is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall."—Nehemiah iv. 10.

REMEMBER that Jerusalem had been totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar; and what destruction by the Babylonians meant may be inferred from the vast heaps of the dust of powdered bricks and charred wood which have been discovered upon the sites of cities which were utterly razed to the ground by the fierce soldiery of the terrible king. The ruins are frequently so complete that even tradition has forgotten the name of the mound or heap which is the sole memorial to mark the sepulchre of a queenly city. The Babylonians made sure work when they did it, their ploughers made deep furrows, and their destroyers cried one to another, "Overturn, overturn, overturn, till not a stone shall abide in its

place." They reaped a nation with their swords as corn is cut down by the sickle, and they beat their cities till the ruins thereof were small as the dust of the summer threshing-floor. Do you wonder that on the site of Jerusalem there remained much rubbish? Many modern destroyers have done their desolating work most wonderfully, and I may venture to quote what I have seen of their doings as an example of the much rubbish with which the foundations of a ruined city are sure to be covered. I have stood upon the Palatine Mount in Rome, where formerly the palaces of the Cæsars raised themselves in more than imperial grandeur. But what an Alp of fragments! What a mountain of broken walls and columns, and stones peering upward like the natural rock of mother earth! Houses, convents, palaces, have been built upon the mass, and for many seasons trees have bloomed and fruited, and gardens have brought forth their harvests above the spot where once the imperial tyrant was wont to awe the nations with a nod. To restore the palaces of the Palatine, the first labour would be the unearthing of the foundations, and this would probably be as huge an undertaking as the rebuilding of the palaces themselves. A mountain must be carried away ere a stone can be laid. If you were able to visit the Forum at Rome, you would see, if you were there to-day, numbers of labourers with horses and carts continually at work taking away hundreds of thousands of tons of rubbish, which have covered up all that still remains of the ancient centre and heart of Rome; so that Jerusalem, I do not doubt, was one vast heap, made up of the *débris* of its houses, of the tower and armoury of David, of the palace of the king, and of the temple itself; and though now, at the period we are about to speak of, the temple had been rebuilt, and modern houses covered the site of the older Jerusalem, yet, when they came to the wall of the city, with the view of thoroughly restoring it, they found it a complete ruin, and such a ruin that the mass which covered it up was difficult to dig through. They could not build the wall, because there was so much rubbish.

Now, this, it seems to me, is intended, or at least may justifiably be used, for a type of the work which God's people have to carry on in the name of Jesus, and in the power of His Spirit, in the world. We have to build the wall of the Church for God, but we cannot build it, for there is so much rubbish in our way. This is true, first, *of the building of the Church, which is the Jerusalem of God;* and this is equally true *of the temple of God, which is to be built in each one of our hearts.* Full often we feel discouraged. Though we hear the voice that saith, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God," still we are apt to feel that we cannot build this wall, because there is so much rubbish.

I. I shall speak first, then, of the great work comprised in THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH.

Now, this enterprise is the work of God. He alone can build the Church. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory," and we may build as we may, but "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Still, our full and firm conviction that it is God's working does not at all interfere with the grand truth that He employs agents for the building up of His Church in the world; that, in fact, He has commissioned us, His chosen servants, and sent us into the world, each one according to our ability and opportunity, to labour for Him. We work because God works by us. We are hindered, however, in this service by the fact that there is much rubbish in the way. It always was so. When Paul began to build for God, and the apostles went forth as wise master-builders, there lay before them in towering heaps the old Jewish rubbish, hard to remove, heavy to bear away, and in quantity equal to a huge hill. The foundation was there; thank God we have not to lay that; that is laid in Christ Jesus, and firmly laid, and "other foundation can no man lay"; but the Jews, with their traditions, had overlaid the foundations; they had added to the word of God, they had put glosses upon it, they had taken away its real meaning, and put to it a meaning of their own. They had invented rites and ceremonies innumerable, and traditions of the fathers dark and mysterious, so that though a man should seek to find out the truth, he could not by reason of the abundance of the confused material and traditional superstition with which they had covered it up. The apostles had to begin their gospel labour amongst their fellow-countrymen in the midst of this much rubbish. No sooner did they begin to remove the worthless deposits than the lovers of tradition assailed them, raised a great dust, and became their violent persecutors, following them from city to city, scandalising them, and committing all manner of violence against them. You cannot remove ruins without arousing the owls and bats. The most rotten rubbish upon earth is sure to find some defender. By this rubbish many have gained their wealth, and they are full of wrath if any threaten to disturb it. The apostles soon found that they had fallen upon troublous times, yet by God's help they cleared away that rubbish, and were enabled to build their wall, till the New Jerusalem became famous in the earth.

They encountered in the wider world of the Roman empire the rubbish of old paganism; and oh, what rubbish that was! He who is acquainted with the classic writers knows how polluted were the people of their times. Their satirists ascribe to them mirthfully vices which even with tears we would not dare to mention. The superstitions of the age were grovelling to a hideous degree; their very gods were monsters of crime, and their sacred rites orgies of lust and drunkenness. The priests had successfully endeavoured to make vice into a religion, and under the pretence of mysterious worship had devised means for pandering to the basest passions of the most corrupt human nature. It is no small mass of rubbish which the student of to-day sifts over as he makes researches into the Greek and Roman mythology. Men could not find out God, for gods many and lords many stood in the way. Neither could they believe in the simplicity of Jesus Christ, because their foolish heart was darkened. "God made man upright, but he hath found out many inventions;" and all these inventions helped to turn him from his uprightness, and to pervert his judgment. Yet those who went before us laboured on amidst that foul and noisome rubbish, and were so successful in their earnest excavations, that at this day no one thinks of worshipping Jupiter, or Saturn, or Venus, or Mercury; these demon-deities have gone to the limbo from whence they came. They have been smitten—smitten by the gospel, and they have withered like grass, so that no man

boweth himself before them any more. The God of truth has come, and these bats and owls of the night have betaken themselves into obscurity and oblivion. This rubbish was cleared away, and the foundations were built upon by earnest men that went before us, though they had to lay each stone in martyr blood, and cement it with agonies and tears.

Moreover, remember that in those early days the Church in her building had to encounter the very much rubbish of the various philosophies of mankind. There was a kind of "feeling after God" in the heathen mind; but this feeling after God was misdirected and proudly self-confident, and therefore it missed its way, and in the process of thought the more spiritual-minded amongst men (if I may venture to call men spiritual at all who were not renewed by grace) invented theories and imaginings, which they thought to be exceeding wise, but which in fact were folly itself dressed out in the robes of vainglory. These philosophies had a great following, and exercised so subtle and powerful an influence that they were felt even in the Church itself. In the writings of the apostles Paul and John you continually meet with allusions to the great Gnostic philosophy which perverted so many Christians. Ever since that day human wisdom has been a greater curse to the Church than anything else. The ignorance of Christians has never been so evil a thing, bad as it is, as the vain knowledge the false wisdom, with which men have been puffed up in their fleshly minds. It is an ill day when men know too much to know Christ. It is a great misfortune when men are too manly to be converted and to become as little children, and sit at the feet of the great Teacher: yet there are many professors of religion who talk as if this was their condition, and as if they were proud of it. Even at this present time the outside philosophies of unchristian men infect the Church, spoil her, injure her, dilute the wine of the kingdom, overturn the children's milk, and to a great extent poison the bread of life. Sad that it should be so, but the rubbish of philosophy has always been in the way of the building up of the wall of the Church of God, and the story of the apostolical age may serve as a great comfort to us in these evil times. As they were hindered so are we, but as they persevered and overcame even so will we, by our great Master's aid.

After that lot of rubbish had been cleared away, the task was only begun, for soon after apostolic times, and the first zeal of Christians had gone, there came the old Roman rubbish, which in the end proved a worse hindrance than all which had preceded it. This Popish rubbish was found in layers—first one doctrinal error, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then another, till at this time the errors of the Church of Rome are as countless as the stars, as black as midnight, and as foul as hell. Her abominations reek in the nostrils of all good men. Her idolatries are the scorn of reason and the abhorrence of faith. The iniquities of her practice, and the enormities of her doctrine, almost surpass belief. Popery is as much the masterpiece of Satan as the gospel is the masterpiece of God. There can scarcely be imagined anything of devilish craftiness or Satanic wickedness which could be compared with her, she is unparalleled, the queen of iniquity. Behold upon her forehead the name, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. The church of Rome and her teachings are a vast mountain of rubbish covering the truth. For weary years good men could not get at the foundation because of this very much rubbish. Here and there a Wicliffe spied out the precious corner-stone, and leaped for joy because he could get his foot upon it, and say, "Jesus Christ Himself, elect and precious, is the stone on which I build my hope." Here and there a John Huss, or a Jerome of Prague, or a Savonarola, in the thick midnight, yet nevertheless found out the foundation, and wept their very hearts out because of the much rubbish which threatened to bury even them while they were seeking the foundation. A master excavator was Martin Luther; how grandly he laid bare the glorious foundation of justification by faith alone! An equally grand worker at this great enterprise was Master John Calvin, who laid open long stretches of the ancient foundations of the covenant of grace. Well was he supported by his brother of Zurich, Zwingle, and John Knox in Scotland, and others in this land. They cleared away for a while some of the rubbish, but there was such a mass of it that they had to throw it up in heaps on either side, and it is beginning to come crumbling down again on to the foundation, and to cover it up once more. A perfect reformation they could not work, and the remnant of the rubbish is now our plague and hindrance. Everywhere the much rubbish is being diligently cast upon the wall by the emissaries of the evil one, and we can scarcely get to the foundations to build thereon the gold and silver and precious stones which God commits to us with which to build up His own house. Alas, there is very, very much rubbish. I saw in Rome that the waggons which took away the earth from the Forum were marked "Regia Scava." They belonged to the royal excavations; and I long to see royal excavators, employed by the King of Kings, get to work to excavate again the foundations of the wall of Jerusalem, and cart away some of the tremendous heaps of rubbish that still lie upon the walls. God grant we may see good and great work done in this direction before long.

But, beloved friends, if all this rabbinical, and pagan, and philosophical, and Romish rubbish were all gone, still the work would scarcely have begun, for there is yet very much rubbish of other kinds lying hereabout. There is much rubbish arising from the world, the flesh, and the devil, so that we are not able to build the wall. Look at human sin, how that impedes us! Oh, if there were no false systems of religion, if priest and scribe were silent, if false prophet and Antichrist were both out of the way, yet the sins of men are a vast and hideous mass of rotten rubbish, and our labours of love are hindered thereby. How hard it is to get at human ears, for the world has the first word, and often the last word, with the most of men. Eargate is choked with rubbish. How harder still it is to get at human hearts, for there Satan reigns as in his own palace, and takes care to erect huge barricades and earthworks of the rubbish of carnal lust and pride and unbelief. Men are wrapped up in indifference to eternal things, like mummies in their bands and gums. They give all their energy to the answering of the question "What shall we eat and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Immortal as they are, they live only for morality. Though their grandest destiny lies in eternity, yet all their efforts are bounded by the narrow space of time. Charm, O Thou Charmer, never so wisely, but this adder hath no ear for Thee. This people, bent on its lusts, will still follow its own

devices. Though Christ beckon with His pierced hand, yet turn they their back on Him; and even. He from Calvary cries :—

> " Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by,
> Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die ? "

He is despised and rejected of men; they see no form nor comeliness in Him whose countenance contains within itself all celestial beauty. They cannot be got at by love or law, by tears or terrors, by prayers or preachings; they are so absorbed in earthly things. We cannot build the wall for their much rubbish. They are wedded to their sins; they cling to their idols; they will not even think upon their soul, and their God, and their Saviour; they choose their own delusions and reject their own mercies, and it seems as if everything in the world helped them this way, for the business of life, the care and the ease, the quiet and the noise, the tumult and the turmoil thereof alike ensnare them; all these things are transformed by their alienated hearts into a mass of rubbish. With one man it is the pursuit, the arduous pursuit of learning, with another an intense greed for gold, with a third ambition, with a fourth the lust of pleasure; but in each man the heap of rubbish prevents our getting at the heart. We cannot build the wall. Who among us has not often gone back to his God, and said, " Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ? " And this age of competition seems to make the thing worse than ever. Some are so poor that they tell us they cannot listen, for they have to work and toil like slaves for their bread merely to keep body and soul together; and as for those who are rich—O God, help the rich ! Still is it true, and perhaps truer now than ever, that " it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God " ; for the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are a mass of rubbish, so that we cannot build the wall.

Oh, how sad is the retrospect of the pastor as he remembers the many in whom he could never reach the conscience, because of the intervening rubbish, and how mournful is the prospect that lies before him ! Our only consolation is that, if *we* cannot build, there is One who can; and if the rubbish be so much that the strength of the bearers of burdens is decaying, yet there is a strength which is not decayed, there is an arm which is not weary, and can perform all that is needed.

I am afraid, dear brethren, that in the work of building up the church the rubbish does not lie all with the sinners, but there is much of it also with the saints. There is very much rubbish among professors, so that we cannot build the wall. I would be very patient with all men, for I need much patience toward myself, but there are far too many dear brethren in Christ who seem to me to spend all their time in diligently doing nothing. I have heard of a man who had, by dint of great patience and much skill, after many days of work, very splendidly carved the image of Cæsar on a cherry-stone. What a splendid result to have achieved. The exploit was duly reported and chronicled. But what of it ? Truly, I have read books which seemed to me to be elaborately learned about nothing of any practical value, and to amount to about as much as a carving on a cherry-stone, and no more. What good was to come of it I am sure I could not tell. Brethren come out every now and then in the religious world so splendidly with some new fad and fancy of theirs, some grand discovery that they have made, some wonderful point of doctrine, some marvellous soul-stirring discovery as it seems to be to them; and all the world is to stand still, and all the churches to be broken up, and I don't know what, until they have exhibited this precious thing, which when you have carefully looked at it, turns out to be very like the mouse which was the famous product of the labour of the mountain. It comes to nothing more. There is very much rubbish about, brethren; and, therefore, for the present distress, if every Christian minister were to keep to preaching Christ and Him crucified, and nothing else, I think he would do well; and if every Christian man were to just keep to the plain truths of Scripture, and have them worked into his own soul by the Holy Spirit, and then speak them out with power, and live for soul-winning, and care for nothing else, he would do well. But there is very much rubbish. A whole evening will be spent by brethren in discussing a question just about as valuable as the famous inquiry of the schoolmen, as to how many angels would be able to stand on the point of a single needle. After discussing it with some little temper, perhaps, and having prayed over it a good deal, too—though I wonder how they dare do so—the whole of it ends in a bag of wind or a bottle of smoke, and nothing else. Had that same time been spent in the visitation of the sick, and reclaiming the Arabs of our streets, the lifting up of the ruffianism and the blackguardism of London into something like decency, morality, and Christianity, it might have been much better. But there is very much rubbish, and I am very much afraid we all of us contribute to that rubbish heap a little. We have all some favourite notion, some conceit, some invention of our own, some addition to the Word, some subtraction from it, some impossible theory, some dogma or doctrine rather of our own inventing than of Bible teaching, and so there is very much rubbish, so that we cannot build the wall. Does not one feel inclined, full often, to say, " Oh, how I wish I could get at it—really get at it—get to doing something for God, and Christ, and the souls of men." Just let the dust cart come and clear the way. These very excellent works upon futurity, and profound books upon nothing—yet, let them go, beautifully written as they are, and let us plunge into the middle of affairs, and say, " God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, two or three things here about this matter by way of comfort. And the first comfort to us is—Well, well, the foundation is laid, the foundation is laid; and in addition to the foundation there are goodly rows of precious stones builded up thereon. The Lord has not yet laid all the twelve bejewelled courses, but the instructed eye may see some of the lower bands of precious stones. Looking back in history I can see a foundation of martyrs built upon Christ, who with the apostles and confessors make up the lower foundations of jasper and sapphire and chalcedony; I can see the glitter of those rows of gems upon the wall already. Read in the book of Revelation and see how they are described. For the last eighteen hundred years, stone upon stone, without sound of hammer, they have been built, and the walls are rising still. Glory be to God, the gospel is a success; notwithstanding the sneer of Sanballat, and the cruel speech of Tobiah the Ammonite, the wall is being built, and the divine eye is upon it.

It is God's great piece of architecture, and He regards it with delight. Concerning it, it may be said, "I the Lord do keep it; I will keep it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." There is for this building the divine decree, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH, He shall build the temple of the Lord, even He shall build the temple of the Lord, and He shall bear the glory." That decree is omnipotent; it is being fulfilled, and shall be fulfilled unto the end. I see at this moment the Master Mason upon the wall, and I read concerning Him, "He shall not fail or be discouraged," and I read yet again of Him, "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." I see with Him, moreover, a band of men whose hearts the Lord has touched, and these labour day and night, and cease not, neither will they cease till the walls of Jerusalem are finished. He is the great Master Builder, and we, each one of us, bearing both sword and trowel, as we are taught by Him, must be wise builders under His direction. The work is going on, for it is in hands that never weary, and it is directed by a mind that never faints; by firm decrees, also, is it banded and builded and cemented, so that it cannot fail, or so much as a stone thereof be cast down.

And we have this to encourage us—that God never has left a work unfinished yet. He began the creation. 'Tis true it was not so difficult a task as this building up of His church, for in the creation, though there was nothing, there was nothing in the way, and He spake and all things came into existence. Here in the building of the Church there are two works—destruction and creation, the removal of the old and the erection of the new; but, nevertheless, He who said, "Behold, I make all things new," is quite equal to the task to which He has set Himself; and as He did not leave the world half finished, did not make it a garden without a man to tenant it, nay, did not leave the man unfinished, but made the woman to be his helpmeet; so He will not leave the work of salvation, to which He has once put His hand, unfinished, but course upon course shall the jewels be laid; emerald shall follow chalcedony, the sardius shall be piled upon the sardonyx, the beryl upon the chrysolyte, and the chrysoprasus upon the topaz, till at length, in the appointed age, the last garnishings of jacinth and amethyst shall crown the wall, and they shall bring forth the top-stone with shoutings of "grace, grace unto it!" He did not pause when He made the world because He needed fresh strength, or wait and say that the undertaking was too much; but its story ran on gloriously through all those wonderful six evenings and mornings until the seventh day came, and the Lord rested from all His work. The six days are passing over us now with their evening gloom and morning brightness, the Lord is making the new world, and He is building up His church, slowly, as we think, but surely and in fit time and due order. Wait ye, and in patience possess your souls, for there shall yet come that Millennial Sabbath, in which again the sons of God shall shout for joy, and the angels shall sing, because the word of God is accomplished and His work is done.

Have courage, my brethren! Bear your burden in removing the rubbish. Use your sword and your trowel still, for the work is the Lord's, and it shall be accomplished. If it were ours, woe worth the day in which it was laid upon such feeble shoulders; but since it is His we need not indulge a solitary trembling thought, but arise and be of good cheer.

II. Now I change the subject to OURSELVES awhile; and may God grant we may speak to profit for a few minutes upon that branch of our topic.

There is a building going on in us. It is the Spirit's work to edify us; that is to say, to build us up in grace, and that building up is carried on by the grace of love. "Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up." We are each one of us called to be builders, builders in God's strength, as I have said before, and let that not be forgotten; but, beloved, I am afraid most of us have to say, "There is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall." Do you not often feel that you cannot be built up in heavenly graces, because of the rubbish of your own corrupt nature? Oh, what a fall the fall was! What a total ruin did it make of our moral nature! Brethren, do you not discover—I do, almost every day—some fresh heap of rubbish which I hardly knew was there? Points in which we thought ourselves strong turn out to be our weaknesses. There was an infirmity from which we half indulged the thought that we were clear, and therefore we were rather severe upon others for having such an infirmity and sin; but at last it broke out in ourselves; it always had been in us, but it had not had the occasion and opportunity; at length the provocation came, and the hidden evil was revealed. Ah, brethren, much more of such rubbish remains in us. Oh, the rubbish of pride, of unbelief, of evil lustings, of anger, of despondency, of self-exaltation! Brethren, it is not worth while to stir it, it is such a foul heap! I have no desire to turn cinder-sifter to it, for there is never a jewel in it that will pay for the sifting; but there it is, and the building of grace does not advance as we could wish, because of the corruption which still abideth in us, notwithstanding all that some may say.

Then there is oftentimes in Christian people the old rubbish of legal thought, of legal acting, and legal fearing. In our old estate we were going to be saved by our own merits. That was our notion. Since our conversion, we doctrinally abhor the idea of any thought of human merit, but experimentally we indulge it. The legal spirit will come in, like an ill weed it springs up spontaneously in the garden from which grace uprooted it. Though we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free, yet the flesh often tries to put the old yoke of bondage upon us, so that if Paul were here he would say to us, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" Ishmael tries to domineer over Isaac; though driven out of the house, he shows his tyrant face at the window. We get the bondslave's dread, aye, and sometimes entertain the bondslave's hope, and think that we are to work for wages, instead of understanding that the *gift* of God is eternal life, while the only wages we could earn would be the wages of sin, which is death. Oh, the old legal tendency! How deep seated! How prone to revive! It will scarcely be conceived that sinners should at the same time be self-righteous and guilty; but yet it is so, that, abounding as we do in the tendency to sin, we equally abound in the tendency to fancy that in us, that is, in our flesh, there dwelleth some good thing. Hence arises another heap of rubbish.

And then old habits—what rubbish they are! You who have been before your conversion guilty of gross sin, do you not often find the recollection of

those old times coming over you like a hideous dream? I know some who, when a hymn is given out, cannot help recollecting an old song which they used to sing, which is suggested to them by, perhaps, the holiest word in the psalm. Aye, and a text of Scripture has sometimes conjured up before their memory a sin which they wished with all their hearts had never occurred, and which they would give their eyes to forget. Yes, the old habits will struggle for mastery, and if we do not fall into them, as I pray God we never may, yet will they vex and trouble us, and herein also, the much rubbish prevents the building up of the wall of the divine life.

So is it with worldly associations. Do not you find that even the common associations of business into which you are obliged to enter do very much by way of heaping rubbish upon the wall of your spirit? You have to meet with ungodly men. You cannot command their tongues: you may rebuke their language when it becomes profane, but there is very much of talk which is not profane, and which we could not very well rebuke, but which, nevertheless, is not sweet with godliness, or savoury with grace, and it damages us. We wish sometimes that we were away altogether from worldly men. We cry, "Woe is me that I dwell in Mesech, and tabernacle in the tents of Kedar!" And so again as the result of our being in the world, there is very much rubbish.

And I will tell you another kind of rubbish that I think some brethren have quite enough of, if not too much, that is, the rubbishing idea that they have come to be somebody after all. Many acquire that notion if they are getting on in the world. If God prospers them, then they say, "Ah, now I really am a great one, and worthy of much honour. I am not now like my poorer brethren." It is sad to see what fine airs certain prosperous professors give themselves; they forget the rock whence they were hewn, and lift up their horn on high, as if they were more than mortal. That is rubbish indeed.

But there are some others who have had choice seasons of fellowship with Christ, and they have been for a while free from temptation, and there has been no great upbreaking of the great deep of corruption within them; and therefore they say, "Ah, now I am getting on: I think, somehow, I am getting up to the higher life. I should not wonder that I should be perfect one of these days." Rubbish, brother! It is all rubbish, every bit of it, it is not worthy harbouring for an instant. It may be very glittering rubbish, it looks amazingly like gold, but "all is not gold that glitters." Any notion of our own attainments which could lead us for a moment to speak of what we are with any degree of complacency is only rubbish. For my own part, I desire constantly to stand at the foot of the cross, with no other testimony concerning myself than this—

> "I the chief of sinners am,
> But Jesus died for me."

Personal holiness is to be sought for with all our hearts, and it can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ—by simple faith in Him. He gives us power to overcome sin through His precious blood; but, depend upon it, the moment we conclude that we have overcome, and can say what Paul could not say—that he had attained and was already perfect—we are in an evil case. Our pride has overpowered our judgment, and we are fools. If any one here is in a condition in which he is able to open his mouth wide in his own praise, I would advise him to fetch a big dust-cart, or rather all the dust-carts in the parish, and take that boasting, every shovelful of it, away; for it is of no use to him, and it will very soon make such a dust as to fly in the eyes and ears of his Christian brethren. Build the wall we cannot while there is so much of this proud rubbish. "In me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing." Low down at the cross-foot, in the dust, be still our place; for we are in ourselves nothing, less than nothing, emptiness, vanity, death. That is our place. Christ is made of God unto you "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption"; in Him be all your glorying, and in Him alone, for if not so, the rubbish will cover up the foundation.

Now, I will suppose that some of you are mourning to-night—some of God's people—because of all this rubbish. I want to say to you this.

First, dear brethren, thank God that you have the foundation surely laid. Are you sure of that? I pray you rest not till you are certain of it.

> "I know that safe with Him remains,
> Protected by His power,
> What I've committed to His hands,
> Till the decisive hour."

"I know whom I have believed." None but Jesus, none but Jesus. There rests our souls' only hope, upon His precious blood and righteousness; every other hope we heartily abhor. Well, the foundation is laid. Blessed be God for that! When a man is brought to rest alone in Jesus, then there is laid for him in Zion a sure foundation-stone, and to that he is cemented by sovereign grace.

Now, let us thank God again that the building up of His temple in us is His own work. He began it. He digged out and made clear to us our own emptiness. He cast out our self-righteousness, and He laid Christ where our self had once been. The Lord did that, and He has done everything else which has been done in us that has been worth the doing. I cannot, I am sure no brother here can, look upon any step he has ever taken as a real advance in divine life, which was taken in any strength but in the strength of God. Whatever we have done of ourselves had been much better undone, for all that nature spins will have to be unravelled sooner or later. "Salvation is of the Lord." Jonah learned that in the whale's belly. It was worth while getting into the whale's belly to learn. We want to know it through and through. Salvation is of the Lord alone, and unto Him must be all the praise. And there is our comfort. It is His work to save us; we are not our own saviours, Christ is the Saviour. It is the Spirit's work to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. It is the Bridegroom, not the bride, that is to make the bride fit for her husband. So says the Scripture. "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." It is He that presents the bride to Himself, and He that makes her fit to be presented. Blessed be God, the work is in sure and competent hands.

And therefore, finally, let us by divine grace work on in faith, with diligence. In faith, I say, believing that our work of faith and labour of love are not in

vain in the Lord, believing that prayer is not a vain exercise, that drawing near to God in communion is not a vain thing, that trusting in the Lord is no idle dream, but that surely He will complete what He has begun. But let us add to faith the most earnest endeavours; let us diligently strive to get away this rubbish. Whatever bad habit obstructs our edification, God help us to conquer it. Whatever sin there is about us, may the blood of Jesus enable us to subdue it. Let us press forward, dear brethren and sisters, never content, never satisfied, till we wake up in His likeness; and, as we have not all His likeness yet, not satisfied with ourselves, let us press forward, looking to that which is before us, and forgetting that which is behind. Faith and diligence, by God's good grace, shall give us to be built up on our most holy faith, not with wood and hay and stubble, but with gold and silver and precious stones, which will abide the fire.

Look that ye be built on the foundation. That is the last and yet the first question, Are you on the foundation? Some build very rapidly, but they are not on the foundation. Yes, you have a fine character and you make a noble profession, but is the palatial structure based on the rocky foundation, or on the sand? Our little children at the seaside will build very fine castles with their wooden spades, but the next tide sweeps all away, because it is sand built on sand. I am afraid the religion of multitudes is just that—sand built on sand. Is that your religion, dear hearer? Does it consist of church-goings, or chapel-goings, and prayer-meetings, and sacrament-takings, and all that? Well, then, it is sand built on sand. But if you are a poor and needy sinner, and you have rested your soul on Jesus, and then, renewed in heart by His Spirit, have been zealous for good works, then is it no longer sand built on sand, but the work of the Spirit of God upon the one foundation which God laid from all eternity, in the Person and the work of His only-begotten Son.

The Lord bless you, every one of you, for Jesu's sake! Amen.

WITNESSES AGAINST YOU

"I set a great assembly against them."—Nehemiah v. 7.

THE facts are these. At the time when certain of the Jews returned with Nehemiah to Jerusalem, many of them were in very straitened circumstances; and, contrary to the Jewish law, the richer Jews lent them money upon usurious interest, amounting to the hundredth per month, or twelve per cent. per annum. They took from their poorer brethren their lands, or put a heavy mortgage upon them; and in some cases took the men themselves to be slaves for debts which they had unavoidably incurred. Now, as you know, every Jew was a landholder, and his land, if mortgaged for a time, must return free to him in the fiftieth year; and, though a Jew might for a while become a servant to his Jewish brother, yet he must go out free at the end of the seventh year. He could only be bound for a short period of servitude. Nehemiah called to him, therefore, the elders, and nobles, and rulers of Jerusalem, and showed them how wrong they were to hold their poorer brethren in bondage. "Ye exact usury, every one of his brother," he says; and he rebukes them sharply for it. When he found that his own words were scarcely powerful enough with them, he gathered together the people, and let them all have a voice, and in the many voices there was power. "I set," said he, "a great assembly against them." Some persons are deaf to the voice of justice until it is repeated loudly by thousands of their fellow-men. The silent voice of principle and right they will not hear, and the gentle rebuke of some one faithful friend they will despise; but when righteousness enlists public opinion on its side, when many are seen to be its advocates, then these very persons will show that they have relics of conscience left, and they yield to right demands, because they see them not only to be just, but to be popular. This is the main point with those of the feebler sort; and we turn the scale, if, like Nehemiah, we "set a great assembly against them."

Now, it struck me to-night that I could most properly, without any difficulty whatever, set a great assembly against every unconverted person here; and, in addition to calling upon him in the name of God, and by the claims of truth, to consider his ways and turn to God, I might summon a great assembly who should testify against the evil course which the unconverted are pursuing.

I shall try to act upon this plan to-night, in reference *to those who remain unconverted.* I would set a great assembly against you. You have not repented of your sins; you have not accepted the salvation which is provided in Christ Jesus; you live without prayer; you seek your own, instead of seeking God.

I set against you the great assembly of all the godly that are upon the earth. They all testify against you. They look upon you with love and anxiety, and desire to see you converted; but, while you are as you are, they are against you. Does not *the consistent life* of every true Christian rebuke you? When you see humble persons devout, gracious, though nothing be said, and though they be not eloquent in speech, is not their life eloquent? Do you not feel it? Have you never felt, even in your most careless moods, that it would be better for you if you were as they are? And when you have seen them remain true and upright under temptation, have you not said within yourself, "After all, there is something in them which I admire, and I wish that I possessed the same strong principles to keep me right in the hour of trial"? Every man, after all, in the bottom of his soul, feels the power of godliness: he cannot help it. In the assembly of the righteous God is greatly feared. The wicked know God's presence among His people, and they do fear it, whether they confess it or not. In fact, slander, ridicule, and persecution are a form of homage which rebellion pays to obedience, which sin pays at the footstool of righteousness. The evil

hate the good, because it condemns their evil; they try to make themselves despise it because it makes them despise themselves.

The righteous do not only stand against you in the consistency of their character, but *their joy in God* rebukes you. If you happen to be an unconverted man, and to have had a godly mother, the subject of much weakness and pain, you cannot have forgotten the sacred cheerfulness with which she bore her life-long affliction. Or, if you have lost a Christian wife, who enjoyed but little comfort in her life with you, you cannot but remember that pale yet happy face when it bade you adieu, and entered into its rest. You know there was a calm about that woman in the time of trouble which you could not imitate; that she took patiently pain which would have startled you into madness, for the power of grace was in her, and made her strong. She, and such as she was, children of God, made calm, and peaceful, and happy —I set them in an assembly against you, and they bear witness against you, because you obey not the living God.

Moreover, they do not only bear witness, but *their very horror at your sin* and at your state is a witness against you. I often think that, if I really could know the condition of my unconverted hearers (thoroughly know it), it might be impossible for me to address them. I do try to realise the position of some of you, and to project my mind into the future which awaits you if you die without God, and without hope. I am not about to give any terrible descriptions of the world to come; but, remember, the most terrible I could give would fall infinitely short of what the reality must be. If I could realise that dreadful future more fully, this tongue might be silent through the horror of my heart's emotions. I pray you, therefore, by that terror which we experience in speaking to you, let it stand as a witness against the sin which will bring upon you such misery. We cannot bear to think of that which awaits you. Holy Whitefield, when he began to touch upon that subject, would, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, cry "The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" It was too much for him. He could but repeat those words, and there cease. *We* feel for you, if you will not feel for yourselves. There are those present who never bow the knee at night without praying for the unconverted with great burden of spirit. I know some here, strong men, whom I have seen overcome with sacred passion when they have agonized for you, and for the souls of the ungodly. It has not been merely a plentiful stream of tears bedewing their manly cheeks, but their hearts have heaved within their bosoms, and their whole being has been convulsed with agony of spirit, lest, peradventure, you should perish.

All the praying people in the world I set as an assembly against you. Shall they pray for you, and will you never pray for yourselves? Shall horror seize them on account of your sins, and shall no horror ever seize you? Shall a godly mother waste—no, it is not waste, shall she spend nights in tears for your soul, and will you never weep the tear of repentance? Shall we plead with you with all the eagerness our heart is capable of, and search for words with which to plead with you, and feel that we have done all too little when we have done our best to persuade you—shall we do all this, and yet will you say, "It is nothing to me. It is nothing to me?" Well, then, if it must be so, I can only say that I set the whole assembly of the living saints upon earth against you. Let them have some influence over you.

"Ah!" say you, "but there are many hypocrites amongst them." Very well, they shall go over to your side: you shall be welcome to them; but all the sincere I set against you.

"But it is not the sincere only that pray." Very well, you shall have all the insincere. Poor company! I wonder you should claim them; but still, every sincere believer does, as it were, when he pleads with God, protest against you that your knees are never bent, and your hearts never cry to God as the Father of spirits. Some live week after week, and month after month, and year after year, without prayer. The very Mahometans and heathen rebuke you; they dare not live a single day without their prayers. You are worse than they are. The little chick, as it drinks at the stream, lifts its head as though to thank God. You are worse than the poor fowls. You have become like the swine under the oak, which search for the acorns, but never think of the tree. You receive the mercies of God, but never give thanks to the Giver. O conscience, if there be conscience left, cry shame upon the man who dares to live without God! I set the prayerful, then, against you.

But next, I have another mighty squadron to call. I set against unconverted men *all the inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments*. Let them come up, one by one, and speak as they were wont to do. Not one has a word of comfort for a man that will not repent of his sins. "Mercy," they will all cry, to the man that accepts the atoning sacrifice; but if he will not believe in Jesus, with one chorus, all the prophets, and the apostles too, will say, "Woe, woe, woe, woe unutterable to the man that lives and dies without Christ!" The universal consent of all men that ever spake as the Spirit moved them is against the ungodly.

But I mention a larger host than either of these, and that is, *the departed saints*. Oh, could you see them this day in their white robes, could you hear their sacred song, it were a sight worth dying to behold; and the sound—it were worth losing all the voices of earth in the silence of death to hear! But suppose you, an unconverted person, should seek a friend amongst that blood-washed host. I will picture you beholding them as they stand in their glorious ranks, and you say, "I am an enemy to God, I am prayerless, I am impenitent, I am graceless, and I intend to remain so; which among you all will be a friend to me?" Not an eye will glance upon you, except with indignation; not a hand will be put out to grasp you. There! March down that long file, look into those joyous faces, and see if you can find among them all a trace of sympathy with your obstinate rebellion. Ask them; conjure them to come and assist you in your sins, or to comfort you in your impenitence. Is there one that will do it? I set the whole assembly against you. And there stands one—you remember her, for though she is strangely changed, and the beatific vision makes every part of her to shine so gloriously, yet you know her. It was your mother, who wept over you in childhood, and who died with prayers for you upon her lips. Ask her whether, if you live and die unconverted, she will be your friend; and that face, which you have often gazed upon with affection, and which was always full of love to you, is turned from you. What has she to do, even with her child, if that child is an heir of wrath? She loves the Saviour too much to side with the Saviour's enemies. On earth she could weep and pray for you:

in heaven she has other work to do, and has undergone such an absorption into the will of God that, if your spirit should pass into another world unrenewed, she, with those dear lips, would say, "Amen!" most solemnly to your condemnation. She, too, will confess, with all the army of the faithful, that the sentence would be just. There is not one of all you knew on earth who is now in heaven who can love you, unless you are renewed and changed in heart. I have sought with many of you, many times, to put the truth as plainly as I could, and to speak as earnestly as I could; but, once past the portal, and you are gone into another world, no preacher shall ever trouble you there. Go down to the shades of death and hell, and no earnest voices shall ever plead with you there. You shall have nobody to ridicule as a fanatic there. You shall hear no sermons of which you can say, "How the man seems to rave!" Ah, no! you shall have other company, and other engagements, but all God's ministers will be against you; and, as long as you remain ungodly here, they are against you. I set the whole host of the redeemed in heaven before you now, and challenge you, by all their glory, to turn from the error of your way, lest that glory should only increase your misery by contrast.

I have to add to all these saints on earth and glorified spirits in heaven, *the whole company of the angels*. They are the friends and companions of the saints, but they are by no means the friends of the ungodly. They would rejoice over you if you repented; but, while you do not repent, it seems to me as if full often the angels, as they fulfil their errands among us, must feel tempted to cry, "Great God of vengeance, let us draw our swords, and let us smite these rebels!" There stands a man who the other day cursed God, and dared Him to blast his limbs. If there had been an angel passing by, and doubtless it might have been so, I wonder he did not pause, suspended in mid-air, in very horror. I should not wonder if he felt in his soul that it was poison to him to be near to such a man, and would fain have drawn the mighty sword, which seraphs wield, to cut the man down. The angels are against you. No one of the sacred host is friend to the man who is the foe of God.

The worst is to come: *God is against you*. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." He would fain have you saved. He has sworn with an oath, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." But if you will not turn, you must burn. If you will not repent, you must perish. God has said it, and He will not lie. Justice demands it, and the Judge of all the earth must be just.

And, to crown all, *Jesus Christ, the Son of God*, is *against you* if you resolve to be the enemy of God. He loves sinners: He died for sinners: He is ever willing to receive them; but as long as they remain impenitent and unbelieving, He cannot love their sin, He cannot love them, viewing them in the light of wilful, persistent rebels. And when He comes in the latter days, you know what will happen to those that loved not Christ: they will be *Anathema Maranatha*—cursed at His coming. He Himself will say it; and it appals me to have to remind you of the fact—He Himself, whose gentle lips were like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, tender as a woman's—He Himself, when He comes, will say, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" You will find no friend in Christ in that last tremendous day. He will break you in pieces with a rod of iron, as potters' vessels are broken into shivers. So, then, I set this great assembly against you: saints on earth and saints in heaven, the angels, and God, and Christ Himself against you.

Who is there for you? Who is there on your side, O enemies of God? It is as dreadful to think of those who are for you as of those who are against you; for those who are for you, and on your side, are the ungodly, like yourselves; and the lost in hell, who are now what you must be, except you escape; and the devil and his angels, themselves punished for their sins. A grim assembly, surely, those that are for you! Methinks a man should start up and say—"I cannot abide in such company as this! Do I sail in this pirate's vessel, with such a dreadful crew on board, and Satan for captain? In God's name I will jump overboard, and swim to another ship, for in this vessel I will never stay, and under this black flag I will never fight, let the bribe be as high as it may. I cannot serve Satan, and I will not." Friends, if such be your language, I stand here, as a servant of Jesus, and hold above you the blood-stained banner of Christ's cross. O, ye who will take the enlisting-money, here it is: come and take it, for whosoever receives Christ—receives Him by trusting Him—to him is given power to become a servant of Christ, and a soldier of the cross; and then I shall have no assembly to set against him, but the same august assembly shall be on the side of the man saved by faith in Jesus! God grant that these words may be found useful, and Christ shall have the glory!

For a few minutes I will vary the strain, but keep closely to the same idea. *Some say that sin is a very pleasant and profitable thing:* indeed, many profess to be of that opinion nowadays. I may have some here, particularly some young men just commencing life, who are fascinated by the charms of London life, and have begun to sip of the dangerous wine which is vended in the house of the strange woman. To them it seems that vice is pleasure. O young man, I wish I had thee in a room alone, that I might speak to thee, for some things that I would say earnestly to thee in private I must but hint at in a public assembly. The results of sin are not such as I can speak of here. Thou art under great delusions. If thou thinkest sin will give thee pleasure. I will set an assembly against thee concerning this dream. Oh, what an assembly it would be if I could bring up from the hospitals the wretches who are suffering an earthly hell from their sins! Have I not seen them? Have I not seen them crawling through the earth, creatures that dare not look up, broken down with hypochondriasis, desponding and despairing, with that despair which nothing but vice ever brings on man? Have I not seen them when their very bones have rotted through their sin? There are diseases which are the stamp and seal of the curse of the Eternal upon transgression. There are diseases which are the big first drops of the everlasting rain of hell's tremendous tempest. If there were a physician or a surgeon here, he could tell you that there are sins which are commonly practised, which bring on men, even in this life, a penalty most terrible. The furnace of hell devours; but, like Nebuchadnezzar's guards, men in this life are made to fall down, slain by the powerful heat that glows from the eternal burnings, when God suffers a portion of the results of sin to come upon them in this life. Could I not bring up here to-night,

if it were fit and proper, spendthrifts, who squandered their early days in all manner of dissoluteness, and who have brought themselves to rags and disease? Go over the casual ward, enter the union-house, spend an evening in a low lodging-house, and sit down and hear the tales of sons of ministers, of sons of gentlemen, of sons of noblemen, of men that once were merchants, traders, lawyers, doctors, who have brought themselves down by nothing else than their own extravagance and sin, to eat the bread of pauperism, and to know the lack even of that bitter fare. Tell me sin is pleasure! If it be, you can have too much of it; but it is bitterness before long, and they are wise who flee from it.

"Well, well," cries one, "we are not all lovers of that kind of sin." Indeed, I hope you are not: I, too, refused such sins, but I had other sins—the world would not call them sins, but they were such—and when, before I found the Saviour, I began to discover what sin was (I speak what I do know), my sins, to me in my consciousness, were a little hell. I know that men who are not saved, sometimes on a dark night, or in sickness, or in trouble, or when alone, will permit conscience to work, and they feel dreadfully uneasy. Have I not seen your cheek blanch when you have been told that your friend was dead? When the funeral knell has been tolling, have you not wished yourself in the depths of the forest, that you might not hear it? When you have been compelled to sit a little while alone, you feared to allow your mind to meditate upon eternity; but you tried to fly off again to the frivolities of time, though you felt there was nothing in them. Sin is a wretched thing, unsatisfying at best. Even painted sins, with their Jezebel faces, are not truly beautiful. What men call immoralities are wretched in themselves, upon the outside; and a grain of common-sense will enable a man to see that their misery far exceeds their pleasure. I set an assembly against the man who declares that there is pleasure in iniquity.

On the other hand, *it is said that true religion makes people miserable.* I would set an assembly against anybody who dares to say that. It was in my mind to ask you who are unhappy through being Christians, to bear witness to-night against Christianity; and then I thought perhaps I would put it the other way; and let those of you who love the Saviour, and find consolation and happiness in Him, sing with me one of our joyous hymns; and I warrant you, sirs, we would make this great dome resound with hearty music. Unhappy! Unhappy through being Christians! I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here present, and I know also about as much of depression of spirit at times as any one; but my Master's service is a blessed service, and faith in Him makes my heart leap for joy. I would not change with the most healthy man, or the most wealthy man, or the most learned man, or the most eminent man in all the world, if I had to give up my faith in Jesus Christ—tried as it sometimes is. Ah! it is a blessed thing to be a Christian, and all God's people will tell you so. It is oft-times our lot to go to see the sick, but sick believers usually cheer our heart. There is a seat just below that used to be occupied by a beloved sister, well-known to you, whom I went to visit in her sickness; and I do assure you, when she was in a consumption, and near to death, I never spent a happier hour than I did with her. And only last week, or ten days ago, when I sat down with her, and she could scarcely speak, yet what she did say was as full of sacred joy as words could compass. She is in heaven now, and heaven was in her then. "So much farther on have I got," said she, "to the better land—so many the fewer of these hard breaths to fetch, and so many the fewer of these hard pains to bear. I shall soon be where Jesus is"; and she talked as freely about dying and going home, as I should talk of going to my own house when this service is ended. Before she fell asleep yesterday, about twelve o'clock, she said to those about her she felt strangely as if she were going through a river. At one time she said she was in the midst of it, the floods were round about her; and soon she said, in intervals of consciousness, "I am going, up the other side; the waters are shallower: I am mounting the other bank." At length she cried, "Jesus is coming for me! I can hear the music of heaven!" Her heart seemed to be overpowered with some sweet mystic melody, which, if it did not enter her soul by the ear, at any rate reached her inmost spirit by some other channel. "I can hear them sing! I can hear them sing!" she said, "and when Jesus comes, don't keep Him waiting for me; don't wish me to stop. Let me go." She is gone. Never one I think suffered more in dying, and never had a consumptive more difficulty in breathing. Thank God, they do not often suffer as much as she did; yet there was never one more calm, more comfortable, and more joyous on the bed of death than this daughter of affliction.

I believe in God without any evidence except Himself, and His own revelation of Himself to my soul; but yet I thank God for evidences, and among those most helpful to me are the death-beds of believers. It does my soul great good to see the Lord's people depart this life. I grieve that you should be taken away to heaven, for we want you here; but ah! if the departure of any of you shall be so sweet as those I have been privileged to witness of late, I shall come to my pulpit boldly. If the religion that I teach makes men and women die like this, I am not ashamed to preach it. If the faith that I have delivered to them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, makes them so triumphant in the last article of death, I will deliver nothing else, but still continue to tell them to trust simply in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and rest wholly and only there. I say, then, by the living saints that do rejoice, and by the dying saints who die without a fear, I set an assembly against the man who dares to slander true religion by saying that it does not make men happy.

I had many other things to say, but it were well to leave you where you are, only praying you, by the shortness of time, by the suddenness of death, by the certainty of judgment, by the terrors of hell, by the glories of heaven, by the value of your own souls, by the blood of Jesus, and by the glory of the Eternal God, to cease being His enemies. Seek ye His face. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." From that, God save you! Amen.

THE JOY OF THE LORD, THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE

"The joy of the Lord is your strength."—Nehemiah viii. 10.

"And the singers sang aloud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."—Nehemiah xii. 42, 43.

LAST Sabbath day in the morning I spoke of the birth of our Saviour as being full of joy to the people of God, and, indeed, to all nations. We then looked at the joy from a distance; we will now in contemplation draw nearer to it, and perhaps as we consider it, and remark the multiplied reasons for its existence, some of those reasons may operate upon our own hearts, and we may go out of this house of prayer ourselves partakers of the exceeding great joy. We shall count it to have been a successful morning if the people of God are made to rejoice in the Lord, and especially if those who have been bowed down and burdened in soul shall receive the oil of joy for mourning. It is no mean thing to comfort the Lord's mourners; it is a work specially dear to the Spirit of God, and, therefore, not to be lightly esteemed. Holy sorrow is precious before God, and is no bar to godly joy. Let it be carefully noted in connection with our first text that abounding mourning is no reason why there should not speedily be seen an equally abundant joy, for the very people who were bidden by Nehemiah and Ezra to rejoice were even then melted with penitential grief, "for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." The vast congregation before the watergate, under the teaching of Ezra, were awakened and cut to the heart; they felt the edge of the law of God like a sword opening up their hearts, tearing, cutting, and killing, and well might they lament: then was the time to let them feel the gospel's balm and hear the gospel's music, and, therefore, the former sons of thunder changed their note, and became sons of consolation, saying to them, "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. Go your way eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Now that they were penitent, and sincerely turned to their God, they were bidden to rejoice. As certain fabrics need to be damped before they will take the glowing colours with which they are to be adorned, so our spirits need the bedewing of repentance before they can receive the radiant colouring of delight. The glad news of the gospel can only be printed on wet paper. Have you ever seen clearer shining than that which follows a shower? Then the sun transforms the rain-drops into gems, the flowers look up with fresher smiles and faces glittering from their refreshing bath, and the birds from among the dripping branches sing with notes more rapturous, because they have paused awhile. So, when the soul has been saturated with the rain of penitence, the clear shining of forgiving love makes the flowers of gladness blossom all around. The steps by which we ascend to the palace of delight are usually moist with tears. Grief for sin is the porch of the House Beautiful, where the guests are full of "The joy of the Lord." I hope then, that the mourners, to whom this discourse shall come, will discover and enjoy the meaning of that divine benediction in the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

From our text we shall draw several themes of thought, and shall remark: first, *there is a joy of divine origin*,—"The joy of the Lord;" and, secondly *that joy is to all who partake of it a source of strength*,—"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Then we shall go on to show that *such strength always reveals itself practically*;—our second text will help us there: and we shall close by noticing, in the fourth place, *that this joy, and, consequently, this strength, are within our reach to-day.*

I. THERE IS A JOY OF DIVINE ORIGIN,—"The joy of the Lord." Springing from the Lord as its source, it will necessarily be of a very elevated character. Since man fell in the garden, he has too often sought for his enjoyments where the serpent finds his. It is written, "upon thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life," this was the serpent's doom; and man, with infatuated ambition, has tried to find his delight in his sensual appetites, and to content his soul with earth's poor dust. But the joys of time cannot satisfy an undying nature, and when a soul is once quickened by the eternal Spirit, it can no more fill itself with worldly mirth, or even with the common enjoyments of life than can a man snuff up wind and feed thereon. But, beloved, we are not left to search for joy; it is brought to our doors by the love of God our Father; joy refined and satisfying, befitting immortal spirits. God has not left us to wander among those unsatisfactory things which mock the chase which they invite; he has given us appetites which carnal things cannot content, and He has provided suitable satisfaction for those appetites; He has stored up at His right hand pleasures for evermore, which even now He reveals by His Spirit to those chosen ones whom He has taught to long for them.

Let us endeavour to analyse that special and peculiar pleasure which is here called "The joy of the Lord." *It springs from God, and has God for its object.* The believer who is in a spiritually healthy state rejoices mainly in God Himself; he is happy because there is a God, and because God is in His person and character what He is. All the attributes of God become well-springs of joy to the thoughtful, contemplative believer; for such a man says within his soul, "All these attributes of my God are mine: His power, my protection; His wisdom, my guidance; His faithfulness, my foundation; His grace, my salvation." He is a God who cannot lie, faithful and true to His promise; He is all love, and at the same time infinitely just, supremely holy. Why, the contemplation of God to one who knows that this God is his God for ever and ever, is enough to make

the eyes overflow with tears, because of the deep, mysterious, unutterable bliss which fills the heart. There was nothing in the character of Jupiter, or any of the pretended gods of the heathen, to make glad a pure and holy spirit, but there is everything in the character of Jehovah both to purify the heart and to make it thrill with delight. How sweet is it to think over all the Lord has done; how He has revealed Himself of old, and especially how He has displayed His glory in the covenant of grace, and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. How charming is the thought that He has revealed Himself to me personally, and made me to see in Him my Father, my friend, my helper, my God. Oh, if there be one word out of heaven that cannot be excelled, even by the brightness of heaven itself, it is this word, "My God, my Father," and that sweet promise, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people." There is no richer consolation to be found: even the Spirit of God can bring nothing home to the heart of the Christian more fraught with delight than that blessed consideration. When the child of God, after admiring the character and wondering at the acts of God, can all the while feel "He is my God; I have taken Him to be mine; He has taken me to be His; He has grasped me with the hand of His powerful love; having loved me with an everlasting love, with the bands of loving-kindness has He drawn me to Himself; my beloved is mine and I am His;" why, then, his soul would fain dance like David before the ark of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord with all its might.

A further source of joy is found by the Christian, who is living near to God, in *a deep sense of reconciliation to God, of acceptance with God, and yet, beyond that, of adoption and close relationship to God.* Does it not make a man glad to know that though once his sins had provoked the Lord they are all blotted out, not one of them remaineth; though once he was estranged from God, and far off from Him by wicked works, yet He is made nigh by the blood of Christ. The Lord is no longer an angry judge pursuing us with a drawn sword, but a loving Father into whose bosom we pour our sorrows, and find ease for every pang of heart. Oh, to know, beloved, that God actually loves us! I have often told you I cannot preach upon that theme, for it is a subject to muse upon in silence, a matter to sit by the hour together and meditate upon. The infinite to love an insignificant creature, an ephemera of an hour, a shadow that declineth! Is not this a marvel? For God to pity me I can understand, for God to condescend to have mercy upon me I can comprehend; but for Him to love me, for the Pure to love a sinner, for the Infinitely Great to love a worm, is matchless, a miracle of miracles! Such thoughts must comfort the soul. And then, add to this, that the divine love has brought us believers into actual relationship with God, so that we are His sons and daughters, this again is a river of sacred pleasure. "Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son." No minister of flame, though perfect in obedience, has received the honour of adoption; to us, even to us frail creatures of the dust, is given a boon denied to Gabriel, for through Jesus Christ the firstborn, we are members of the family of God. Oh! the abyss of joy which lies in sonship with God, and joint heirship with Christ! Words are vain here. Moreover, the joy springing from the spirit of adoption is another portion of the believer's bliss. He cannot be an unhappy man who can cry, "Abba, Father." The spirit of adoption is always attended by love, joy, and peace, which are fruits of the Spirit; for we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of liberty and joy in Christ Jesus. "My God, my Father." Oh how sweet the sound. But all men of God do not enjoy this, say you. Alas! we grant it, but we also add that it is their own fault. It is the right and portion of every believer to live in the assurance that he is reconciled to God, that God loves him, and that he is God's child, and if he doth not so live he has himself only to blame. If there be any starving at God's table, it is because the guest stints himself, for the feast is superabundant. If however, a man comes, and I pray you all may, to live habitually under a sense of pardon through the sprinkling of the precious blood, and in a delightful sense of perfect reconciliation with the great God, he is the possessor of a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But, beloved, this is not all. The joy of the Lord in the spirit springs also from *an assurance that all the future, whatever it may be, is guaranteed by divine goodness,* that being children of God, the love of God towards us is not of a mutable character, but abides and remains unchangeable. The believer feels an entire satisfaction in leaving himself in the hands of eternal and immutable love. However happy I may be to-day, if I am in doubt concerning to-morrow, there is a worm at the root of my peace; although the past may now be sweet in retrospect, and the present fair in enjoyment, yet if the future be grim with fear, my joy is but shallow. If my salvation be still a matter of hazard and jeopardy, unmingled joy is not mine, and deep peace is still out of my reach. But when I know that He whom I have rested in hath power and grace enough to complete that which He hath begun in me, and for me; when I see the work of Christ to be no half-way redemption, but a complete and eternal salvation; when I perceive that the promises are established upon an unchangeable basis, and are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, ratified by oath and sealed by blood, then my soul hath perfect contentment. It is true, that looking forward there may be seen long avenues of tribulation, but the glory is at the end of them; battles may be foreseen, and woe unto the man who does not expect them, but the eye of faith perceives the crown of victory. Deep waters are mapped upon our journey, but faith can see Jehovah fording these rivers with us, and she anticipates the day when we shall ascend the banks of the hither shore and enter into Jehovah's rest. When we have received these priceless truths into our souls we are satisfied with favour and full of the goodness of the Lord. There is a theology which denies to believers this consolation, we will not enter into controversy with it, but sorrowfully hint that a heavy chastisement for the errors of that system of doctrine lies in the loss of the comfort which the truth would have brought into the soul. For my part, I value the gospel not only for what it has done for me in the past, but for the guarantees which it affords me of eternal salvation. "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand."

Now, beloved, I have not yet taken you into the great deeps of joy, though these streams are certainly by no means shallow. There is an abyss of delight for every Christian *when he comes into actual fellowship*

with God. I spoke of the truth that God loved us, and the fact that we are related to Him by ties most near and dear; but, oh, when these doctrines become experiences, then are we indeed anointed with the oil of gladness. When we enter into the love of God, and it enters into us; when we walk with God habitually, then our joy is like Jordan at harvest time, when it overfloweth all its banks. Do you know what it means—to walk with God—Enoch's joy; to sit at Jesus' feet—Mary's joy; to lean your head upon Jesus' bosom—John's familiar joy? Oh yes, communion with the Lord is no mere talk with some of us. We have known it in the chamber of affliction; we have known it in the solitude of many a night of broken rest; we have known it beneath discouragements and under sorrows and defamations, and all sorts of ills; and we reckon that one dram of fellowship with Christ is enough to sweeten an ocean full of tribulation, and that only to know that He is near us, and to see the gleaming of His dear eye, would transform even hell itself into heaven, if it were possible for us to enjoy His presence there. Alas! ye do not and cannot know this bliss, ye who quaff your foaming bowls, listening to the sound of stringed instruments, ye do not know what this bliss means—ye have not dreamed of it, nor could ye compass it though a man should tell it unto you. As the beast in the meadow knows not the far-reaching thoughts of Him who reads the stars and threads the spheres, so neither can the carnal man make so much as a guess of what are the joys which God hath prepared for them that love Him, which any day and every day, when our hearts seek it, He revealeth unto us by His Spirit. This is "the joy of the Lord," fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Beloved, if we reach this point, we must labour to maintain our standing, for our Lord saith to us "abide in Me." The habit of communion is the life of happiness.

Another form of "the joy of the Lord" will visit us practically every day in *the honour of being allowed to serve Him.* It is a joy worth worlds to be allowed to do good. To teach a little child his letters for Christ, will give a true heart some taste of the joy of the Lord, if it be consciously done for the Lord's sake alone. To bear the portion to those for whom nothing is prepared, to visit the sick, to comfort the mourner, to aid the poor, to instruct the ignorant, any, and all of such Christian works, if done in Jesus' name, will in their measure array us in Jehovah's joy. And happy are we, brethren, if when we cannot work we are enabled to lie still and suffer, for acquiescence is another silver pipe through which "the joy of the Lord" will come to us. It is sweet to smart beneath God's rod, and feel that if God would have us suffer it is happiness to do so, to fall back with the faintness of nature, but at the same time with the strength of grace, and say, "Thy will be done." It is joy, when between the millstones crushed like an olive, to yield nothing but the oil of thankfulness; when bruised beneath the flail of tribulation, still to lose nothing but the chaff, and to yield to God the precious grain of entire submissiveness. Why, this is a little heaven upon earth. To glory in tribulations also, this is a high degree of upclimbing towards the likeness of our Lord. Perhaps, the usual communions which we have with our Beloved, though exceeding precious, will never equal those which we enjoy when we have to break through thorns and briars to be at Him; when we follow Him into the wilderness then we feel the love of our espousals to be doubly sweet. It is a joyous thing when in the midst of mournful circumstances, we yet feel that we cannot mourn because the Bridegroom is with us. Blessed is that man, who in the most terrible storm is driven in, not from his God, but even rides upon the crest of the lofty billows nearer towards heaven. Such happiness is the Christian's lot. I do not say that every Christian possesses it, but I am sure that every Christian ought to do so. There is a highway to heaven, and all in it are safe; but in the middle of that road there is a special way, an inner path, and all who walk therein are happy as well as safe. Many professors are only just within the hedge, they walk in the ditch by the road side, and because they are safe there, they are content to put up with all the inconveniences of their walk; but he who takes the crown of the causeway, and walks in the very centre of the road that God has cast up, shall find that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, for there the Lord Himself shall be his companion, and will manifest Himself to him. You shallow Christians who do but believe in Christ, and barely that, whose bibles are unread, whose closets are unfrequented, whose communion with God is a thing of spasms, you have not the joy of the Lord, neither are you strong. I beseech you, rest not as you are, but let your conscious feebleness provoke you to seek the means of strength: and that means of strength is to be found in a pleasant medicine, sweet as it is profitable—the delicious and effectual medicine of "the joy of the Lord."

II. But time would fail me to prolong our remarks upon this very fruitful subject, and we shall turn to our second head, which is this: that THIS JOY IS A SOURCE OF GREAT STRENGTH.

Very rapidly let us consider this thought. It is so because this joy arises from considerations which always strengthen the soul. Very much of the depth of our piety will depend upon our thoughtfulness. Many persons, after having received a doctrine, put it by on the shelf; they are orthodox, they have received the truth, and they are content to keep that truth on hand as dead stock. Sirs, of what account can this be to you, to store your garners with wheat if you never grind the corn for bread, or sow it in the furrows of your fields? He is the joyful Christian who uses the doctrines of the gospel for spiritual meat, as they were meant to be used. Why, some men might as well have a heterodox creed as an orthodox one for all the difference it makes to them. Having the notion that they know, and imagining that to know sufficeth them, they do not consider, contemplate, or regard the truths which they profess to believe, and, consequently, they derive no benefit from them. Now, to contemplate the great truths of divine election, of eternal love, of covenant engagements, of justification by faith through the blood of Christ, and the indwelling and perpetual abiding of the Holy Ghost in His people,—to turn over these things is to extract joy from them; and this also is strengthening to the mind. To press the heavenly grapes by meditation, and make the the red wine flow forth in torrents, is an exercise as strengthening as it is exhilarating. Joy comes from the same truths which support our strength, and comes by the process of meditation.

Again, "the joy of the Lord" within us is always the sign and symbol of strong spiritual life. Holy vivacity betokens spiritual vigour. I said that he

who had spiritual joy gained it by communion with God, but communion with God is the surest fosterer of strength. You cannot be with a strong God without getting strength yourself, for God is always a transforming God; regarding and looking upon Him our likeness changes till we become in our measure like our God. The warmth of the South of France, of which you often hear so much, does not spring from soft balmy winds, but from the sun; at sunset the temperature falls. You shall be on one side of the street in Italy and think it May, cross the street into the shade and it is cold as January. The sun does it all. A man who walks in the sunlight of God's countenance, for that very reason is warm and strong. The sunlight of joy usually goes with the warmth of spiritual life. As the light of joy varies so does the warmth of holy strength; he who dwells in the light of God is both happy and strong. He who goes into the shade and loses the joy of the Lord becomes weak at the same time. So the joy of the Lord becomes our strength, as being an indicator of its rise or fall. When a soul is really vigorous and active, it is like the torrent which dashes down the mountain side, which scorns in winter to own the bonds of frost: in a few hours the stagnant pools and slowly moving streams are enchained in ice; but the snow king must bring forth all his strength ere he can manacle the rushing torrent. So when a soul dashes on with the sacred force of faith, it is hard to freeze it into misery, its vigour secures its joy.

Furthermore, the man who possesses "the joy of the Lord," finds it his strength in another respect, that it fortifies him against temptation. What is there that he can be tempted with? He has more already than the world can offer him as a reward for treachery. He is already rich; who shall ensnare him with the wages of unrighteousness? He is already satisfied; who is he that can seduce him with pleasing baits? "Shall such a man as I flee?" The rejoicing Christian is equally proof against persecution. They may well afford to be laughed at who win at such a rate as he does. "You may scoff," saith he, "but I know what true religion is within my soul, and your scoffing will not make me relinquish the pearl of great price." Such a man is, moreover, made strong to bear affliction; for all the sufferings put upon him are but a few drops of bitterness cast into his cup of bliss, to give a deeper tone to the sweetness which absorbs them.

Such a man becomes strong for service, too. What can he not do who is happy in his God? By his God he leaps over a wall, or breaks through a troop. Strong is he, too, for any kind of self-sacrifice. To the God who gives him all, and remains to him as his perpetual portion, such a man gives up all that he hath, and thinks it no surrender. It is but laying up his treasure in his own peculiar treasure house, even in the God of his salvation.

A joyous man, such I have now in my mind's eye, is to all intents and purposes a strong man. He is strong in a calm restful manner. Whatever happens he is not ruffled or disturbed. He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. The ruffled man is ever weak. He is in a hurry, and doth things ill. The man full of joy within is quiet, he bides his time and croucheth in the fulness of his strength. Such a man, though he is humble, is firm and steadfast; he is not carried away with every wind, or bowed by every breeze, he knows what he knows, and holds what he holds, and the golden anchor of his hope entereth within the veil, and holds him fast. His strength is not pretentious but real. The happiness arising from communion with God breeds in him no boastfulness; he does not talk of what he can do, but he does it; he does not say what he could bear, but he bears all that comes. He does not himself always know what he could do; his weakness is the more apparent to himself because of the strength which the Holy Ghost puts upon him; but when the time comes, his weakness only illustrates the divine might, while the man goes calmly on, conquering and to conquer. His inner light makes him independent of the outward sun; his secret granaries make him independent of the outer harvest; his inward fountains place him beyond dread though the brook Cherith may dry up; he is independent of men and angels, and fearless of devils; all creatures may turn against him if they please, but since God Himself is his exceeding joy, he will not miss their love or mourn their hate. He standeth where others fall, he sings where others weep, he wins where others fly, he glorifies his God where others bring dishonour on themselves and on the sacred Name. God grant us the inward joy which arises from real strength and is so linked with it as to be in part its cause.

III. But now I must hasten on to notice in the third place that THIS STRENGTH LEADS TO PRACTICAL RESULTS. I am sure I shall have your earnest attention to this, because in many of you I have seen the results follow of which I now speak. I would not flatter any one, but my heart has been full of thanksgiving to the God of all grace when I have seen many of you rejoicing in the Lord under painful circumstances and producing the fruits of a gracious strength. Turn then to our second text, and there you shall observe some of the fruits of holy joy and pious strength.

First, it leads to *great praise*. "The singers sang aloud," their minstrelsy was hearty and enthusiastic. Sacred song is not a minor matter. Quaint George Herbert has said—

> "Praying's the end of preaching."

Might he not have gone further and have said, *praising's the end of praying?* After all, preaching and praying are not the chief end of man, but the glorifying of God, of which praising God vocally is one form. Preaching is sowing, prayer is watering, but praise is the harvest. God aims at His own glory, so should we; and "whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me saith the Lord." Be ye diligent then to sing His praises with understanding. We have put away harps and trumpets and organs, let us mind that we really rise above the need of them. I think we do well to dispense with these helps of the typical dispensation; they are all inferior even in music to the human voice, there is assuredly no melody or harmony like those created by living tongues; but let us mind that we do not put away an atom of the joy. Let us be glad when in the congregation we unite in psalmody. It is a wretched thing to hear the praises of God rendered professionally, as if the mere music were everything. It is horrible to have a dozen people in the table-pew singing for you, as if they were proxies for the whole assembly. It is shocking to me to be present in places of worship where not a tenth of the people ever venture to sing at all, and these do it through their teeth so very

softly, that one had need to have a microscope invented for his ears, to enable him to hear the dying strain. Out upon such mumbling and murdering of the praises of God; if men's hearts were joyous and strong, they would scorn such miserable worship. In this house we all try to sing, but might we not have more praise services? We have had a praise meeting every now and then. Ought we not to hold a praise meeting every week? Should not the prayer meeting be more than ever cheered by praise. The singing of God's people should be, and if they were more full of divine strength would be, more constant and universal. How sinners chant the praise of Bacchus in the streets! You can hardly rest in the middle of the night, but what unseemly sounds of revelry startle you. Shall the votaries of wine sing so lustily, and shall we be silent? We are not often guilty of disturbing the world with our music; the days in which Christian zeal interfered with the wicked seem to have gone by; we have settled down into more orderliness, and I am afraid also into more lukewarmness. Oh for the old Methodistic shout. Brethren, wake up your singing again. May the Lord give us again a singing-time, and make us all praise Him with heart, and with voice, till even the adversaries shall say, "The Lord hath done great things for them;" and we shall reply, "Aye, ye, speak the truth; He hath done great things for us whereof we are glad." Perhaps there has not been so large a blessing upon the churches of England, because they have not rendered due thanksgiving. In all the time in which we are in trouble we are anxious and prayerful; when a prince is sick bulletins are issued every hour or so; but ah, when the mercy comes but few bulletins are put out, calling upon us to bless and praise the name of God for His mercies. Let us praise the Lord from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, for great is the Lord, and greatly is He to be praised.

The next result is *great sacrifice.* "That day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced." What day is that in which the church of God now makes great sacrifices? I have not seen it in the calendar of late; and, alas! if men make any sacrifice they very often do so in a mode which indicates that they would escape the infliction if they could. Few make great sacrifices and rejoice. You can persuade a man to give a considerable sum; a great many arguments at last overcome him, and he does it because he would have been ashamed not to do it, but in his heart he wishes you had not come that way, and had gone to some other donor. That is the most acceptable gift to God which is given rejoicingly. It is well to feel that whatever good your gift may do to the church, or the poor, or the sick, it is twice as much benefit to you to give it. It is well to give, because you love to give; as the flower which pours forth its perfume because it never dreamed of doing otherwise; or like the bird which quivers with song, because it is a bird and finds a pleasure in its notes; or like the sun which shines, not by constraint, but because, being a sun, it must shine; or like the waves of the sea which flash back the brilliance of the sun, because it is their nature to reflect and not to hoard the light? Oh, to have such grace in our hearts that we shall joyfully make sacrifices unto our God. The Lord grant that we may have much of this; for the bringing of the tithes into the storehouse is the way to the blessing; as saith the Scripture: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Thine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Next to that, there are sure to follow *other expressions of joy.* They "rejoiced, for God had made them to rejoice with great joy." It was not all singing and giving. When the wheels of the machine are well oiled the whole machine goes easily; and when the man has the oil of joy, then in his business, and in his family, the wheels of his nature glide along sweetly and harmoniously, because he is a glad and a happy man. There are some professors who imagine the sorrow of the Lord to be their strength; they glory in the spirit of bondage and in an unbelieving experience, having great acquaintance with the corruption of their hearts, sometimes of a rather too practical character. They make the deformities of the saints to be their beauty-spots, and their faults to be their evidences. Such men denounce all who rejoice in the Lord, and only tolerate the unbelieving. Their strength lies in being able to take you through all the catacombs of nature's darkness, and to show you the rottenness of their evil hearts. Well, such strength as that let those have who will, but we are persuaded that our text is nearer to wisdom: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." While we know something of our corruption, and mourn it, know something of the world's troubles, and sometimes lament as we bear them; yet there is a joy in the perfect work of Christ, and a joy in our union to Him which uplifts us far above all other considerations. God becomes to us such a strength that we cannot help showing our joy in our ordinary life.

But then the text tells us that holy joy leads to *family happiness.* "The wives also and the children rejoiced." It is so in this church. I have lately seen several children from households which God has blessed, and I have rejoiced to see that father and mother know the Lord, and that even the last of the family has been brought to Jesus. Oh happy households where the joy is not confined to one, but where all partake of it. I dislike much that Christianity which makes a man feel, "If I go to heaven it is all I care for." Why, you are like a German stove which I found in the room of an hotel the other day—a kind of stove which required all the wood they could bring up merely to warm itself, and then all the heat went up the chimney. We sat around it to make it warm, but scarce a particle of heat came forth from it to us. Too many need all the religion they can get to cheer their own hearts, and their poor families and neighbours sit shivering in the cold of ungodliness. Be like those well constructed stoves of our own houses, which send out all the heat into the room. Send out the heat of piety into your house, and let all the neighbours participate in the blessing, for so the text finishes, "The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off." The joy of the Lord should be observed throughout our neighbourhood, and many who might otherwise have been careless of true religion will then enquire, "What makes these people glad, and creates such happy households?" Your joy shall thus be God's missionary.

IV. And now I have to close. THIS JOY, THIS STRENGTH, ARE BOTH WITHIN OUR REACH! "For the Lord had made them glad with great joy." God

alone can give us this great joy. Then it is within the reach of any, for God can give it to one as well as to another. If it depended upon our good works or our natural abilities, some of us could never reach it; but if God is the source and giver of it He may give it to me as well as to thee, my brother, and to thee as well as to another. What was the way in which God gave this joy? Well first, He gave it to these people by their being *attentive hearers*. They were not only hearers, but they heard with their ears, their ears were attentive unto the word; it was read to them and they sucked it in, receiving it into their souls. An attentive hearer is on the way to being a joyous receiver. Having heard it they *felt the power of it*, and they wept. Did that seem the way to joy? It was. They received the threatenings of the law with all their terrors into their soul, they allowed the hammer of the word to break them in pieces, they submitted themselves to the word of reproof. Oh! that God would incline you all to do the same, for this, again, is the way in which God gives joy. The word is heard, the word is felt. Then after this, when they had felt the power of the word, we see that *they worshipped God devoutly*. They bowed the head. Their postures indicated what they felt within. Worshippers who with penitent hearts really adore God, will never complain of weary Sabbaths; adoration helps us into joy. He who can bow low enough before the throne shall be lifted as high before that throne as his heart can desire.

We read also that these hearers and worshippers *understood* clearly what they heard. Never be content with hearing a sermon unless you can understand it, and if there be a truth that is above you, strain after it, strive to know it. Bible-reader, do not be content with going through the words of the chapter: pray the Holy Ghost to tell you the meaning, and use proper means for finding out that meaning; ask those who know, and use your own enlightened judgment to discover the sense. When shall we have done with formalism of worship and come into living adoration? Sometimes, for all the true singing that there is, the song might as well be in Latin or in Greek. Oh! to know what you are singing, to know what you are saying in prayer, to know what you are reading, to get at it, to come right into it, to understand it—this is the way to holy joy.

And one other point. These people when they had understood what they had devoutly heard, were *eager to obey*. They obeyed not only the common points of the law in which Israel of old had furnished them with examples, but they found out an old institution which had been buried and forgotten. What was that to them; God had commanded it, and they celebrated it, and in so doing this peculiar joy came upon them. Oh, for the time when all believers shall search the word of God, when they shall not be content with saying, "I have joined myself with a certain body of Christians, and they do so; therefore I do so." May no man say to himself any longer, "Such is the rule of my church"; but may each say, "I am God's servant and not the servant of man, not the servant of thirty-nine articles, of the Prayer-book, or the Catechism; I stand to my own Master, and the only law book I acknowledge is the book of His word, inspired by His Spirit." Oh, blessed day, when every man shall say, "I want to know wherein I am wrong; I desire to know what I am to do; I am anxious to follow the Lord fully." Well, then, if your joy in God leads you to practical obedience, you may rest assured it has made you strong in the very best manner.

Beloved brethren and sisters, we had, before I went away for needed rest, a true spirit of prayer among us. I set out for the Continent joyfully, because I left with you the names of some eighty persons proposed for church-membership. My beloved officers, with great diligence, have visited these and others, and next Lord's-day we hope to receive more than a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty fresh members into the church. Blessed be God for this. I should not have felt easy in going away if you had been in a barren, cold, dead state; but there was a real fire blazing on God's altar, and souls were being saved. Now, I desire that this gracious zeal should continue, and be renewed. It has not gone out in my absence, I believe, but I desire now a fresh blast from God's Spirit to blow the flame very vehemently. Let us meet for prayer to-morrow, and let the prayer be very earnest, and let those wrestlers who have been moved to agonizing supplication renew the ardour and fervency of their desires, and may we be a strong people, and consequently a joyous people in the strength and joy of the Lord. May sinners in great numbers look unto Jesus and be saved. Amen, and Amen.

A GOD READY TO PARDON

"Thou art a God ready to pardon."—Nehemiah ix. 17.

WHEN a man's conscience is so awakened to the existence of sin that he cannot perceive any plea for mercy within himself, it is his wisdom to look for a plea in the nature and character of God. Now, brethren, if we search ourselves through and through, we cannot find anything in our fallen nature which can recommend us to the Most High. If we think that we have a claim upon God's goodness, we are in darkness, and deceive ourselves. When the true light comes, it reveals our bareness of all merit or excuse, and shows that there is nothing in human nature but that which provokes the Lord. This is the fact as to our condition while we are unregenerate, and oftentimes the true believer, when darkness gathers around him, finds himself to be in much the same condition. His evidences burn dimly, the candle of the Lord seems quenched within his spirit, and, worst of all, the sun of divine favour is not discernible; then groping all around he can discover nothing in himself but that which causes him to sigh and groan, being burdened. In such a plight he should cast overboard the great anchor of faith, and escape from himself to his God. It were well for him always to do so, but especially in the

cloudy and dark day. To whom should he turn for light but to the Sun of Righteousness? Where look for grace but to the God of all grace? Where for all but to the All in all? If what *I* am makes me despair, let me consider what *God in Christ* is and I shall have hope.

That God is merciful becomes to sinners the first point upon which they can fix their hope: that the mercy of God endureth for ever affords to the saints a most blessed stronghold when inward sin assails the soul. But whence do we learn this supremely consoling truth? How do we know that God is merciful? I scarcely think we should have inferred from His works the readiness of God to show mercy. I have heard a great deal about the attributes of God in nature: I have, indeed, heard a great deal more than I have ever been able to see. To "go from nature up to nature's God" is a very common expression, but it is a very long step, mark you, from the highest Alp of nature to the footstool of the throne of God. It will be found much easier to go down from God to nature when you once know the Lord than ever it can be to ascend from the works to the Maker. It is more than questionable whether the best instructed mind could have discovered much of God's moral nature from the universe around—His goodness to obedient creatures we might have gathered, but His mercy to the guilty is there but dimly revealed. Look at this visible universe and you perceive that it is governed by certain fixed laws. If a man offends against these laws, do the laws bend, and make allowance for his mistake? Not so, they operate immutably, and every violation of them is avenged. The captain makes a mistake of a few points in his steering—there is a current which he has not perceived, or perhaps his compass itself is out of gear; anyhow, he is, without any fault on his part, drifted upon a rock. Does the rock move, or is it softened? or when the ship strikes is there some miracle by which the timbers are held together? Does some angelic hand undergird the ship and preserve the precious lives? No, amidst the howling of the pitiless storm the vessel breaks up, and those who struggle best are unable to survive the fury of the sea. Is there any sign of mercy here? Or take another case: the simple countryman, in his ignorance of the laws of electricity, is overtaken by a pelting storm, and to escape from the drenching rain he runs beneath some lofty tree to screen himself beneath its spreading branches. It is a law of nature that elevated points should attract the lightning: the man does not know this, he does not intend to defy his Maker's natural law, but for all that, when the death-dealing fluid splits the tree it leaves a senseless corpse at the foot thereof. The law does not suspend its operations though that man may be the husband upon whose life the bread of many children may depend, though he may have been one of the most guileless and prayerful of mankind, though he may have been utterly unconscious of having exposed himself to the force of a physical law of God, yet still he dies, for he has placed himself in the way of a settled law of nature, and it takes its course. There is scant trace of mercy here. Or it may be that a physician in the pursuit of discoveries which shall alleviate pain, with no ambition except to serve his fellow creatures, no mercenary motive swaying him, endeavours to penetrate into the secrets of nature, and imbibes or inhales a certain noxious drug or pernicious vapour. Will the noxious drug or destructive gas stay its deadly office because of the generosity of the motive of the man who exposes himself to its influence? Ah, not so, the precious life is sacrificed, and we hear the sad news that a great physician is no more; nature having stood fast and firm, and no mercy having been shown to the breaker of her laws. Now seeing that these laws move on immutably like the great wheels of a mighty machine, and he that is entangled in those wheels is ground to powder, it does seem as if we had slight evidence of the mercy of God if we look to nature alone: certainly not enough to calm the conscience or allay the fears of the guilty. We admit that there are some tokens for good to the offender, even in nature, for does not the Lord teach man to set up his beacons upon the headland and anchor his light-ships near the sands, and has He not led us up to the formation of life-boats whereby multitudes of lives have been saved? In the case of death by lightning there is reason to believe that the death is more certainly painless than any other; and, again, loftiness need not remain a danger, for the lightning conductor has warded off the bolt of heaven from multitudes of elevated buildings. In the case of most poisons there are antidotes which save life if they are taken speedily enough, and even the poisons themselves, in certain compounds, turn out to be healing medicines. So there are traces of the pardon of offences in the mitigating or the removing of penalties even under the iron rule of natural law. Never is a law changed, mark you, in nature, except in the few instances of miraculous interpositions; and in the moral universe never is a law changed at all, for heaven and earth shall pass away but not one jot or one tittle of the law shall fail. Still there are laws which counteract full frequently the roughness and the crushing power of other laws; and these, like their counterparts in the moral universe, prove that God is merciful. But, all this being allowed, the light which nature affords us is, upon this subject, rather conjecture than assurance. My brethren, let us thank God we are not left to mere guesses upon this point, we are not left to the sun and to the moon to give us light upon this matter; we have a more sure word of testimony whereunto ye do well if ye take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. We have this book of Holy Scripture written by the pen of the Holy Spirit, which tells us over and over again that the God whom we have offended is a God ready to pardon, a God whose mercy endureth for ever.

I would call your attention to the expression, "*a God ready to pardon*," not a God who may possibly pardon; neither a God who upon strong persuasion and earnest pleadings may, at length, be induced to forgive; not one who, perchance, at some remote period after we have undergone a long purgation may manifest a mercy which is now in the background, but a God "ready to pardon,"—willing and more than willing—ready, standing prepared, or to use another Scriptural expression, "waiting to be gracious." We have a God who stands like a host at a festival, which is all provided and prepared, saying, "My oxen and My fatlings are provided, all things are ready, come ye to the supper." Not only are all things ready but God Himself is ready, His own heart and hand all ready to bestow pardon upon the guilty ones who come before Him. There is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared.

This blessed truth, in the first place, *was remarkably*

seen in the story of Israel, on that we will dwell; and secondly, *it is equally true of the Lord at all times.* May the Holy Spirit in mercy lead us to feel the power of mercy while we speak thereon.

I. First, then, I shall ask your attention to THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL AS SINGULARLY ILLUSTRATING THE READINESS OF GOD TO PARDON. Brethren, the Israelites seem to have been set forward as a picture of all God's people. As the foot of the altar was made of the looking-glasses of the women, the polished brass of the mirrors being melted down, so it seems to me as if Israel was intended to be a looking-glass in which every one of us might look and see his own image. Full sure I am that when I speak of Israel you will perceive that the record speaks of you, and draws your portraits to the life.

They were, in the first place, *a people very specially favoured, but they were a people as specially ungrateful.* To what other nation did God give the oracles of His truth? What other tribes did He separate unto Himself to be a people in whose midst He would show forth His glory? What other nation did He bring forth out of the house of bondage with a high hand and a stretched out arm? For what other people did He pour out of heaven the dread artillery of all His plagues, smiting their foes with judgments most terrible? For what other race did He divide the sea that He might lead them through the deep as through a wilderness? What other armies of men had food to eat which dropped from heaven? What other hosts were led and guided for forty years, and supplied without their own labour, without sowing or planting, or reaping, or gathering into barns? Surely the Lord Himself was with them, and they were favoured above all the rest of mankind. Who is like unto thee, O Israel, a people chosen of the Lord! But they were just as specially sinful. It scarcely seems to us as if any other nation ever existed who provoked the Lord so much, for they transgressed against light and love, against instruction and illumination, against wooing and warning, against entreaty and rebuke. They rebelled though they knew that they were highly favoured, and were conscious that they were a distinguished and elect people. Their iniquities were committed against a God whose hand they had seen, and whose voice they had heard, as He spoke to them from the top of Sinai. They lived amid a blaze of miracles, and walked a pathway of marvels. God was in the camp, His glory shone forth between the cherubim, and under the symbol of the fiery cloudy pillar His presence was revealed to them all. God was round about them for a wall of fire, and as the glory in their midst: and yet with the Lord before their eyes they refused to see Him, and with all His wonders before them they refused to believe. You know, dear friends, that we are always particularly wounded by the unkindness of any to whom we have been specially attentive and generous. We complain, "It was not an enemy, for then I could have borne it, but it was thou, a man, mine acquaintance, my friend." Hard is it to be injured by a child for whom you have endured much self-denial, and to whom you have rendered tenderest love. "Sharper than an adder's tooth is an unthankful child." After this fashion Israel offended, and, speaking after the manner of men, the Lord felt it keenly, He was grieved at His heart, because His great goodness to them had been so basely misused. He cries, "O that they had hearkened unto Me," and in another place, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth, I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Me." Such is the language which Scripture puts into the mouth of the Lord, and yet He forgave His provoking people times without number—was He not indeed ready to pardon?

Again, the Israelites were *absolutely dependent upon God for everything, and yet they were proud.* Read in the sixteenth verse, "They and our fathers dealt proudly." If any people in the world ought to have been humble, surely the Israelites were they. They had been slaves in Egypt, and lien among the pots in degraded bondage—brickmakers all of them. Their backs were raw with the lash of the slave-driver, and they cried out under the sore oppression. The Lord chose them in the ignorance and debasement which always come with slavery. When He brought them out they had no treasures but such as they had demanded of their former masters. Their stock of food was very slender, and they had to traverse the arid wilderness. Tied up in bundles on their shoulders, they carried a little food, but that was soon spent, and every day they had to receive bread fresh from God's own ovens, while as for water they would have perished had it not been for the rock whose streams followed them all their way. They were not a people addicted to commerce, they had no opportunities for hunting, there were no means for husbandry; and therefore, if day by day the manna had not fallen, they must have utterly starved. Yet though they were pensioners upon the daily charity of God, and were both fed and clothed by His bounty, still they were proud. I know some others who are much in the same condition, and perhaps they are proud too. Paupers and yet proud! Living on alms and yet boastful! Ah, brethren, but this in Israel was very provoking to God, even as it is in us. Those vagrant mendicants thought themselves somewhat, so that when they were a little tried they began to murmur against Moses, and to accuse their God of bringing them out into the desert to die. They hectored it very loudly, and with a high stomach, and thought themselves hardly put upon, and would not do this, and would do that, as though they were some great ones, while all the while they were no better than so many birds of the air, which have to gather what God's generous hand is pleased to scatter for their daily food. Was He not a God ready to pardon, to have mercy upon a proud people? Is it not always very hard to forgive a haughty spirited offender? If the offender will humble himself before you there is less difficulty; but if, being absolutely dependent upon you for everything, the offender nevertheless insults you with high words, it becomes very hard to keep your temper with him. Pride is irritating, yea abominable. O Lord, when Thou didst forgive the haughtiness of Thine erring people, Thou wast indeed ready to pardon.

These people, again, *deliberately rebelled*, for the sixteenth and seventeenth verses tell us they "hardened their necks, and hearkened not to Thy commandments, and refused to obey." It was not that they made mistakes, it was not that they fell into errors or were misled; but they did not want to go right, and refused to know what God's will and mind were. They stopped their ears and closed their eyes. When they asked that the words which the Lord spake from Sinai might not be spoken to them any more, it was but natural that they should dread the terror of the trumpet sound; but deep

down in their hearts there was also a distaste for a law so pure, so holy. Their hearts were set on mischief, and they were not to be led in the way of obedience. They had a ready ear for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. who preached sedition, they were ready to be led into idolatrous ceremonies and lustful acts by Moabitish women; but before the Lord they were as bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke. Anybody and everybody they would hearken to except their God, but to Him they had such small regard that they cast His ordinances and precepts behind their backs, and sinned again and again with resolute deliberation. They often went astray though often reproved. It was not mere error and mistake, but the set and current of their heart was towards evil. Deliberation adds greatly to the heinousness of sin, and it is a sad thing when we have to charge ourselves with this. The repetition of the same offence also shows a state of heart very near akin to determination, for it has all the appearance of a deliberate refusal to watch against temptation, and of a fixed resolve to treat the voice of God with indifference. Alas, that we should be so readily decoyed by the baits of evil, and so feebly held by the cords of goodness. Lord, when we provoke Thee in this way be pleased to show Thyself a God ready to pardon.

More than this, we are told that the Israelites were *unmindful of what the Lord had done for them:* "Neither were mindful of Thy wonders that Thou didst among them." They were by this unmindfulness led into the great crime of unbelief. You think, my brethren, that if you had seen the Red Sea divided and Israel's hosts led through, while Pharaoh's army was drowned, you would have trusted God all your life. "Oh," say you, "if I had been present, and really gathered the manna and eaten it, I could not, I am sure, with such a demonstration before my eyes, have ever fallen into unbelief again." Well, I leave that question whether you would or not; having a very shrewd suspicion that your heart is by no means better than that of the ancient unbelievers. At any rate Israel soon fell back into her chronic unbelief. Within a few days after they had seen the whole host of Pharaoh destroyed, they began to murmur against God and against Moses; and though ever day they ate the manna, and drank the miraculously given water, yet continually they asked, "Is the Lord among us or not?" and they were perpetually putting questions such as made Moses demand of them, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" They were cankered to the heart with unbelief. For a moment they had a sort of faith,

> "Now they believe His Word,
> While rocks with rivers flow;
> Now with their lusts provoke the Lord,
> And He reduced them low."

but in another moment they relapsed into infidelity. The slightest peril, the slightest trouble to themselves, they began to think that now they were come to a difficulty out of which the Lord could not deliver them, and they cried, "Surely, He means to destroy us. He will never bring us into the promised land." Do you know any other people like this? I need to put out my hand to touch one of the same order. At any rate, since the Lord forgave His people Israel, though they angered Him with their ungenerous mistrust, we see most clearly that He is "a God ready to pardon."

Further on we read that these people *committed in spirit an act of utter apostasy.* They made unto themselves a captain to return to their bondage. They said they would go back to Egypt, since there was no hope of their ever conquering Canaan, for the Canaanites were too strong for them. What, back to slavery! Back to making bricks without straw! Leaving God and His tabernacle, and the glory of His presence. What think ye would they go back for? What was the attractive bait which lured them? They would return to their taskmasters for the sake of the leeks and the garlic, and the onions, the flavour of which was still in their mouths. Their soul lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt, and they would, to sit down by those savoury cauldrons, go back to the ignoble condition of slavery again, and leave the Lord and all His guardian care, and forego the goodly land, which was but a little way beyond. O foolish people! Ah, brethren, this is madness, but alas is there not in us, even in us, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and have there not been times when we also have been tempted to return to the beggarly elements of the world, and seek content in the grovelling joys of earth?

Perhaps it was worst of all that the Israelites *did actually fall into shameful idolatry.* They set up the figure of a calf to represent God; they compared their glory unto the image of an ox that eateth grass, and they said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt." God was incensed at this, as well He might be, nevertheless at the entreaty of Moses He did not utterly destroy them. O, brethren, it is a shameful thing when we love the creature more than the Creator, and dare to set up anything which is dear to us in Jehovah's place. "Little children keep yourselves from idols," but if you have had idols, and have been forgiven, then you can see in this history, and in your own experience, that the Lord is ready to pardon.

For a minute I desire to show you the opposite side, namely, the divine goodness. While God forgave this people He showed His readiness to pardon in the following ways. First, *He continued while they were in all these sins to guide them both by night and by day.* The nineteenth verse says, "Yet Thou in Thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go." Only think of it, that very day they made a calf, when the sun went down the fiery pillar still lit up the camp. At that very hour in which they said "We will make to ourselves a captain, and go back to Egypt," the cloud was covering the camp, and screening them from the burning heat of the sun. They sinned beneath the shade of special mercy. Oh, if the Lord had said, "Now I will leave you, I will give you no more guidance. Since you will not follow My commandments, go which way you will," should you have wondered? If He had left them to faint in the heat of the day and grope in the darkness of the night would you have been surprised? Ah, but let us wonder to think that the Lord has guided *us* as pilgrims through this desert land: He has still been both sun and shade to us, even to this day, notwithstanding all our sin. Had He deserted us what countless evils had befallen us. Blessed be the mercy which faileth not.

Another marvellously gracious fact was that *He continued still to teach them.* I am more surprised at

this than at the other. Read the twentieth verse—"Thou gavest also Thy good Spirit to instruct them." I should have thought He would have said, "Moses, take down the tabernacle, roll up the curtains, put away the ark, no more morning sacrifices, no more evening lambs. Aaron, go home, take off your breastplate, and your ephod, and all your garments, which were made for glory and for beauty. This people shall be taught no longer, they are incorrigible. It is in vain that I dwell among them and walk among them." No, but still He made known His ways among them, and maintained the testimony of His servant Moses, and gave them still those matchless types which set forth so fully the way of salvation. My brethren, bless ye also the Lord that though He has often smitten you, and given you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, yet He has not taken away your teachers from you, nor quenched the light of Israel. Still doth His good spirit enlighten and instruct the people. Is He not a God ready to pardon?

Nehemiah also notices that *God did not stint them in their daily provisions*, notwithstanding their offences. "Yea," says he, "Thou withheldest not Thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst." I am struck with wonder to think that God should have caused His manna still to fall. They provoked Moses and they set up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, but that very morning God's bread was in their mouths. They came up to speak against God and against His servant, but their tongues would have been cleaving to the roof of their mouths for thirst if that very morning they had not drunk of the water which God had given them. When dependent persons will persist in disregarding our remonstrances and violating our rules, we are driven to stop the supplies. But the Lord did not stop the supplies even in this urgent case. Would not famine and drought have brought them to their senses? If there had been no food for the women and children, and no drink for the strong men, would not that have tamed them? Even lions and savage beasts may be thus subdued. But no, their bread was given them, and their water was sure. Was He not a God ready to pardon?

One other remark here, and it is this,—*He did sustain them to the end and ultimately bring them into the land of promise.* "Yea, forty years didst Thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing: their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. Their children also multipliedest Thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which Thou hadst promised to their fathers that they should go in to possess it." Yes, and I know a people who, despite their sins, have already taken possession of many a gracious promise, so that they already dwell in the midst of covenant blessings. I know a people too who, notwithstanding their sins, shall enter into rest. "He shall surely bring them in," for He will bring His chosen into His glory, and they shall see His face with joy. Is He not a God ready to pardon?

My tale is all too long for me to tell it. I must cease from this portion of the history and ask you to meditate upon it, and as you do so to admire our pardoning God.

II. Secondly, IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THE LORD AT ALL TIMES IS A GOD READY TO PARDON. It is true of Him *by nature*, for mercy is an essential attribute of God. We must never think that our Lord Jesus died to make God merciful; on the contrary, the death of the Lord Jesus is the result of the mercy of God. When man sinned God was willing enough to pardon him, for the death of a sinner is no pleasure to Him. Judgment is His strange work. The way in which the Lord came to Adam at the first shewed His mercy. He came, if you remember, in the cool of the day,—not at the instant the crime was committed. God is not in a hurry to accuse man, or to execute vengeance upon him; He therefore waited until the cool of the day. He did not address rebellious man in the language of indignation, but He kindly said, "Adam, where art thou?" And when He had questioned the guilty pair, and convicted them, and the sentence was passed, it was terrible certainly, but oh how mildly tempered; the curse was as much as possible made to fall obliquely: "cursed is the ground for thy sake." Though the woman was made to feel great sorrows, yet those were connected with a happy event which causes the travail to be forgotten. There was tenderness in the dread utterances of an offended God, and mainly so because almost as soon as He declared that man must labour and die He promised that the "seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." Assuredly the Lord our God is by nature very pitiful and full of compassion.

This truth is evident when we remember that God was abundantly ready to pardon, for *He Himself removed the impediment which lay in the way of forgiveness.* Being Judge of all the earth it was essential to Him in that office that sin should never be treated as a light thing, but should be duly punished, lest others rush into it, hoping to escape judgment. For the good of all His creatures, as well as for the glory of His own character, God must not allow sin to go unpunished. The judge may be willing enough to pardon the culprit, but he is a judge, and as such he must condemn the guilty. The readiness of God to pardon was seen in this that at His own cost He provided a way by which His mercy might be consistent with justice. From His own bosom He took His only begotten Son, His own self, for He was one with Him; and God, in the person of His Son, suffered that which has honoured justice, vindicated the law, and enabled God to be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Oh, as I see the adorable Father giving up His Well-beloved, to bleed and die for men, I know beyond all question that He is a God ready to pardon.

And now, *the atonement being made*, and justice being unable any longer to offer any protest to boundless mercy, *God stands ready to pardon.* By the blood of His dear Son He is able to blot out offences, through the sweet savour of the sacrifice of Jesus He smiles on guilty men. He delights now to blot into oblivion the transgressions of all them that seek His face.

The Lord's readiness to pardon is very conspicuous to sinners, because He sends His message of love to them while they are yet in their sins. He presents perfect pardon through Jesus Christ to them, even while they are sinners, for "Christ died for the ungodly." I love to think that the gospel does not address itself to those who might be supposed to have helped themselves a little out of the mire, to those who show signs of lingering goodness, but it comes to men ruined in Adam and doubly lost by their own sin, it comes to them in the abyss where sin

has hurled them and lifts them up from the gates of hell. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus Christ's salvation is like the good Samaritan, it comes where the wounded man is, and pours in its oil and wine into his bleeding wounds.

The readiness of God to pardon is to be seen in the fact that He makes no hard conditions with sinners. He does not say, "I will pardon if you suffer this or endure that penance; I will pardon if you perform this act of heroism or that deed of consecration." No, He Himself says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Receive what is freely given—that is the gospel precept, and nothing else. Only confess thy transgressions, or, in other words, own thine emptiness and then trust thy Saviour, and thou art saved.

That He is ready to forgive appears in this yet more glorious fact, that what God demands of man by the gospel He also works in him by His spirit; as for confession of sin He puts the words into the sinner's mouth, repentance He works in the sinner's heart, and saving faith His own Spirit creates in the sinner's soul. Is He not ready to forgive when even what might be called the condition of pardon in one light is under another aspect a gift of free grace?

See ye not His readiness to forgive, when He accepts even the very lowest grade of the necessary graces? Of repentance, so long as it be sincere, He doth accept a tear or a sigh; of faith, though it be but as a grain of mustard seed, He doth accept it if it be but true. And notwithstanding all the faults that are in the sinner, though His heart be neither as tender as it ought to be, nor his knowledge so clear, nor his eye of faith so bright, nor his conversion so complete as it should be, yet God looketh not at any of these faultinesses except to forgive them. The ignorance and shortcoming God winketh at, and He only looks at what He can see of Christ in the sinner. The sinner's plea on his lip is, "for Jesus' sake," the sinner's hope in his heart is "for Christ's sake,"—and it is this that the Father looks at; when He sees that the poor trembling soul has embraced Jesus, His own dear Son, the Father puts the sin away at once without a word, and says, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." Oh, He is indeed a God ready to pardon.

Dear child of God, this text has a bearing upon you, and you can see it in your own self. Observe how the Lord chastens you. "Why is that?" say you. Why, because you have been offending Him. You are His child, and He is your Father, and He desires to forgive you, but there is a hindrance. Have you never felt a difficulty about expressing forgiveness to your own child when he has done wrong again and again? There is no difficulty in your heart, for you love him well, but still you do not wish him to think lightly of the fault, and you are afraid that if you at once tell him that you forgive him he may, perhaps, think that he may transgress with impunity. Therefore you chasten him, so that after the chastening has been endured it may be safe for you to pardon—I mean safe as far as he is concerned. He will not be tempted to go into the sin through the readiness with which you forgive him, for he will remember the smarts which your love inflicted. Look upon your chastening as a proof that God is ready to forgive because He executes in wisdom that discipline which is necessary for a safe forgiveness.

Think, too, how lightly He chastens.

> "He will not always chide
> And when His strokes are felt,
> His strokes are fewer than our crimes,
> And lighter than our guilt."

That rod of His, ah, He never loves it. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. But when He does use it, how quickly He puts it up again. Brethren, note how ready the Lord is to pardon us, for when we have sadly fallen He graciously sets us on our feet again. "He restoreth my soul." If you have wandered, like Noah's dove flying over the waste of waters, the Lord will receive you, even as Noah received the weary bird. He put out his hand at once and plucked her in unto him, into the ark, and even thus does the good Spirit pluck us in to Himself. He fills our empty spirits again, revives our dying hope, relights the candles of our joy, and makes us once again what we had been, and perhaps more. And then He comes and restores to us His own presence, oh so soon. He says, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but in great mercy will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting mercy will I have pity upon thee." Very loath is He to hide His face, but very swift is He to come on wings of mercy to restore joy to His mourners. Is He not ready to pardon?

I have almost done when I have answered a question on the behalf of the unconverted, and the same on behalf of the children of God. A poor seeker says to me, "You tell us God is ready to pardon, why is it, then, that I have prayed so long for mercy and have not found it?" That was a question I asked once when my prayers went up to heaven, and seemed to smite upon a dome of brass, and were reverberated in my ears. Listen! Dost thou know to what God has promised to give pardon? To prayer! I think if thou wilt read aright He promised pardon to confession, to repentance, and to faith. Hast thou acknowledged thine iniquity? Wilt thou renounce thy sin? Hast thou believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Come, wilt thou now trust Jesus Christ? Man, thou shalt have pardon now. But if thy prayers are unbelieving prayers thou art going the wrong way to work. Thou mayest as well hope to win heaven by thy works as by thy prayers, for indeed thy prayers are but a kind of work—salvation is by believing, not by praying. If faith be mixed with thy prayer, then wilt thou succeed. Believing is essential; and if thou believest thou shalt have mercy, now at once. "Still," says another, "I have believed in Jesus Christ, and I hope I am saved from guilt, but how is it if God is ready to pardon that I am still suffering from the result of sin." This, my friend, you must bear so long as God wills it. God does not make a man healthy if he has brought his body to sickness by sin, neither does He fill a man's pocket if he has spent his money in profligacy. This, my brother, is left to be a thorn in thy side; not as a token of anger, but because thou art not to be trusted with health or wealth, and God will not lead thee into temptation again. Accept this from the Lord's hand as a gentle chastening. Remember, if He save thy soul it little matters about the rest, for it will be better for the to enter into life halt or maimed than to have all

thy limbs, and all the world, and lose thy soul. Accept sickness, or whatever else comes, as the result of sin, and do not think it by any means proves that God has not pardoned thee—on the contrary it may be that He loves thee enough to chasten thee.

A child of God now says to me, "If God is so ready to pardon, how is it I am still a sufferer, I am still poor, and so on?" Ah, my dear friend, perhaps that is not a rod at all, for remember "every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it." Not because it did not bear, but to make it bring forth more fruit. You are God's child, and you have a cross to carry. Do not look at it as a token of anger. Was God angry with Simon, the Cyrenian, who carried Christ's cross after Him? No, He was conferring an honour upon him.

"Shall Simon bear the cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No, there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me."

Take it up, for "through much tribulation" we shall "inherit the kingdom." Look at affliction in this light, and you will see that there is nothing of anger in it.

"But," says one child of God, "I am under a cloud. I cannot see the face of God. Why does He hide Himself from me?" Not because He is unready to pardon, but, perhaps, because you are not ready to forsake the sin which He is aiming at. Perhaps you have not searched your heart yet. There is still hidden under the camel's furniture some idol or other. Make Rachel get up, and do you search even in the secret places. Cry, "Wherefore dost Thou contend with me?" for, if like David and Job you have to say that you are chastened every morning and plagued every evening, there is a reason for it. If you have walked contrary to God, He is walking contrary to you. Take your Achan and stone him, and then the Lord will come into the camp again. Tear down the idol and you shall have Jehovah's presence once more. But mark the word—whatever your experience may be, this is true—He delighteth in mercy, and He is a God ready to pardon. May the Holy Spirit bless this truth to your souls, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

ESTHER'S EXALTATION; OR, WHO KNOWETH?

"Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"—Esther iv. 13, 14.

THE appeal of Mordecai in his pressing time of distress was to one single person, namely, to Esther. I believe that I shall do better this morning by making my sermon an address to individuals than by speaking of nations or churches. I assuredly believe that England has been raised up as a nation and brought to her present unique position that she may be the means of spreading the gospel throughout all the nations of the earth. I judge that God has blessed the two great nations of the Anglo-Saxon race—England and the United States—and given them pre-eminence in commerce and in liberty on purpose that in such a time as this they may spread abroad the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Woe to these nations if they fail to fulfil their solemn obligations! If, being raised up for a purpose, they refuse to perform it, they shall melt away. If, being armed and carrying bows, they turn back in the day of battle, both empires will perish as surely as did the power of Macedon and the dominion of Rome. We ought to be very careful as a people to act upon the rule of righteousness and the principles of peace; for any other conduct is inconsistent with our high calling. We are entrusted with great opportunities; if we do not rightly use them the New Zealander of Macaulay may yet survey the ruins of this empire-city. "Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed," said Mordecai to Esther, and he says the same to us. Oh, that England may know the day of her visitation.

We might properly say of any Christian church that it has its own appointed place in the purposes of divine mercy. If the candle is lighted, even though it be set upon a golden candlestick, it is not lighted for itself, but that it may give light to all that are in the house. If any church fail to bless others, and so proves unfaithful to her solemn trust, the Lord will take away the candlestick out of its place, and leave the unfaithful to mourn in darkness. Remember the Lord's warning voice, "Go ye now unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." Remember, also, unfaithful Jerusalem, whose house is left unto her desolate because she obeyed not the voice of the Lord. The church in Rome was once a church of high commanding influence for good: you know what it has become. Some other churches are on the way, I fear, to the same dreadful end. God grant that none of the churches with which we are connected as Christian people may ever either apostatize from the faith, or grow lax and worldly, or become indifferent to the glory of God and the salvation of men. I might thus speak to each church and say, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

My brethren, it is a wonderfully easy thing to denounce the faults of a government or of a nation, to complain of this being done, and of that being left undone; and this amusement may only serve to divert our conscience from its more profitable duties at home. But consider the matter, and remember that in a free state we each one are part and parcel of the nation, and of the government;

and we are each one personally responsible in our measure and degree for all the acts of the nation. It is an easy matter to tie up our country to the halberds like a criminal and then to flagellate it without mercy; it would be a far more profitable business to use the whip of criticism upon ourselves.

The same is true with regard to a church. Men are too apt to condemn in the mass what they tolerate in themselves as individuals. But why are we so ready to accuse the churches? Why are we so censorious as to what the churches do, and what the churches are? Who make up the churches? Why, we each one by our influence help to make the churches good, or bad, or indifferent, as the case may be. Therefore, I will not waste time in generalities, but I will come to personalities. I will follow Mordecai's tack, and speak alone to Esther, that is to say, to each one who may happen to be here to whom God has entrusted opportunity, talent, and position, I would urge them to remember that there is something for each believer to do, a work which he cannot delegate to another, a task which it is his privilege to be permitted to undertake, which it will be to his solemn disgrace and detriment if he do not execute, but which will be to his eternal glory under God if he be found faithful in it. The gospel assures us that the great Householder has committed talents "to every man according to his several ability." Our hope of success this morning in our sermon shall lie in your individualizing yourselves and hearing the voice of the Spirit of God, saying to each one, "Who knoweth whether *thou* art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

I shall lay out my sermon in four parcels, arranging it under four words.

I. The first word is HEARKEN! Hearken to My word, as Mordecai desired Esther to hearken to him. Hearken while God the Lord speaks to your heart, and calls you to your high vocation.

Hearken, first, to a question. Brother, *will you separate your interests from those of your people and your God?* I do not think that Mordecai was afraid that Esther would do so; but still it is sometimes as well to prevent an evil before we perceive it; and he did so by saying, "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house." It was possible that being a queen it might enter into her mind that she would be safe even if all the rest of the Jews were put to death.

It would be a painful thing that her countrymen should be destroyed, but still the stroke might not touch her in the seclusion of the palace, where she had "not yet showed her kindred nor her people." She would still remain the favoured wife of the great king; and she might, therefore, selfishly look to herself, and leave those who were in peril to look to themselves or to their God, while she coldly hoped that the Lord would somehow or other give them deliverance. Does that temptation come across the path of any one of us? It may. You may say, "I shall be saved though the city should perish in its iniquity. Though the people are steeped in poverty and ignorance, I shall enjoy plenty and live in light. I know the Lord myself, and that is my main concern; if the heathen perish I am not one of them, and I am thankful that it will not interfere with my destiny." Will you argue in this selfish manner? Will you follow the wicked policy of separating your own personal interests from those of your Redeemer and His church? If so your ship is wrecked before it leaves the harbour. You are no child of God if this principle holds the mastery over you. Your salvation lies not in your separation from Christ and His church, but in your union with them. Over the sea of life there is no passing in safety but in the vessel which carries your Lord and His disciples. Are you going to sail in a separate boat, or will you try to swim across the sea in your own strength? Then look to yourself, and expect disaster. If your interests and Christ's are to be separated you must supply yourself with atonement, with righteousness, with spiritual life, and with heavenly food; yea, you must make a heaven for yourself. You cannot do this, and therefore it would be your ruin to attempt to stand alone. Do you wish to be joined with Jesus so as to be rescued from hell? I tell you, sirs, there is no receiving Christ unless you receive His doctrine and rule. You must receive this grace also, namely, that you give yourself to Him, to make His interests your interests, His life your life, His kingdom your kingdom, His glory your glory. Your personal welfare will be found in submergence into Christ. Sink or swim with your Lord and His cause. Do you mean to separate yourself from the church of God, and say, "I shall look to my own salvation, but I cannot be supposed to take an interest in saving others"? In such a spirit as that I do not say you *will* be lost, but I say you *are* lost already. It is as needful that you be saved from selfishness as from any other vice. Some of our worst fetters are those which are forged by selfishness, and this is one of the chief bonds which our Redeemer must burst for us. We must live unto God and love others as God hath loved us, or else we are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. I conceive that nobody who professes to be a Christian would deliberately wish to set up a private estate apart from Christ and His cause. Then if you are partners in name, be partners in fact. If you have fellowship with Christ—remember that it is of the essence of fellowship that you are in co-partnership with Him; if He is a loser, you are a loser, and you are to fret about it; and if He is a gainer, you are a gainer, and you are to joy therein. He bids you rejoice with Him that He has found His sheep that was lost. I ask again,—Are you determined to set up a separate interest from Christ? If you are, say so deliberately and count the cost. Mark that man; for though he may in his selfishness spread himself abroad and flourish like a green bay tree, yet the day shall come when he shall wither, and the place that knows him shall know him no more for ever. O professed servant of God, minister, deacon, or private church-member, thou shalt perish if once thou beginnest to live unto thyself. Remember that word, ye careless women, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth;" and hearken, ye selfish religionists, to this truth: "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die."

Hearken to a second question. *If you could separate your interests from those of the cause of God, would you thereby secure them?* You are a church-member: you think also that you are a living member of the body of Christ, and you are tempted to look to yourself and to leave others to their shifts. Hearken, "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." Is it so, that because you are yourself a member of a flourishing church, and because you enjoy all sorts of Christian privileges, you therefore harden your heart concerning

dying churches and desponding saints? Do you imagine that the body can be sick, and yet you as a member of it will not suffer? I tell you, if the church of God goes aside it will be to your injury; if the truth of God be not preached you will be a loser; if Christian life be not vigorous you will be weakened. When a baneful atmosphere is over other Christians you will breathe it. Sinners cannot be left in their spiritual death without creating a foulness in the air which is to the peril of us all. If this great city is left to seethe and rot in its infidelity and misery and filthiness, fancy not that you Christian people will escape. You dwell with these outcasts, and you are already feeling their influence, and you will feel it still more if they do not feel yours. How far and how deep that participation will go I will not venture to prophesy, for I am no prophet, neither the son of a prophet; but there are elements now fermenting which threaten, first, the existence of the commonwealth, and next, the liberties of Christian worship. Take you good heed, my brethren; things cannot long remain as they are. This great flood of wretchedness must be assuaged, or it will sweep us all away. I know not what of evil may yet come of the negligence of the Christian church towards the population with which it is surrounded. Those wretched beings who starve in over-crowded rooms will not die unavenged if nothing more comes of it than the sin which is begotten of want. If you live in a house well-ventilated, and well-drained, and you have near your hovels foul, filthy, dilapidated, over-crowded, when the fever breeds there it will not respect your garden wall; it will come up into your windows, smite down your children, or lay you yourself in the grave. As such mischief to health cannot be confined to the locality in which it was born, so is it with spiritual and moral disease; it must and will spread on all sides. This may be a selfish argument; but as we are battling with selfishness, we may fitly take Goliath's sword with which to cut off his head. You Christian people suffer if the church suffers; you suffer even if the world suffers. If you are not creating a holy warmth, the chill of sin is freezing you. Unconsciously the death which is all around will creep over you who are idle in the church, and it will soon paralyse all your energies unless in the name of God you arouse yourselves to give battle to it. You must unite with the Lord and His people in winning the victory over sin, or sin will win the victory over you. Hearken to this, and let it sink into your mind.

Next, remember, for your humiliation, that *God can do without you.* Enlargement and deliverance will arise to His people from another place if it come not by us. If the Lord were tied up to any one man, or any one church, or any one nation, it were treasonable for that person, church, or nation to be negligent; but as the Lord waiteth not for man, neither tarrieth for the sons of men, it becomes them to mind what they are at. He can do without *us.* When He looked and there was no man, His own arm brought salvation; and as it was of old so will it be again. Mark you that. The great Owner of the vineyard will have fruit at the end of the year, and if yonder tree does not bear it, He will cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground? If the husbandmen consult their own gain, and plot to gain the inheritance for themselves, their lord will destroy them, "and will let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render Him the fruits in their seasons." He will effect His purpose; He will fetch home His banished; He will gather together His scattered sheep; He will cause the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea; and if we do not gather in the wanderers, or spread the knowledge of His grace, the work will be done by more faithful men. The Spirit saith unto the church in Philadelphia, "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The crown of this church has been soul-winning: suffer none to rob you of it. If any one of you has gained already the high honour of bringing sinners to Christ, do not lose it by a future life of sloth or powerlessness. Hold fast your zeal and perseverance, that you may be rewarded at the last day.

He can do without you; recollect that, O servant of the Lord! We are apt to think ourselves wonderfully important, and begin to fret if we are put aside from our work for a little; but perhaps this affliction is necessary to teach us and to teach all that know us to cease from man and to look to God alone. It would be a sad thing to exhibit pride and self-conceit, and provoke the Lord to show the world how readily He can dispense with our labours. With this truth in view my heart cries—

> "Dismiss me not Thy service, Lord,
> But train me for Thy will."

Here follows a still more sobering reflection. Recollect that as God can do without us, *it may be He will do without us.* It might come to pass that God would say, "I will no more bless the world by this England; she has become selfishly mercantile; she cares more for commerce than for righteousness; she is drunken and infidel; I will give her up. Her merchants care nothing for the poor, whose labour is ill-requited; let her pass away as all oppressors must, and let the nations say—"Alas, alas, that great city, that mighty city! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought." He may say to any church, "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of My mouth." "Ichabod" has been written aforetime, and may be again, on places where once there shone upon the forefront the inscription—"Holiness unto the Lord." So also any man may be set aside, even as the Lord put away Saul and said to him, "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." Though, like Samson, a hero may have slain his thousands, and the hopes of Israel hang upon the hero; yet shorn and blinded, he may yet grind with slaves at the mill if his lusts enslave him. The Lord may decline to use us if we are not prepared in such a time as this to do our very utmost, and to lay ourselves out for the cause of truth and holiness. It may please the Lord to say of a wicked and slothful servant, "Take away his talent from him and give it to him that hath ten talents." He may say to any pastor among us, "Let his habitation be desolate, and his bishoprick let another take." Hearken, I pray you, to this warning from the Lord. Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord will judge His people, and to whom much is given of him shall much be required.

Hearken to yet one thing more. *How will you bear the disgrace, if ever it come upon you, of having suffered your golden opportunities to be wasted?* What if Israel had been destroyed for lack of Esther's intercession? Her name would have been a byword

among other nations as a base and traitorous woman. If the people had been spared by some other means, and she had refused her mission, as long as there lived a Jew they would have kept no feast of Purim, but have cursed her memory. When I think of the neglects of our own ancestors I am anxious that we take warning by them. There are at this moment straths in the Highlands which are thoroughly Romish. Why? They were not carefully evangelized at the time of the Reformation. If the workers of that period had done their work thoroughly there would have been no Romish valleys in Presbyterian Scotland. Ireland still cowers under the shadow of the Pope; there was a hopeful time when better things were promised, but this was allowed to pass by; and what can be done to rescue Ireland now? Times do not tarry, and tides do not wait; and if we do not avail ourselves of them while they are with us, our descendants may lament our neglects. I fear that the best among us can recollect with regret times which we have suffered to pass over us unimproved. We can never call them back again. You did not train your children: they are men and women now, and will not listen to you. O, parents, why did you not speak to them when they would have listened? But what if a whole life should glide away in living for yourselves, in living for your own comfort and enriching? What if you have done nothing in all these years for the cause of the Lord Jesus and the coming of His kingdom? What disgrace awaits the unfaithful servant! What dishonour awaits *you!* If you have been clouds without rain, wells without water, smoking lamps giving no light, fields that yield no harvest, what must be your portion? Let every Esther resolve that she will never bring this ban upon her name: let every man, woman, and even child among us, knowing the Lord, feel that the vows of the Lord are upon us, and that by imperative necessity we must serve according to our capacity the cause of God and truth. If we even perish through our zeal for the Lord of Hosts it will be grand thus to lose our lives. Thus much for the word "Hearken." May the Spirit of God sanctify your hearts by His word.

II. I change a little, and the call is now "CONSIDER."

Consider to what some of you have been advanced. You have been raised to salvation. You have been lifted from the dunghill and set among princes. I have uttered the word "salvation;" but what an infinity of goodness lies hidden there! In the music of that word all sweetnesses meet together. What are the obligations of one elected according to the foreknowledge of God, redeemed by the heart's blood of Christ, and quickened by the Holy Ghost? What manner of persons ought we to be? You have been raised to that honour, walk worthy of it. Besides that, some of you have been raised to a considerable degree of Christian knowledge,—you are not now mere babes in grace; you are well instructed, and you have had a blessed experience both of trouble and of joy, which has made you strong in the Lord, and has confirmed you in the faith, and has admitted you into the inner circle where the joy of the Lord is best known. If I had said that you had been elevated to be queens, like Esther, it would have been a poor elevation compared with that which you have actually received. Some of you who are the favourites of heaven have leaned your head on Christ's bosom, and have been permitted to sit where angels would wish to be; you are near and dear to Jesus, and espoused to Him in love.

In addition to all this, the Lord has raised some of you out of poverty and brought you to comparative wealth, perhaps to positive wealth; and He has given you positions which once you never dreamed of. To this He adds domestic comfort, and health, and prosperity in all its forms. The Lord has also given you talent. I fear we have all of us more ability than we use—but some have more talent than they themselves are aware of, and this perhaps they display in business, but never in the cause of God.

Thus you are brought to the kingdom; but why is it so? I want you to consider *why the Lord has brought you where you are.* Do you think that He has done it for your own sake? Does He intend all this merely that you may practise self-indulgence? Can this be the design of God? Do not think so. Has He done all this merely to give you pleasure? Not so: God's work is like a net of many meshes, and these are all connected with each other. We are links of the same chain, and cannot move without moving others. We are members of one body, and God acts towards us with that fact in view. He does not bless the hand for the hand's sake, but for the sake of the whole body. Well then, dear friend, you are saved that you may save; you are taught that you may teach; you are confirmed in the faith that you may confirm others; talents are allotted to you that you may turn them over and bring in heavenly usury for your Lord. Whatever you have is yours not to hoard for yourself, or to spend upon yourself, but that you may use it as a good steward of God. Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom which God has given thee for such a time as this, when there is need of thee and all that thou hast?

Consider, next, *at what a time it is that you have been thus advanced.* You have been instructed in the faith in a time when unbelief is rampant. What for? You have been confirmed in full assurance at a time when many are weak and trembling. What for? You have been entrusted with talent in a time when multitudes are perishing for lack of knowledge. What for? You are found in the church when valued brethren are dying or moving off. Why is this? You have wealth when many are starving. Why is this? You hold a high position when many master spirits are leading men into infidelity, or ritualism, or communism. Why are you placed where you are. Brother, your inevitable answer must be that God has put you where you are for some good purpose, which purpose must be connected with His own glory, and with the extension of His kingdom in the world. If, however, you think it enough to have secured a fortune, let me ask you—Do you think you are the proprietor of what you have amassed; or do you admit that you are a steward? If you are a steward, use not the goods entrusted to you for your own ends, but for your Master; for if you do not, you are a thief. Whenever a steward considers that the estate is his own property, and not his master's, he is a thief, and before long his master will deal with him and say, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

Consider also, I pray you, *under what very special circumstances you have come where you are.* To you as an individual I distinctly speak, and to no one else. It was a very strange thing that Esther, who was the foster child of Mordecai, a humble Jew, should rise from lowly rank to be the queen of Persia.

Out of all the women gathered from every province how singular that she should be chosen to be queen! Special Providence selected the Jewish maiden for the throne. The like is true of each one of us now occupying a post of usefulness. David was taken from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, that he might be the shepherd of God's people Israel. I am marvelling to find myself where I now am; are not you? How came you into your present pastorate, my dear brother in the ministry? How did you gain that comfortable position which you now occupy in society? How came you even to be in the church of God? Oh, if anybody had told yonder brother a few years ago that he would be here, he would have sworn at them; but here he is, sitting at the feet of Jesus, charmed to be His disciple. Now, consider what a wonder of grace you are, what a singular favour it is that you are where you are. Should not these remarkable dealings of the Lord towards you bind you to the divine service? Many a man of business here to-day obtaining a satisfactory livelihood has a dozen times been within an inch of bankruptcy, and yet he has obtained help, and passed the rock in safety. Some of you have been well-nigh ruined several times; and yet you still have bread to eat and raiment to put on. It is a miracle in your eyes that you have not come to beggary. Let your special deliverances and memorable mercies be as the tongue of persuasion, constraining you to grateful service. Consider how great things the Lord has done for you, and let us not have to say, "Many times did He deliver them, but they soon forgat His works. They understood not His wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of His mercies."

Then I beg you to consider once more, *with what singular personal adaptations you are endowed for the work to which God has called you.* I believe you are endowed with special capacity for a certain work, so that no one is so fitted for it as yourself: you are a key to a lock which no other key will fit so well. God has prepared you for the work for which you are appointed. Is it not written—"Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for Thou renderest to every man according to his work"? Each labourer for the Lord has his proper tools found him. God does not, like Pharaoh, require us to make bricks without straw, nor to fight without weapons, nor to build without a trowel. The Lord provides lamps, and oil, and wedding-garments for all who are called to the Bridegroom's midnight banquet. You, my brother, are equipped for such work as the Lord has appointed you; will you not at once get to your post? You say, "If I could preach, I would do it gladly." You would not preach worthily unless you are even now prepared to do other service for which you are fitted. You would be a disgrace to the pulpit if you are useless in the home circle. If God entrusts you with a single talent, and you do not use it, neither would you use ten talents; for he that is unfaithful in that which is least, would be unfaithful in that which is greatest. "But," says one, "I can hardly get out to public worship; I am a mother shut in at home with five or six little children." To you there is a little kingdom in your own household. No one can bring up those little ones for the Lord so well as you can. Your influence over them is as strong as it is tender. Now, do not say, "Because I am not allowed to be a preaching woman, therefore I will not attend to the lowly care of my children." It is far better to train a little family for Jesus than to be attempting a work to which you are not called. Let each one of you feel that he has come to his own little kingdom for such a time as this. You and your work fit each other: God has joined you together, let no man put you asunder. Ask for more power from the Holy Spirit, and if there happens to be a tool which the Lord intends for you which hangs a little higher than your present reach, get the ladder of earnest endeavour and you will soon attain to it. Consider how you can improve yourself; give yourself to reading; study Scripture more, and use all helps towards increased knowledge and efficiency. If a further qualification be within your reach, be eager for it, and even the reaching after it may be as great a blessing to you as the talent itself.

III. Thirdly, ASPIRE. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Rise to the utmost possible height. Fulfil your calling to its loftiest degree. Not only do all that you are sure you can do, but aim at something which as yet is high up among the questions. Say to yourself, "Who knoweth?" That is what the ambitious man says when he aspires to be great. When Louis Napoleon was shut up in the fortress of Ham, and everybody ridiculed his foolish attempts upon France, yet he said to himself, "Who knows? I am the nephew of my uncle, and may yet sit upon the imperial throne," and he did so before many years had passed. I have no desire to make any man ambitious after the poor thrones, and honours, and riches of this world; but I would fain make you all ardently ambitious to honour God and bless men. Who knows? Does anybody know what God may do by you? Does anybody know what capacities slumber within your bosom? I suggest the enquiry, and I will help you to an answer.

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *Nobody knows to the contrary.* I cannot tell but what God may bless you to this entire nation. Nobody will dare to say that He cannot. I cannot tell but what God may bless you, my friend, to that part of London in which you live, even though you may be deeply conscious of its great needs and of your own insufficiency. Who can tell what the Lord can or will do? Dear mother, who knows but what the Lord Jesus may bless you to all the members of your family, so that by your means all the little ones shall come to Him? Nobody has any right to speak to the contrary. Who knows but what God may bless you, dear teacher, to all your Sunday-school class, so that you may meet them all in heaven? Nobody can declare that it shall not be so, therefore strive after it. The watchword is, "Aspire."

Further, *nobody knows the limit of the possibilities which surround any man—should God please to use him.* "Alas," cries one, "I am soon at the end of my powers." My dear brother, if you begin calculating how much there is in you by nature, and how much you can do of yourself, you may as well end the enquiry by hearing our Lord's word—"Without Me ye can do nothing." Though you be no better than a mere cipher, yet the Lord can make something of you. Set one before a cipher and it is ten directly. Let two or three noughts combine to serve the Lord, and if the Lord Jesus heads them these nothings become tens of thousands. Who knows what you can do? Shall the church ever say, "Here is a problem we cannot solve?" Bite your lip through

rather than have it thought that you doubt the power of the Almighty. All things are possible to him that believeth. Ye are able to take the land into possession, the Lord being your helper. Go up against even these entrenched Canaanites, the walls of whose cities reach to heaven, for you can drive them out. You seem in your own sight to be as grasshoppers when compared with the sons of Anak; but the Lord on high is mighty, and out of the weakest things He hath ordained strength to His honour and glory. Young man, I trust you have given your heart to the Lord; what are you going to do? You have come into some property unexpectedly; or you are promoted in a house of business—what is the meaning of it? "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" My talented brother, should you not take your share in battling with present evils? I believe that in dark times God is making lamps with which to remove the gloom. Martin Luther is sitting by his father's hearth in the forest when the Pope is selling his wicked indulgences: he will come out soon, and stop the crowing of the cock of the Romish Christ-denying Peter. John Calvin is quietly studying when false doctrine is most rife, and he will be heard of at Geneva. A young man is here this morning—I do not know whereabouts he is, but I pray the Lord to make this to be an ordination sermon to him, starting him on his life-work. I feel as if I were Samuel at Bethlehem, seeking for David, to anoint him with a horn of oil in the name of the Lord. Some beloved brethren are here who have done a good deal, and the Lord has blessed them; but their work is heavy and their hearts are weary. By the anointing which has given you the kingdom, I trust that you will not be weary in well-doing. Pluck up courage, for a grand future is before you. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Be content to be a living sacrifice. Say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish. I am content to give myself up for such a cause. Come life, come death, I am all His own; if I die in my Lord's work, I die content."

Further, who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *You do not yourself know.* I speak experimentally, using my own self as an instance in the work which God has enabled me to do. If it had been revealed to me that I should have enjoyed the opportunities which have fallen to my lot, I could never have believed it. If the Lord could use *me*, He can also use *you*. Only stand in a waiting posture, saying, "Here am I, send me!" and you shall see things which you dare not expect. If the curtain could be withdrawn, and you could behold the future, you would exclaim, "Is Thy servant born of angels that he should attempt such things as these?" I do not suppose Peter, James, and John had any inkling of what the Lord was going to do by them when they left their boats and nets at His call. John dreamed that one day he might sit on an earthly throne and his brother James on another, but this was not to be: yet have they obtained a nobler heritage. To each of us there is a share in the purposes of heaven, and this is a kingdom large enough. Who knoweth, brother or sister, whether thou art put in thy family to save thy family? Who knoweth whether thou art made to live in a back street to bless that street? Who knoweth whether thou art set down in a forlorn district to upraise that district? Who knoweth whether thou art put into that nation to save that nation? Aye, put into the world in Christ's name to save the world? Aspire to great things for God.

IV. Our fourth word is—CONFIDE. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?". If thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this, *be confident that thou art safe.* If God has brought Esther to the throne that she may go in unto the king and save her people; go in, good Esther! Fear not the risk. Fast and pray your three days before you go; but be not dismayed. If the womanhood in you trembles in the prospect of a possible death, let confidence in God override your fears. Ahasuerus cannot kill you; you cannot die: he can refuse his golden sceptre to all the princes of the empire, but not to you; for God has placed you where you are, and ordained you for His purpose. Rest assured if He had meant to destroy you He would not have shown you such things as these. Fall back on His past mercy and be confident.

What is more, if God has a purpose to serve by a man that man will live out his day and *accomplish the divine design.* The more resistance he experiences the more surely will his life-work be achieved. If all the devils in hell rose up at once against a true, devoted servant of God, who has a work to do, in the name of the Lord He would drive them away as smoke before the wind. David said, "They compass me about like bees, yea, they compass me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them." It is a bad day for anybody when he opposes himself to the manifest destiny of one of the Lord's commissioned ones. I fall back often on the grand truth of predestination: it is no sleepy doctrine to me. If God's decree runneth there is no altering it, and if He has purposed it there is no defeating it. Heaven and earth shall sooner fail than the eternal purpose. Each chosen servant of God is like the word which called him: as the word of the Lord does not return unto Him void, but prospers in the thing whereto He hath sent it, even so shall it be with every servant of the Most High. A holy confidence in the divine purpose instead of making men grow stolid and idle may prove to be one of the mightiest impulses to the heroic life. Cromwell's Ironsides to a man believed in the everlasting purpose, therefore they were invincible, for no fear ever breathed upon them. Though the hosts of the tyrant may be innumerable, yet with the war cry, "The Lord of Hosts is with us," we will ride forth conquering and to conquer. Settle it in your mind that the Lord has called you to the work, and then advance without question or fear. Put your hand to the plough, and pause not. Do the work with your might. Do not stand asking how: do it as you can. Do not stand asking when: do it directly. Do not say, "But I am weak":—the Lord is strong. Do not say, "But I must devise methods." Do not concoct schemes or tarry to perfect your methods: fling yourself upon the work with all your might. Load your cannon with rough bits of rock or stones from the road if nothing better comes to hand; ram them in with plenty of powder; and apply the fire. When you have nothing else to hurl at the foe, place yourself in the gun. Believe me, no shot will be more effectual than the hurling of your whole being into the conflict. There was a man who strove in the House of Commons for what he thought would be a great boon to seamen, but he could not prevail. At last he broke through

all the rules of the house and acted like a fanatic, and when everybody saw that the man was so in earnest that he was ready to faint and die, they said, "We must do something"; and it was done. An enthusiasm which overpowers yourself is likely to overpower others. Do not fail from want of fervour. Never mind if men think you crazy. When you are overhwelmed yourself the flood of zeal will bear all opposition before it. When you become so fanatically insane as to be absorbed by a passion for the glory of God, the salvation of men, the spread of truth, and the reclaiming of the fallen masses, there shall be about you the truest sanity, and the mightiest force. May you feel such a passion concerning missions to-day. May you feel that the gospel must be preached to all nations. May you feel that impulse at this moment while we worship God by giving our contributions to His cause.

PROVIDENCE—AS SEEN IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

"Though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them."—Esther ix. 1.

YOU are probably aware that some persons have denied the inspiration of the Book of Esther because the name of God does not occur in it. They might with equal justice deny the inspiration of a great number of chapters in the Bible, and of a far greater number of verses. Although the name of God does not occur in the Book of Esther, the Lord Himself is there most conspicuously in every incident which it relates. I have seen portraits bearing the names of persons for whom they were intended, and they certainly needed them, but we have all seen others which required no name, because they were such striking likenesses that the moment you looked upon them you knew them. In the Book of Esther, as much as in any other part of the Word of God, and I had almost committed myself by saying—more than anywhere else, the hand of Providence is manifestly to be seen.

To condense the whole of the story of the Book of Esther into one sermon would be impossible, and therefore I must rely upon your previous acquaintance with it; I must also ask your patience if there should be more of history in the sermon than is usual with me. All Scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable, whether it be history or doctrine. God never meant the Book of Esther to lie dumb, and whatever it seemed good to Him to teach us by it, it ought to be our earnest endeavour to learn.

The Lord intended by the narrative of Esther's history to set before us a wonderful instance of His providence, that when we had viewed it with interest and pleasure, we might praise His name, and then go on to acquire the habit of observing His hand in other histories, and especially in our own lives. Well does Flavel say, that he who observes providence will never be long without a providence to observe. The man who can walk through the world and see no God, is said upon inspired authority to be a fool; but the wise man's eyes are in his head, he sees with an inner sight, and discovers God everywhere at work. It is his joy to perceive that the Lord is working according to His will in heaven, and earth, and in all deep places.

It has pleased God at different times in history to startle the heathen world into a conviction of His presence. He had a chosen people, to whom He committed the true light, and to these He revealed Himself continually: the rest of the world was left in darkness, but every now and then the divine glory flamed through the gloom, as the lightning pierces the blackness of tempest. Some by that sudden light were led to seek after God, and found Him; others were rendered uneasy, and without excuse, though they continued in their blind idolatry, The wonderful destruction of Pharaoh and his armies at the Red Sea was a burst of light, which startled the midnight of the world by giving proof to mankind that the Lord lived, and could accomplish His purposes by suspending the laws of nature and working miracles. The marvellous drama enacted at Shushan, the capital of Persia, was intended to be another manifestation of the being and glory of God, working not as formerly, by a miracle, but in the usual methods of His providence, and yet accomplishing all His designs. It has been well said that the Book of Esther is a record of wonders without a miracle, and therefore, though equally revealing the glory of the Lord, it sets it forth in another fashion from that which is displayed in the overthrow of Pharaoh by miraculous power.

Let us come now to the story. There were two races, one of which God had blessed and promised to preserve, and another of which He had said that He would utterly put out the remembrance of it from under heaven. Israel was to be blessed and made a blessing, but of Amalek the Lord had sworn that "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." These two peoples were therefore in deadly hostility, like the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, between whom the Lord Himself has put an enmity. Many years had rolled away; the chosen people were in great distress, and at this far off time there still existed upon the face of the earth some relics of the race of Amalek, among them was one descended of the royal line of Agag, whose name was Haman, and he was in supreme power at the court of Ahasuerus, the Persian monarch. Now it was God's intent that a last conflict should take place between Israel and Amalek: the conflict which began with Joshua in the desert was to be finished by Mordecai in the king's palace. This last struggle began with great disadvantage to God's people. Haman was prime minister of the far-extending empire of Persia, the favourite of a despotic monarch, who was pliant to his will. Mordecai, a Jew in the employment of the king, sat in the king's gate; and when he saw proud Haman go to and fro, he refused to pay to him the homage which others

rendered obsequiously. He would not bow his head or bend his knee to him, and this galled Haman exceedingly. It came into his mind that this Mordecai was of the seed of the Jews, and with the remembrance came the high ambition to avenge the quarrel of his race. He thought it scorn to touch one man, and resolved that in himself he would incarnate all the hate of generations, and at one blow sweep the accursed Jews, as he thought them, from off the face of the earth. He went in to the king, with whom his word was power, and told him that there was a singular people scattered up and down the Persian empire, different from all others, and opposed to the king's laws, and that it was not for the king's profit to suffer them. He asked that they might all be destroyed, and he would pay into the king's treasury an enormous sum of money to compensate for any loss of revenue by their destruction. He intended that the spoil which would be taken from the Jews should tempt their neighbours to kill them, and that the part allotted to himself should repay the amount which he advanced, thus he would make the Jews pay for their own murder. He had no sooner asked for this horrible grant than the monarch conceded it; taking his signet ring from off his finger, he bade him do with the Jews as seemed good to him. Thus the chosen seed are in the hands of the Agagite, who thirsts to annihilate them. Only one thing stands in the way, the Lord has said, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." We shall see what happens, and learn from it.

I. First, we shall learn from the narrative that GOD PLACES HIS AGENTS IN FITTING PLACES FOR DOING HIS WORK. The Lord was not taken by surprise by this plot of Haman; He had foreseen it and forestalled it. It was needful, in order to match this cunning, malicious design of Haman, that some one of Jewish race should possess great influence with the king. How was this to be effected? Should a Jewess become Queen of Persia, the power she would possess would be useful in counteracting the enemy's design. This had been all arranged years before Haman had concocted in his wicked heart the scheme of murdering the Jews. Esther, whose sweet name signifies myrtle, had been elevated to the position of Queen of Persia by a singular course of events. It happened that Ahasuerus, at a certain drinking bout, was so far gone with wine as to forget all the proprieties of eastern life, and sent for his queen, Vashti, to exhibit herself to the people and the princes. No one dreamed in those days of disobeying the tyrant's word, and therefore all stood aghast when Vashti, evidently a woman of right royal spirit, refused to degrade herself by being made a spectacle before that ribald rout of drinking princes, and refused to come. For her courage Vashti was divorced, and a new queen was sought for. We cannot commend Mordecai for putting his adopted daughter in competition for the monarch's choice; it was contrary to the law of God, and dangerous to her soul in the highest degree. It would have been better for Esther to have been the wife of the poorest man of the house of Israel than to have gone into the den of the Persian despot. The Scripture does not excuse, much less commend, the wrongdoing of Esther and Mordecai in thus acting, but simply tells us how divine wisdom brought good out of evil, even as the chemist distils healing drugs from poisonous plants. The high position of Esther, though gained contrary to the wisest laws, was overruled for the best interests of her people. Esther in the king's house was the means of defeating the malicious adversary. But Esther alone would not suffice; she is shut up in the harem, surrounded by her chamberlains and her maids of honour, but quite secluded from the outside world. A watchman is needed outside the palace to guard the people of the Lord, and to urge Esther to action when help is wanted. Mordecai, her cousin and foster-father obtained an office which placed him at the palace gate. Where could he be better posted? He is where much of the royal business will come under his eye, and he is both quick, courageous, and unflinching: never had Israel a better sentinel than Mordecai, the son of Kish, a Benjamite—a very different man from that other son of Kish, who had suffered Amalek to escape in former times. His relationship to the queen allowed him to communicate with her through Hatach her chamberlain, and, when Haman's evil decree was published, it was not long before intelligence of it reached her ear, and she felt the danger to which Mordecai and all her people were exposed. By singular providences did the Lord place those two most efficient instruments in their places. Mordecai would have been of little use without Esther, and Esther could have rendered no aid had it not been for Mordecai. Meanwhile, there is a conspiracy hatched against the king, which Mordecai discovers, and communicates to the highest authority, and so puts the king under obligation to him, which was a needful part of the Lord's plan.

Now, brethren, whatever mischief may be brewing against the cause of God and truth, and I dare say there is very much going on at this moment, for neither the devil, nor the Jesuits, nor the atheists are long quiet, this we are sure of, the Lord knows all about it, and He has His Esther and His Mordecai ready at their posts to frustrate their designs. The Lord has His men well placed, and His ambushes hidden in their coverts, to surprise His foes. We need never be afraid but what the Lord has forestalled His enemies, and provided against their mischief.

Every child of God is where God has placed him for some purpose, and the practical use of this first point is to lead you to inquire for what practical purpose has God placed each one of you where you now are? You have been wishing for another position where you could do something for Jesus: do not wish anything of the kind, but serve Him where you are. If you are sitting at the King's gate there is something for you to do there, and if you were on the queen's throne, there would be something for you to do there; do not ask either to be gatekeeper or queen, but whichever you are, serve God therein. Brother, are you rich? God has made you a steward, take care that you are a good steward. Brother, are you poor? God has thrown you into a position where you will be the better able to give a word of sympathy to poor saints. Are you doing your allotted work? Do you live in a godly family? God has a motive for placing you in so happy a position. Are you in an ungodly house? You are a lamp hung up in a dark place; mind you shine there. Esther did well, because she acted as an Esther should, and Mordecai did well, because he acted as a Mordecai should. I like to think, as I look over you all,—God has put each one of them in the right place, even as a

good captain well arranges the different parts of his army, and though we do not know His plan of battle, it will be seen during the conflict that He has placed each soldier where he should be. Our wisdom is not to desire another place, nor judge those who are in another position, but each one being redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, should consecrate himself fully to the Lord, and say, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have *me* to do, for here I am, and by Thy grace I am ready to do it." Forget not then the fact that God in His providence places His servants in positions where He can make use of them.

II. Secondly, the Lord not only arranges His servants, but HE RESTRAINS HIS ENEMIES. I would call your attention particularly to the fact that Haman, having gained a decree for the destruction of all the Jews upon a certain day, was very anxious to have his cruel work done thoroughly, and therefore, being very superstitious and believing in astrology, he bade his magicians cast lots that he might find a lucky day for his great undertaking. The lots were cast for the various months, but not a single fortunate day could be found till hard by the close of the year, and then the chosen day was the thirteenth of the twelfth month. On that day the magicians told their dupe that the heavens would be propitious, and the star of Haman would be in the ascendant. Truly the lot was cast into the lap, but the disposal of it was of the Lord. See ye not that there were eleven clear months left before the Jews would be put to death, and that would give Mordecai and Esther time to turn round, and if anything could be done to reverse the cruel decree, they had space to do it in. Suppose that the lot had fallen on the second or third month, the swift dromedaries and camels and messengers would scarcely have been able to reach the extremity of the Persian dominions, certainly a second set of messengers to counteract the decree could not have done so, and, humanly speaking, the Jews must have been destroyed; but oh, in that secret council chamber where sit the sorcerers and the man who asks counsel at the hands of the infernal powers, the Lord Himself is present, frustrating the tokens of the liars and making diviners mad. Vain were their enchantments and the multitude of their sorceries; the astrologers, the star-gazers, and the monthly prognosticators were all fools together, and led the superstitious Haman to destruction. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel." Trust ye in the Lord ye righteous, and in patience possess your souls. Leave your adversaries in the hands of God, for He can make them fall into the snare which they have privily laid for you.

Notice attentively that Haman selected a mode of destroying the Jews which was wonderfully overruled for their preservation. They were to be slain by any of the people among whom they lived who chose to do so, and their plunder was to reward their slayers. Now, this was a very cunning device, for greed would naturally incite the baser sort of men to murder the thrifty Jews, and no doubt there were debtors who would also be glad to see their creditors disposed of: but see the loophole for escape which this afforded! If the decree had enacted that the Jews should be slain by the soldiery of the Persian empire it must have been done, and it is not easy to see how they could have escaped, but, the matter being left in private hands, the subsequent decree that they might defend themselves, was a sufficient counteraction of the first edict. Thus the Lord arranged that the wisdom of Haman should turn out to be folly after all.

In another point, also, we mark the restraining hand of God: namely, that Mordecai, though he had provoked Haman to the utmost was not put to death at once. Haman "refrained himself." Why did he do so? Proud men are usually in a mighty tiff if they consider themselves insulted, and are ready at once to take revenge; but Haman "refrained himself"; until that day in which his anger burned furiously and he set up the gallows, he smothered his passion. I marvel at this; it shows how God makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder He doth restrain. Mordecai must not die a violent death by Haman's hand. The enemies of the church of God, and of His people, can never do more than the Lord permits; they cannot go a hair's breadth beyond the divine license, and when they are permitted to do their worst there is always some weak point about all that they do, some extreme folly which renders their fury vain. The wicked carry about them the weapons of their own destruction, and when they rage most against the Most High, the Lord of all brings out of it good for His people and glory to Himself. Judge not providence in little pieces, it is a grand mosaic, and must be seen as a whole. Say not of any one hour "This is dark,"—it may be so, but that darkness will minister to the light, even as the ebon gloom of midnight makes the stars appear the more effulgent. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength. His wisdom will undermine the mines of cunning, His skill will overtop the climbings of craft; "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong."

III. Next we will notice that GOD IN HIS PROVIDENCE TRIES HIS PEOPLE. You must not suppose that those who are God's servants will be screened from trial; that is no part of the design of providence. "If ye be without chastisement," says the apostle, "then are ye bastards and not sons." God's intent is to educate His people by affliction, and we must not therefore dream that an event is not providential because it is grievous, nay, ye may count it to be all the more so, for "the Lord trieth the righteous." Observe that God tried Mordecai; he was a quiet old man, I have no doubt, and it must have been a daily trial to him to stand erect, or to sit in his place when that proud peer of the realm went strutting by. His fellow-servants told him that the King had commanded all men to pay homage to Haman, but he held his own, not, however, without knowing what it might cost him to be so sternly independent. Haman was an Amalekite, and the Jew would not bow before him. But what a trouble it must have been to the heart of Mordecai, when he saw the proclamation that all the Jews must die: the good man must have bitterly lamented his unhappy fate in being the innocent cause of the destruction of his nation. "Perhaps," he thought within himself, "I have been too obstinate. Woe is me; my whole house, and my whole people are to be slain because of what I have done." He put on sackcloth and cast ashes on his head, and was full of sorrow, a sorrow which we can hardly realise; for even if you know you have done right, yet if you bring down trouble, and especially destruction, upon the heads of others it cuts you to the quick. You could bear martyrdom for yourself, but it is sad to see others suffer through your firmness.

Esther also had to be tried. Amid the glitter of

the Persian court she might have grown forgetful of her God, but the sad news comes to her, "Your cousin and your nation are to be destroyed." Sorrow and dread filled her heart. There was no hope for her people, unless she would go unto the king—that despot from whom one angry look would be death; she must risk all, and go unbidden into his presence, and plead for her nation. Do you wonder that she trembled? Do you marvel that she asked the prayers of the faithful? Are you surprised to see both herself and her maids of honour fasting and lamenting before God? Do not think, my prosperous friend, that the Lord has given you a high place that you may escape the trials which belong to all His people: yours is no position of ease, but one of the hottest parts of the battle. Neither the lowest and most quiet position, nor the most public and exposed condition will enable you to escape the "much tribulation" through which the church militant must fight its way to glory. Why should we wish it? Should not the gold be tested in the crucible? Should not the strong pillar sustain great weights? When the Menai bridge was first flung across the straits the engineer did not stipulate that his tube should never be tried with great weights; on the contrary, I can imagine his saying, "Bring up your heaviest trains and load the bridge as much as ever you will, for it will bear every strain." The Lord trieth the righteous because He has made them of metal which will endure the test, and He knows that by the sustaining power of His Holy Spirit they will be held up and made more than conquerors; therefore is it a part of the operation of providence to try the saints. Let that comfort those of you who are in trouble at this time.

IV. But we must pass on to note, fourthly, that THE LORD'S WISDOM IS SEEN IN ARRANGING THE SMALLEST EVENTS SO AS TO PRODUCE GREAT RESULTS. We frequently hear persons say of a pleasant or a great event, "What a providence!" while they are silent as to anything which appears less important, or has an unpleasant savour. But, my brethren, the place of the gorse upon the heath is as fixed as the station of a king, and the dust which is raised by a chariot-wheel is as surely steered by providence as the planet in its orbit. There is as much providence in the creeping of an aphis upon a rose leaf as in the marching of an army to ravage a continent. Everything, the most minute as well as the most magnificent, is ordered by the Lord who has prepared His throne in the heavens, whose kingdom ruleth over all. The history before us furnishes proof of this.

We have reached the point where Esther is to go in unto the king and plead for her people. Strengthened by prayer, but doubtless trembling still, Esther entered the inner court, and the king's affection led him instantly to stretch out the golden sceptre. Being told to ask what she pleases, she invites the king to come to a banquet, and bring Haman with him. He comes, and for the second time invites her to ask what she wills to the half of his kingdom. Why, when the king was in so kind a spirit, did not Esther speak? He was charmed with her beauty, and his royal word was given to deny her nothing, why not speak out? But no, she merely asks that he and Haman will come to another banquet of wine to-morrow. O, daughter of Abraham, what an opportunity hast thou lost! Wherefore didst thou not plead for thy people? Their very existence hangs upon thy entreaty, and the king has said, "What wilt thou?" and yet thou art backward! Was it timidity? It is possible. Did she think that Haman stood too high in the king's favour for her to prevail? It would be hard to say. Some of us are very unaccountable, but on that woman's unaccountable silence far more was hanging than appears at first sight. Doubtless she longed to bring out her secret, but the words came not. God was in it; it was not the right time to speak, and therefore she was led to put off her disclosure. I dare say she regretted it, and wondered when she should be able to come to the point, but the Lord knew best. After that banquet Haman went out joyfully at the palace gate, but being mortified beyond measure by Mordecai's unbending posture, he called for his wife and his friends, and told them that his riches and honours availed him nothing so long as Mordecai, the Jew, sat in the king's gate. They might have told him, "You will destroy Mordecai and all his people in a few months, and the man is already fretting himself over the decree; let him live, and be you content to watch his miseries and gloat over his despair!" But no, they counsel speedy revenge. Let Mordecai be hanged on a gibbet on the top of the house, and let the gallows be set up at once, and let Haman early in the morning ask for the Jew's life, and let his insolence be punished. Go, call the workmen, and let the gallows be set up at a great height that very night. It seemed a small matter that Haman should be so enraged just at that hour, but it was a very important item in the whole transaction, for had he not been so hasty he would not have gone so early in the morning to the palace, and would not have been at hand when the king said "Who is in the court?"

But what has happened? Why, that very night, when Haman was devising to hang up Mordecai, the king could not sleep. What caused the monarch's restlessness? Why happened it on that night of all others? Ahasuerus is master of one hundred and twenty and seven provinces, but not master of ten minutes' sleep. What shall he do? Shall he call for soothing instruments of music, or beguile the hours with a tale that is told, or with a merry ballad of the minstrel? No, he calls for a book. Who would have thought that this luxurious prince must listen to a reader at dead of night. "Bring a book!" What book? A volume perfumed with roses, musical with songs, sweet as the notes of the nightingale? "No, bring the chronicles of the empire." Dull reading, that! But there are one hundred and twenty seven provinces,—which volume shall the page bring from the recorder's shelves? He chose the record of Shushan the royal city. That is the centre of the empire, and its record is lengthy, in which section shall the reader make a beginning? He may begin, where he pleases, but ere he closes the book the story of the discovery of a conspiracy by Mordecai has been read in the king's hearing. Was not this a singular accident? Singular if you like, but no accident. Out of ten thousand other records the reader pitches upon that one of all others. The Jews tell us that he began at another place, but that the book closed and fell open at the chapter upon Mordecai. Be that as it may, this is certain, that the Lord knew where the record was, and guided the reader to the right page. Speaking after the manner of men, there were a million chances against one that the king of Persia should, in the dead of the night, be reading the chronicle of his own kingdom, and that he should light upon this particular part of it. But that was

not all, the king is interested, he had desired to go to sleep, but that wish is gone, and he is in haste to act. He says, "This man Mordecai has done me good service, has he been rewarded?" "No." Then cries the impulsive monarch, "He shall be rewarded at once. Who is in the court?" It was the most unlikely thing in the world for the luxurious Ahasuerus to be in haste to do justice, for he had done injustice thousands of times without remorse, and chiefly on that day when he wantonly signed the death warrant of that very Mordecai and his people. For once, the king is intent on being just, and at the door stands Haman,—but you know the rest of the story, and how he had to lead Mordecai in state through the streets. It seems a very small matter whether you or I shall sleep to-night or toss restlessly on our beds, but God will be in our rest or in our wakefulness; we know not what His purpose may be, but His hand will be in it, neither doth any man sleep or wake but according to the decree of the Lord.

Observe well how this matter prepared the way for the queen at the next banquet; for when she unfolded her sorrow and told of the threatened destruction of the Jews, and pointed to that wicked Haman, the king must have been the more interested and ready to grant her request, from the fact that the man who had saved his life was a Jew, and that he had already awarded the highest honours to a man in every way fitted to supersede his worthless favourite. All was well, the plotter was unmasked, the gibbet ready, and he who ordered it was made to try his own arrangements.

V. Our next remark is THE LORD IN HIS PROVIDENCE CALLS HIS OWN SERVANTS TO BE ACTIVE. This business was done, and well done, by divine providence, but those concerned had to pray about it. Mordecai and all the Jews outside in Shushan fasted, and cried unto the Lord. Unbelievers inquire, "What difference could prayer make?" My brethren, prayer is an essential part of the providence of God, so essential, that you will always find that when God delivers His people, His people have been praying for that deliverance. They tell us that prayer does not affect the Most High, and cannot alter His purposes. We never thought it did; but prayer is a part of the purpose and plan, and a most effective wheel in the machinery of providence. The Lord sets His people praying, and then He blesses them. Moreover, Mordecai was quite sure the Lord would deliver His people, and he expressed that confidence, but he did not therefore sit still; he stirred up Esther, and when she seemed a little slack, he put it very strongly, "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then enlargement and deliverance will arise from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." Nerved by this message, Esther braced herself to the effort. She did not sit still and say, "The Lord will arrange this business, there is nothing for me to do," but she both pleaded with God, and ventured her life and her all for her people's sake, and then acted wisely and discreetly in her interviews with the king. So, my brethren, we rest confidently in providence, but we are not idle. We believe that God has an elect people, and therefore do we preach in the hope that we may be the means, in the hands of His Spirit, of bringing this elect people to Christ. We believe that God has appointed for His people both holiness here and heaven hereafter; therefore do we strive against sin, and press forward to the rest which remaineth for the people of God. Faith in God's providence, instead of repressing our energies, excites us to diligence. We labour as if all depended upon us, and then fall back upon the Lord with the calm faith which knows that all depends upon Him.

VI. Now must we close our historical review with the remark that in the end THE LORD ACHIEVES THE TOTAL DEFEAT OF HIS FOES AND THE SAFETY OF HIS PEOPLE. Never was a man so utterly defeated as Haman, never was a project so altogether turned aside. He was taken in his own trap, and he and his sons were hanged upon the gibbet set up for Mordecai. As for the Jews, they were in this special danger, that they were to be destroyed on a certain day, and though Esther pleaded with the king for their lives, he was not able to alter his decree, though willing to do so, for it was a rule of the constitution that the law of the Medes and Persians altered not. The king might determine what he pleased, but when he had once decreed it he could not change it, the people feeling it better to submit to the worst established law than to be left utterly to every capricious whim of their master. Now, what was to be done? The decree was given that the Jews might be slain, and it could not be reversed. Here was the door of escape,—another decree was issued giving the Jews permission to defend themselves, and take the property of any who dared to attack them; thus one decree effectually neutralized the other. With great haste this mandate was sent all over the kingdom, and on the appointed day the Jews stood up for themselves and slew their foes. According to their tradition nobody attempted to attack them except the Amalekites, and consequently only Amalekites were slain, and the race of Amalek was on that day swept from off the face of the earth. God thus gave to the Jews a high position in the empire and we are told that many became Jews, or were proselytes to the God of Abraham, because they saw what God had done. As I commenced by saying that God sometimes darted flashes of light through the thick darkness, you will now see what a flash this must have been. All the people were perplexed when they found that the Hebrews might be put to death, but they must have been far more astonished when the decree came that they might defend themselves. All the world enquired "Why is this?" and the answer was "The living God whom the Jews worship, has displayed His wisdom and rescued His people." All nations were compelled to feel that there was a God in Israel, and thus the divine purpose was fully accomplished, His people were secured, and His name was glorified to the world's end.

From the whole we learn the following lessons.

First, it is clear that *the divine will is accomplished, and yet men are perfectly free agents.* Haman acted according to his own will, Ahasuerus did whatever he pleased, Mordecai behaved as his heart moved him, and so did Esther. We see no interference with them, no force or coercion; hence the entire sin and responsibility rest with each guilty one, yet, acting with perfect freedom, none of them acts otherwise than divine providence had foreseen. "I cannot understand it," says one. My dear friend, I am compelled to say the same,—I do not understand it either. I have known many who think they comprehend all things, but I fancy they had a higher opinion of themselves than truth would endorse. Certain of my brethren deny free agency, and so get out of the difficulty; others assert that there is no predestina-

tion, and so cut the knot. As I do not wish to get out of the difficulty, and have no wish to shut my eyes to any part of the truth, I believe both free agency and predestination to be facts. How they can be made to agree I do not know, or care to know; I am satisfied to know anything which God chooses to reveal to me, and equally content not to know what He does not reveal. There it is; man is a free agent in what he does, responsible for his actions, and verily guilty when he does wrong, and he will be justly punished too, and if he be lost the blame will rest with himself alone; but yet there is One who ruleth over all, who, without complicity in their sin, makes even the actions of wicked men to subserve His holy and righteous purposes. Believe these two truths and you will see them in practical agreement in daily life, though you will not be able to devise a theory for harmonising them on paper.

Next, we learn *what wonders can be wrought without miracles.* When God does a wonderful thing by suspending the laws of nature men are greatly astonished and say, "This is the finger of God," but now-a-days they say to us, "Where is your God? He never suspends His laws now!" Now, I see God in the history of Pharaoh, but I must confess I see Him quite as clearly in the history of Haman, and I think I see Him in even a grander light; for (I say it with reverence to His holy name) it is a somewhat rough method of accomplishing a purpose to stop the wheel of nature, and reverse wise and admirable laws; certainly it reveals His power, but it does not so clearly display His immutability. When, however, the Lord allows everything to go on in the usual way, and gives mind and thought, ambition, and passion their full liberty, and yet achieves His purpose, it is doubly wonderful. In the miracles of Pharaoh we see the finger of God, but in the wonders of providence without miracle, we see the hand of God. To-day, whatever the event may be, whether it be the war between the Germans and the French, or the march into Coomassie, or the change of our own government, the attentive eye will as clearly see the Lord as if by miraculous power the hills had leaped from their places, or the floods had stood upright as an heap. I am sure that God is in the world, aye, and is at my own fireside, and in my chamber, and manages my affairs, and orders all things for me, and for each one of His children. We want no miracles to convince us of His working, the wonders of His providence are as great marvels as miracles themselves.

Next we learn *how safe the Church of God is.* At one time the people of God seemed to be altogether in Haman's power. Nero once said that he wished his enemies had but one neck that he might destroy them all at a blow, and Haman seemed to have realised just such power. Yet the chosen nation was delivered, the Jewish people lived on until the Messiah came, and does exist, and will exist till they shall enjoy the bright future which is decreed for them. So is it with the Church of God to-day. The foes of truth can never put out the candle which God has lit, never crush the living seed which the Lord Jesus has sown in His own blood-bought people. Brethren, be ye not afraid, but stablish your hearts in God.

Again, we see that *the wicked will surely come to an ill end.* They may be very powerful, but God will bring them down. They may be very crafty, and may plot and plan, and may think that even God Himself is their accomplice, because everything goes as they desire; but they may be sure their sin will find them out. They may dig deep as hell, but God wil undermine them, and they may climb as high as the stars, but God will be above them to hurl them down. Wicked man, I charge you if you be wise, turn you from your career of opposition to the Most High, you cannot stand against Him, neither can you outwit Him. Cease, I beseech you, from this idle opposition, and hear the voice of His gospel which says, "Confess your sin and forsake it. Believe in Jesus, the Son of God, the great atoning Sacrifice, and even you shall yet be saved." If you do not so, upon your own head shall your iniquities fall.

Last of all, let each child of God rejoice that *we have a guardian so near the throne.* Every Jew in Shushan must have felt hope when he remembered that the queen was a Jewess. To-day let us be glad that Jesus is exalted

> "He is at the Father's side,
> The Man of love, the Crucified."

How safe are all His people, for "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." There is One that lieth in the bosom of God who will plead for all those who put their trust in Him. Therefore be ye not dismayed, but let your souls rest in God, and wait patiently for Him, for sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than those who trust the Lord shall perish. "They shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end." Amen.

SATAN CONSIDERING THE SAINTS

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job."—Job i. 8.

HOW very uncertain are all terrestrial things! How foolish would that believer be who should lay up his treasure anywhere, except in heaven! Job's prosperity promised as much stability as anything can do beneath the moon. The man had round about him a large household of, doubtless, devoted and attached servants. He had accumulated wealth of a kind which does not suddenly depreciate in value. He had oxen, and asses, and cattle. He had not to go to markets, and fairs, and trade with his goods to procure food and clothing, for he carried on the processes of agriculture on a very large scale round about his own homestead, and probably grew within his own territory everything that his establishment required. His children were numerous enough to promise a long line of descendants. His prosperity wanted nothing for its consolation. It had come to its flood-tide: where was the cause which could make it ebb?

Up there, beyond the clouds, where no human

eye could see, there was a scene enacted which augured no good to Job's prosperity. The spirit of evil stood face to face with the Infinite Spirit of all good. An extraordinary conversation took place between these two beings. When called to account for his doings, the evil one boasted that he had gone to and fro throughout the earth, insinuating that he had met with no hindrance to his will, and found no one to oppose his freely moving and acting at his own pleasure. He had marched everywhere like a king in his own dominions, unhindered and unchallenged. When the great God reminded him that there was at least one place among men where he had no foothold, and where his power was unrecognized, namely, in the heart of Job; that there was one man who stood like an impregnable castle garrisoned by integrity, and held with perfect loyalty as the possession of the King of Heaven; the evil one defied Jehovah to try the faithfulness of Job, told Him that the patriarch's integrity was due to his prosperity, that he served God and eschewed evil from sinister motives, because he found his conduct profitable to himself. The God of heaven took up the challenge of the evil one, and gave him permission to take away all the mercies which he affirmed to be the props of Job's integrity, and to pull down all the outworks and buttresses and see whether the tower would not stand in its own inherent strength without them. In consequence of this, all Job's wealth went in one black day, and not even a child was left to whisper comfort. A second interview between the Lord and His fallen angel took place. Job was again the subject of conversation; and the Great One defied by Satan, permitted him even to touch him in his bone and in his flesh, till the prince became worse than a pauper, and he who was rich and happy was poor and wretched, filled with disease from head to foot, and fain to scrape himself with a miserable potsherd, to gain a poor relief from his pain.

Let us see in this the mutability of all terrestrial things. "He hath founded it upon the floods," is David's description of this world; and, if it be founded on the floods, can you wonder that it changes oft? Put not your trust in anything beneath the stars: remember that "Change" is written on the fore-front of nature. Say not therefore, "My mountain standeth firm: it shall never be moved;" the glance of Jehovah's eye can shake thy mountain into dust, the touch of His foot can make it like Sinai, to melt like wax, and to be altogether on a smoke. "Set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," and let your heart and your treasure be "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal." The words of Bernard may here instruct us: "That is the true and chief joy which is not conceived from the creature, but received from the Creator, which (being once possessed thereof) none can take from thee: compared with which all other pleasure is torment, all joy is grief, sweet things are bitter, all glory is baseness, and all delectable things are despicable."

This is not, however, our subject this morning. Accept thus much as merely an introduction to our main discourse. The Lord said to Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" Let us deliberate, first, *in what sense the evil spirit may be said to consider the people of God;* secondly, *let us notice what it is* a *that he considers about them*; and then, thirdly, *let us comfort ourselves by the reflection that One who is far above Satan considers us in a higher sense.*

I. First, then, IN WHAT SENSE MAY SATAN BE SAID TO CONSIDER THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

Certainly not in the usual Biblical meaning of the term "consider." "O Lord consider my trouble." "Consider my meditation." "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." Such consideration implies good-will and a careful inspection of the object of benevolence with regard to a wise distribution of favour. In that sense Satan never considers any. If he has any benevolence, it must be towards himself; but all his considerations of other creatures are of the most malevolent kind. No meteoric flash of good flits across the black midnight of his soul. Nor does he consider us as we are told to consider the works of God, that is, in order to derive instruction as to God's wisdom and love and kindness. He does not honour God by what he sees in His works, or in His people. It is not with him, "Go to the ant; consider her ways and be wise;" but he goes to the Christian and considers his ways and becomes more foolishly God's enemy than he was before. The consideration which Satan pays to God's saints is upon this wise. *He regards them with wonder, when he considers the difference between them and himself.* A traitor, when he knows the thorough villainy and the blackness of of his own heart, cannot help being astounded, when he is forced to believe another man to be faithful. The first resort of a treacherous heart is to believe that all men would be just as treacherous, and are really so at bottom. The traitor thinks that all men are traitors like himself, or would be, if it paid them better than fidelity. When Satan looks at the Christian, and finds him faithful to God and to His truth, he considers him as we should consider a phenomenon—perhaps despising him for his folly, but yet marvelling at him, and wondering how he can act thus. "I," he seems to say, "a prince, a peer of God's parliament, would not submit my will to Jehovah: I thought it better to reign in hell than serve in heaven: I kept not my first estate, but fell from my throne: how is it that these stand? What grace is it which keeps these? I was a vessel of gold, and yet I was broken; these are earthen vessels, but I cannot break them! I could not stand in my glory—what can be the matchless grace which upholds them in their poverty, in their obscurity, in their persecution, still faithful to the God who doth not bless and exalt them as He did me!" It may be that he also wonders at their happiness. He feels within himself a seething sea of misery. There is an unfathomable gulf of anguish within his soul, and when he looks at believers, he sees them quiet in their souls, full of peace and happiness, and often without any outward means by which they should be comforted, yet rejoicing and full of glory. *He* goes up and down through the world and possesses great power, and there be many myrmidons to serve him, yet he hath not the happiness of spirit possessed by yonder humble cottager, obscure, unknown, having no servants to wait upon her, but stretched upon the bed of weakness. He admires and hates the peace which reigns in the believer's soul.

His consideration may go farther than this. Do you not think that *he considers them to detect, if possible, and flaw any fault in them, by way of solace to himself?* "*They* are not pure," saith he—"these blood-bought ones—these elect from before the foundations of the world,—*they* still sin! These

adopted children of God, for whom the glorious Son bowed His head and gave up the ghost!—even they offend!" How must he chuckle, with such delight as he is capable of, over the secret sins of God's people, and if he can see anything in them inconsistent with their profession, anything which appears to be deceitful, and therein like himself, he rejoices. Each sin born in the believer's heart, cries to him, "My father! my father!" and he feels something like the joy of fatherhood as he sees his foul offspring. He looks at the "old man" in the Christian, and admires the tenacity with which it maintains its hold, the force and vehemence with which it struggles for the mastery, the craft and cunning with which every now and then, at set intervals, at convenient opportunities, it putteth forth all its force. He considers our sinful flesh, and makes it one of the books in which he diligently reads. One of the fairest prospects, I doubt not, which the devil's eye ever rests upon, is the inconsistency and the impurity which he can discover in the true child of God. In this respect he had very little to consider in God's true servant, Job.

Nor is this all, but rather just the starting point of his consideration. We doubt not that *he views the Lord's people, and especially the more eminent and excellent among them, as the great barriers to the progress of his kingdom*; and just as the engineer, endeavouring to make a railway, keeps his eye very much fixed upon the hills and rivers, and especially upon the great mountain through which it will take years laboriously to bore a tunnel, so Satan, in looking upon his various plans to carry on his dominion in the world, considers most such men as Job. Satan must have thought much of Martin Luther. "I could ride the world over," says he, "if it were not for that monk. He stands in my way. That strong-headed man hates and mauls my firstborn son, the pope. If I could get rid of him I would not mind though fifty thousand smaller saints stood in my way." He is sure to consider God's servants, if there be "none like him," if he stand out distinct and separate from his fellows. Those of us who are called to the work of the ministry must expect from our position to be the special objects of his consideration. When the glass is at the eye of that dreadful warrior, he is sure to look out for those who by their regimentals are discovered to be the officers, and he bids his sharpshooters be very careful to aim at these, "For," saith he, "if the standard-bearer fall, then shall the victory be more readily gained to our side, and our opponents shall be readily put to rout." If you are more generous than other saints, if you live nearer to God than others, as the birds peck most at the ripest fruit, so may you expect Satan to be most busy against you. Who cares to contend for a province covered with stones and barren rocks, and ice-bound by frozen seas? But in all times there is sure to be a contention after the fat valleys where the wheat-sheaves are plenteous, and where the husbandman's toil is well requited, and thus, for you who honour God most, Satan will struggle very sternly. He wants to pluck God's jewels from His crown, if he can, and take the Redeemer's precious stones even from the breastplate itself. He considers, then, God's people; viewing them as hindrances to his reign, he contrives methods by which he may remove them out of his way, or turn them to his own account. Darkness would cover the earth if he could blow out the lights; there would be no fruit to shake like Lebanon, if he could destroy that handful of corn upon the top of the mountains; hence his perpetual consideration is to make the faithful fail from among men.

It needs not much wisdom to discern that *the great object of Satan in considering God's people is to do them injury.* I scarcely think he hopes to destroy the really chosen and blood-bought heirs of life. My notion is that he is too good a divine for that. He has been foiled so often when he has attacked God's people, that he can hardly think he shall be able to destroy the elect, for you remember the soothsayers who are very nearly related to him, spoke to Haman on this wise; "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." He knows right well that there is a seed royal in the land against whom he fights in vain; and it strikes me if he could be absolutely certain that any one soul was chosen of God, he would scarcely waste his time in attempting to destroy it, although he might seek to worry and to dishonour it. It is however most likely that Satan no more knows who God's elect are than we do, for he can only judge as we do by outward actions, though he can form a more accurate judgment than we can through longer experience, and being able to see persons in private where we cannot intrude; yet into God's book of secret decrees his black eye can never peer. By their fruits he knows them, and we know them in the same manner. Since however, *we* are often mistaken in our judgment, *he* too may be so; and it seems to me that he therefore makes it his policy to endeavour to destroy them all—not knowing in which case he may succeed. He goeth about seeking whom he *may* devour, and, as he knows not whom he may be permitted to swallow up, he attacks all the people of God with vehemence. Some one may say, "How can one devil do this?" He does not do it by himself alone. I do not know that many of us have ever been tempted directly by Satan: we may not be notable enough among men to be worth *his* trouble; but he has a whole host of inferior spirits under his supremacy and control, and as the centurion said to himself, so he might have said of Satan—"he saith to this spirit, 'Do this,' and he doeth it, and to his servant, 'Go,' and he goeth." Thus all the servants of God will more or less come under the direct or indirect assaults of the great enemy of souls, and that with a view of destroying them; for he would, if it were possible, deceive the very elect. Where he cannot destroy, there is no doubt that Satan's object is to worry. He does not like to see God's people happy. I believe the devil greatly delights in some ministers, whose tendency in their preaching is to multiply and foster doubts and fears, and grief, and despondency, as the evidences of God's people. "Ah," saith the devil, "preach on; you are doing my work well, for I like to see God's people mournful. If I can make them hang their harps on the willows, and go about with miserable faces, I reckon I have done my work very completely." My dear friends, let us watch against those specious temptations which pretend to make us humble, but which really aim at making us unbelieving. Our God takes no delight in our suspicions and mistrusts. See how he proves his love in the gift of his dear Son Jesus. Banish then all your ill surmisings, and rejoice in unmoved confidence. God delights to be worshipped with joy. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with

psalms." "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say, rejoice." Satan does not like this. Martin Luther used to say, "Let us sing psalms and spite the devil," and I have no doubt Martin Luther was pretty nearly right; for that lover of discord hates harmonious, joyous praise. Beloved brother, the arch-enemy wants to make you wretched here, if he cannot have you hereafter; and in this, no doubt, he is aiming a blow at the honour of God. He is well aware that mournful Christians often dishonour the faithfulness of God by mistrusting it, and he thinks if he can worry us until we no more believe in the constancy and goodness of the Lord, he shall have robbed God of His praise. "He that offereth praise, glorifieth Me," says God; and so Satan lays the axe at the root of our praise, that God may cease to be glorified.

Moreover, if Satan cannot destroy a Christian, how often has he *spoilt his usefulness*? Many a believer has fallen, not to break his neck—that is impossible,—but he has broken some important bone, and he has gone limping to his grave! We can recall with grief some men once eminent in the ranks of the church, who did run well, but on a sudden, through stress of temptation, they fell into sin, and their names were never mentioned in the church again, except with bated breath. Everybody thought and hoped they were saved so as by fire, but certainly their former usefulness never could return. It is very easy to go back in the heavenly pilgrimage, but it is very hard to retrieve your steps. You may soon turn aside and put out your candle, but you cannot light it quite so speedily. Friend, beloved in the Lord, watch against the attacks of Satan and stand fast, because you, as a pillar in the house of God are very dear to us, and we cannot spare you. As a father, or as a matron in our midst, we do you honour, and oh! —we would not be made to mourn and lament—we do not wish to be grieved by hearing the shouts of our adversaries while they cry "Aha! Aha! so would we have it," for alas! there have been many things done in our Zion which we would not have told in Gath, nor published in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised should rejoice, and the sons of the Philistines should triumph. Oh may God grant us grace, as a church, to stand against the wiles of Satan and his attacks, that having done his worst he may gain no advantage over us, and after having considered, and considered again, and counted well our towers and bulwarks, he may be compelled to retire because his battering rams cannot jar so much as a stone from our ramparts, and his slings cannot slay one single soldier on the walls.

Before I leave this point, I should like to say, that perhaps it may be suggested, "How is it that God permits this constant and malevolent consideration of His people by the evil one?" One answer, doubtless, is, that God knows what is for His own glory, and that He giveth no account of His matters; that having permitted free agency, and having allowed, for some mysterious reason, the existence of evil, it does not seem agreeable with His having done so to destroy Satan; but He gives him power that it may be a fair hand-to-hand fight between sin and holiness, between grace and craftiness. Besides, be it remembered, that incidentally the temptations of Satan are of service to the people of God; Fenelon says they are the file which rubs off much of the rust of self-confidence, and I may add, they are the horrible sound in the sentinel's ear, which is sure to keep him awake. An experimental divine remarks, that there is no temptation in the world which is so bad as not being tempted at all; for to be tempted will tend to keep us awake: whereas, being without temptation, flesh and blood are weak—and though the spirit may be willing, yet we may be found falling into slumber. Children do not run away from their father's side when big dogs bark at them. The howlings of the devil may tend to drive us nearer to Christ, may teach us our own weakness, may keep us upon our own watch-tower, and be made the means of preservation from other ills. Let us "be sober, be vigilant, because our adversary the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour"; and let us who are in a prominent position be permitted affectionately to press upon you one earnest request, namely, "Brethren, pray for us." that, exposed as we are peculiarly to the consideration of Satan, we may be guarded by divine power. Let us be made rich by your faithful prayers that we may be kept even to the end.

II. Secondly, WHAT IS IT THAT SATAN CONSIDERS WITH A VIEW TO THE INJURY OF GOD'S PEOPLE?

It cannot be said of him as of God, that he knoweth us altogether; but since he has been now nearly six thousand years dealing with poor fallen humanity, he must have acquired a very vast experience in that time, and having been all over the earth, and having tempted the highest and the lowest, he must know exceedingly well what the springs of human action are, and how to play upon them. Satan watches and considers first of all *our peculiar infirmities*. He looks us up and down, just as I have seen a horse-dealer do with a horse; and soon finds out wherein we are faulty. I, a common observer, might think the horse an exceedingly good one, as I see it running up and down the road, but the dealer sees what I cannot see, and he knows how to handle the creature just in such quarters and at such points that he soon discovers any hidden mischief. Satan knows how to look at us and reckon us up from heel to head, so that he will say of this man, "His infirmity is lust," or of that other, "He hath a quick temper," or of this other, "He is proud," or of that other, "He is slothful." The eye of malice is very quick to perceive a weakness, and the hand of enmity soon takes advantage of it. When the arch-spy finds a weak place in the wall of our castle, he takes care to plant his battering-ram, and begin his siege. You may conceal, even from your dearest friend, your infirmity, but you will not conceal it from your worst enemy. He has lynx eyes, and detects in a moment the joint in your harness. He goes about with a match, and though you may think you have covered all the gunpowder of your heart, yet he knows how to find a crack to put his match through, and much mischief will he do, unless eternal mercy shall prevent.

He takes care also to consider *our frames and states of mind*. If the devil would attack us when our mind is in certain moods, we should be more than a match for him: he knows this, and shuns the encounter. Some men are more ready for temptation when they are distressed and desponding; the fiend will then assail them. Others will be more liable to take fire when they are jubilant and full of joy; then will he strike his spark into the tinder. Certain persons, when they are much vexed and tossed to and fro, can be made to say almost anything; and others, when their souls are like perfectly placid waters, are just then in a condition to be navigated by the devil's

vessel. As the worker in metals knows that one metal is to be worked at such a heat, and another at a different temperature; as those who have to deal with chemicals know that a certain heat one fluid will boil, while another reaches the boiling-point much earlier, so Satan knows exactly the temperature at which to work us to his purpose. Small pots boil directly they are put on the fire, and so little men of quick temper are soon in a passion; larger vessels require more time and coal before they will boil, but when they do boil, it is a boil indeed, not soon forgotten or abated. The enemy, like a fisherman, watches his fish, adapts his bait to his prey; and knows in what seasons and times the fish are most likely to bite. This hunter of souls comes upon us unawares, and often we are overtaken in a fault, or caught in a trap through an unwatchful frame of mind. That rare collector of choice sayings, Thomas Spencer, has the following, which is much to the point:—"The chameleon, when he lies on the grass to catch flies and grasshoppers, taketh upon him the colour of the grass, as the polypus doth the colour of the rock under which he lurketh, that the fish may boldly come near him without any suspicion of danger. In like manner, Satan turneth himself into that shape which we least fear, and sets before us such objects of temptation as are most agreeable to our natures, that so he may the sooner draw us into his net; he sails with every wind, and blows us that way which we incline ourselves through the weakness of nature. Is our knowledge in matter of faith deficient? He tempts us to error. Is our conscience tender? He tempts us to scrupulosity, and too much preciseness. Hath our conscience, like the ecliptic line, some latitude? He tempts us to carnal liberty. Are we bold spirited? He tempts us to presumption. Are we timorous and distrustful? He tempteth us to desperation. Are we of a flexible disposition? He tempteth us to inconstancy. Are we stiff? He labours to make obstinate heretics, schismatics, or rebels of us. Are we of an austere temper? He tempteth us to cruelty. Are we soft and mild? He tempteth us to indulgence and foolish pity. Are we hot in matters of religion? He tempteth us to blind zeal and superstition. Are we cold? He tempteth us to Laodicean lukewarmness. Thus doth he lay his traps, that one way or other, he may ensnare us."

He also takes care to consider *our position among men.* There are a few persons who are most easily tempted when they are alone; they are the subjects then of great heaviness of mind, and they may be driven to most awful crimes: perhaps the most of us are more liable to sin when we are in company. In some company I never should be led into sin; into another society I could scarcely venture. Many are so full of levity, that those of us who are inclined the same way can scarcely look them in the face without feeling our besetting sin set a-going; and others are so sombre, that if they meet a brother of like mould, they are pretty sure between them to invent an evil report of the goodly land. Satan knows where to overtake you in a place where you lie open to his attacks; he will pounce upon you, swoop like a bird of prey from the sky, where he has been watching for the time to make his descent with a prospect of success.

How, too, will he consider *our condition in the world!* He looks at one man, and says, "That man has property: it is of no use my trying such-and-such arts with him; but here is another man who is very poor, I will catch him in that net." Then, again, he looks at the poor man, and says, "Now, I cannot tempt him to this folly, but I will lead the rich man into it." As the sportsman has a gun for wild fowl, and another for deer and game, so has Satan a different temptation for various orders of men. I do not suppose that the Queen's temptation ever will annoy Mary the kitchen-maid. I do not suppose, on the other hand, that Mary's temptation will ever be very serious to me. Probably you could escape from mine—I do not think you could; and I sometimes fancy I could bear yours—though I question if I could. Satan knows, however, just where to smite us, and our position, our capabilities, our education, our standing in society, our calling, may all be doors through which he may attack us. You who have no calling at all, are in peculiar peril—I wonder the devil does not swallow you outright. The most likely man to go to hell is the man who has nothing to do on earth. I say that seriously. I believe that there cannot happen a much worse evil to a person than to be placed where he has no work; and if I should ever be in such a state, I would get employment at once, for fear I should be carried off, body and soul, by the evil one. Idle people tempt the devil to tempt them. Let us have something to do, let us keep our minds occupied, for, if not, we make room for the devil. Industry will not make us gracious, but the want of industry may make us vicious. Have always something on the anvil or in the fire.

> "In books, or work, or healthful play,
> I would be busy too,
> For Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do."

So Watts taught us in our childhood, and so let us believe in our manhood. Books, or works, or such recreations as are necessary for health, should occupy our time; for if I throw myself down in indolence, like an old piece of iron, I must not wonder that I grow rusty with sin.

Nor have I done yet. Satan, when he makes his investigations, notices all *the objects of our affection.* I doubt not when he went round Job's house, he observed it as carefully as thieves do a jeweller's premises when they mean to break into them. They very cunningly take account of every door, window, and fastening: they fail not to look at the next-door house; for they may have to reach the treasure through the building which adjoins it. So, when the devil went round, jotting down in his mind all Job's position, he thought to himself, "There are the camels and the oxen, the asses, and the servants—yes, I can use all these very admirably." "Then," he thought, "there are the three daughters! There are the ten sons, and they go feasting—I shall know where to catch them, and if I can just blow the house down when they are feasting, that will afflict the father's mind the more severely, for he will say 'Oh that they had died when they had been praying, rather than when they had been feasting and drinking wine.' I will put down too in the inventory," says the devil, "his wife—I dare say I shall want her," and accordingly it came to that. Nobody could have done what Job's wife did—none of the servants could have said that sad sentence so stingingly—or, if she meant it very kindly, none could have said it with such a fascinating air as Job's own wife, "Bless God and die," as it may be read, or "Curse God and die." Ah, Satan, thou hast ploughed with Job's heifer, but

thou hast not succeeded; Job's strength lies in his God, not in his hair, or else thou mightest have shorn him as Samson was shorn! Perhaps the evil one had even inspected Job's personal sensibilities, and so selected that form of bodily affliction which he knew to be most dreaded by his victim. He brought upon him a disease which Job may have seen and shuddered at, in poor men outside the city gates. Brethren, Satan knows quite as much in regard to you. You have a child, and Satan knows that you idolize it. "Ah," says he, "there is a place for my wounding him." Even the partner of your bosom may be made a quiver in which hell's arrows shall be stored till the time may come, and then she may prove the bow from which Satan will shoot them. Watch even your neighbour and her that lieth in your bosom, for you know not how Satan may get an advantage over you. Our habits, our joys, our sorrows, our retirements, our public positions, all may be made weapons of attack by this desperate foe of the Lord's people. We have snares everywhere; in our bed and at our table, in our house and in the street. There are gins and trap-falls in company; there are pits when we are alone. We may find temptations in the house of God as well as in the world; traps in our high estate, and deadly poisons in our abasement. We must not expect to be rid of temptations till we have crossed the Jordan, and then, thank God, we are beyond gunshot of the enemy. The last howling of the dog of hell will be heard as we descend into the chill waters of the black stream, but when we hear the hallelujah of the glorified, we shall have done with the black prince for ever and for ever.

III. Satan considered, but THERE WAS A HIGHER CONSIDERATION WHICH OVERRODE HIS CONSIDERATION.

In times of war, the sappers and miners of one party will make a mine, and it is a very common counteractive for the sappers and miners of the other party to counter-mine by undermining the first mine. This is just what God does with Satan. Satan is mining and he thinks to light the fusee and to blow up God's building, but all the while God is undermining him, and He blows up Satan's mine before he can do any mischief. The devil is the greatest of all fools. He has more knowledge but less wisdom than any other creature, he is more subtle than all the beasts of the field, but it is well called *subtlety*, not wisdom. It is not true wisdom; it is only another shape of folly. All the while that Satan was tempting Job, he little knew that he was answering God's purpose, for God was looking on and considering the whole of it, and holding the enemy as a man holds a horse by its bridle. *The Lord had considered exactly how far He would let Satan go.* He did not the first time permit him to touch his flesh—perhaps that was more than Job at that time could have borne. Have you never noticed that if you are in good strong bodily health you can bear losses and crosses, and even bereavements with something like equanimity? Now that was the case with Job. Perhaps if the disease had come first and the rest had followed, it might have been a temptation too heavy for him, but God who knows just how far to let the enemy go, will say to him, "Thus far, and no farther." By degrees he became accustomed to his poverty; in fact, the trial had lost all its sting the moment Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." That enemy was slain—nay it was buried and this was the funeral oration, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." When the second trial came, the first trial had qualified Job to bear the second. It may be a more severe trial for a man in the possession of great worldly wealth suddenly to be deprived of the bodily power of enjoying it, than to lose all first, and then lose the health necessary to its enjoyment. Having already lost all, he might almost say, "I thank God that now I have nothing to enjoy, and therefore the loss of the power to enjoy it is not so wearisome. I have not to say, 'How I wish I could go out in my fields, and see to my servants, for they are all dead. I do not wish to see my children—they are all dead and gone—I am thankful that they are; better so, than that they should see their poor father sit on a dunghill like this.'" He might have been almost glad if his wife had gone too, for certainly she was not a very particular mercy when she was spared; and possibly, if he had had all his children about him, it might have been a harder trial than it was. The Lord who weighs mountains in scales, had meted out His servant's woe.

Did not the Lord also consider *how He should sustain His servant under the trial*? Beloved, you do not know how blessedly our God poured the secret oil upon Job's fire of grace while the devil was throwing buckets of water on it. He saith to himself, "If Satan shall do much, I will do more; if he takes away much, I will give more; if he tempts the man to curse, I will fill him so full of love to Me that he shall bless Me. I will help him; I will strengthen him; yea, I will uphold him with the right hand of My righteousness." Christian, take those two thoughts and put them under your tongue as a wafer made with honey—you will never be tempted without express license from the throne where Jesus pleads, and, on the other hand, when He permits it, He will with the temptation make a way of escape, or give you grace to stand under it.

In the next place, the Lord considered *how to sanctify Job by this trial.* Job was a much better man at the end of the story than he was at the beginning. He was "a perfect and an upright man" at first, but there was a little pride about him. We are poor creatures to criticise such a man as Job—but still there was in him just a sprinkling of self-righteousness. I think, and his friends brought it out. Eliphaz and Zophar said such irritating things, that poor Job could not help replying in strong terms about himself that were rather too strong, one thinks; there was a little too much self-justification. He was not proud as some of us are, of a very little—he had much to be proud of, as the world would allow—but yet there was the tendency to be exalted with it; and though the devil did not know it, perhaps if he had left Job alone, that pride might have run to seed, and Job might have sinned; but he was in such a hurry, that he would not let the ill seed ripen, but hastened to cut it up, and so was the Lord's tool to bring Job into a more humble, and consequently a more safe and blessed state of mind. Moreover, observe how Satan was a lackey to the Almighty! Job all this while was being *enabled to earn a greater reward.* All his prosperity is not enough; God loves Job so much, that He intends to give him twice the property; He intends to give him his children again; He means to make him a more famous man than ever; a man whose name shall ring down the ages; a man who shall be talked of through all generations. He is not to be the man of Uz, but of the whole world. He is not to be heard of by a handful in one neighbourhood, but all men are to hear of Job's patience in the hour of trial. Who is to do this?

Who is to fashion the trump of fame through which Job's name is to be blown? The devil goes to the forge, and works away with all his might, to make Job illustrious! Foolish devil! he is piling up a pedestal on which God will set His servant Job, that he may be looked upon with wonder by all ages.

To conclude, *Job's afflictions and Job's patience have been a lasting blessing to the Church of God, and they have inflicted incredible disgrace upon Satan.* If you want to make the devil angry, throw the story of Job in his teeth. If you desire to have your own confidence sustained, may God the Holy Ghost lead you into the patience of Job. Oh! how many saints have been comforted in their distress by this history of patience! How many have been saved out of the jaw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear by the dark experiences of the patriarch of Uz. O arch fiend, how art thou taken in thine own net! Thou hast thrown a stone which has fallen on thine own head. Thou madest a pit for Job, and hast fallen into it thyself; thou art taken in thine own craftiness. Jehovah has made fools of the wise and driven the diviners mad. Brethren, let us commit ourselves in faith to the care and keeping of God—come poverty, come sickness, come death, we will in all things through Jesus Christ's blood be conquerors, and by the power of His Spirit we shall overcome at the last. I would God we were all trusting in Jesus. May those who have not trusted Him be led to begin this very morning, and God shall have all the praise in us all, evermore. Amen.

JOB'S RESIGNATION

"Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."—Job i. 20–22.

JOB was very much troubled, and he did not try to hide the outward signs of his sorrow. A man of God is not expected to be a stoic. The grace of God takes away the heart of stone out of his flesh, but it does not turn his heart into a stone. The Lord's children are the subjects of tender feelings; when they have to endure the rod, they feel the smart of its strokes; and Job felt the blows that fell upon him. Do not blame yourself if you are conscious of pain and grief, and do not ask to be made hard and callous. That is not the method by which grace works; it makes us strong to bear trial, but we have to bear it; it gives us patience and submission, not stoicism. We feel, and we benefit by the feeling, and there is no sin in the feeling, for in our text we are expressly told of the patriarch's mourning, "In all this Job sinned not." Though he was the great mourner—I think I might truly call him the chief mourner—of Scripture, yet there was no sin in his mourning. Some there are who say that, when we are heavy of heart, we are necessarily in a wrong spirit, but it is not so. The apostle Peter saith, "If need be ye are in heaviness through manifold trials," but he does not imply that the heaviness is wrong. There are some who will not cry when God chastiseth them, and some who will not yield when God smiteth them. We do not wish to be like them; we are quite content to have the suffering heart that Job had, and to feel the bitterness of spirit, the anguish of soul, which racked that blessed patriarch.

Furthermore, Job made use of very manifest signs of mourning. He not only felt sorrow within his heart, but he indicated it by rending his mantle, by shaving off the hair of his head, and by casting himself prone upon the ground, as if he sought to return to the womb of mother-earth as he said that he should; and I do not think we are to judge those of our brethren and sisters who feel it right to wear the common tokens of mourning. If they give them any kind of solace in their sorrow, let them have them. I believe that, at times, some go to excess in this respect, but I dare not pass sentence upon them because I read here, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." If the crape should be worn for a very long while, and if the sorrow should be nursed unduly, as others judge, yet we cannot set up a standard of what is right for others, each one must answer for his conduct to his own Lord. I remember the gentleness of Jesus towards mourners rather than His severity in dealing with them; He hath much pity for our weakness, and I wish that some of His servants had more of the same spirit. If you who are sorrowing could be strong, if the weeds of mourning could be laid aside, it might indicate a greater acquiescence in the divine will; but if you do not feel that it should be so with you, God forbid that we should rebuke you while we have such a text as this before us, "Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground"; and "in all this Job sinned not."

I want you, however, to notice that mourning should always be sanctified with devotion. It is very pleasant to observe that, when Job had rent his mantle after the Oriental custom, and shaved his head (in a manner which, in his day, was not forbidden, but which under the Mosaic law was prohibited, for they mght not cut their hair by way of mourning as the heathen did), and, after the patriarch had fallen down upon the ground, he "worshipped." Not, he grumbled; not, he lamented; much less that he began to imprecate and use language unjustifiable and improper; but he "fell down upon the ground, and worshipped." O dear friend, when thy grief presses thee to the very dust, worship there! If that spot has come to be thy Gethsemane, then present there thy "strong crying and tears" unto thy God. Remember David's words, "Ye people, pour out your hearts,"—but do not stop there, finish the quotation, —"Ye people, pour out your hearts before Him." Turn the vessel upside down; it is a good thing to empty it, for this grief may ferment into something more sour. Turn the vessel upside down, and let every drop run out; but let it be before the Lord. "Ye people, pour out your hearts before Him: God is a refuge for us." When you are bowed down beneath a heavy burden of sorrow, then take to worshipping the Lord, and especially to that kind of worshipping which lies in adoring God, and in making

a full surrender of yourself to the divine will, so that you can say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." That kind of worshipping which lies in the subduing of the will, the arousing of the affections, the bestirring of the whole mind and heart, and the presentation of oneself unto God over again in solemn consecration, must tend to sweeten sorrow, and to take the sting out of it.

It will also greatly alleviate our sorrow if we then fall into serious contemplations, and begin to argue a little, and to bring facts to bear upon our mind. Evidently Job did so, for the verses of my text are full of proofs of his thoughtfulness. The patriarch brings to his own mind at least four subjects for earnest consideration, out of which he drew great comfort. In like manner, you will do well, not merely to sit still and say, "I shall be comforted," but you must look about you for themes upon which to think and meditate to profit. Your poor mind is apt to be driven to and fro by stress of your sorrow; if you can get anchor-hold of some great clearly-ascertained truths, about which you can have no possible doubt, you may begin to derive consolation from them. "While I was musing," said David, "the fire burned," and it comforted and warmed him. Remember how he talked to himself as to another self, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." There are two Davids, you see, talking to one another, and cheering one another! A man ought always to be good company for himself, and he ought also to be able to catechise himself; he who is not fit to be his own schoolmaster is not fit to be schoolmaster to other people. If you cannot catechise your own heart, and drill a truth into your own soul, you do not know how to teach other people. I believe that the best preaching in the world is that which is done at home. When a sorrowing spirit shall have comforted itself, it will have learned the art of consoling other people. Job is an instance of this kind of personal instruction; he has three or four subjects which he brings before his own mind, and these tend to comfort him.

I. The first is, to my mind, THE EXTREME BREVITY OF LIFE.

Observe what Job says, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." He came forth, and he expected to go back to mother-earth, and there to lie. That is Job's idea of life, and a very true one it is, "*I come forth and I go back again.*" One asked a man of God, one day, "Will you tell me what life is?" The man of God stopped just a moment, and then deliberately walked away. When his friend met him, the following day, he said to him, "Yesterday, I asked you a question, and you did not answer it." "But I did answer it," said the godly man. "No," rejoined the other, "you were there, and you were gone." "Well, you asked me what life was, and that was my answer. Could I have answered your question better?" He answered and acted wisely, for that is a complete summary of our life here below,—We come, and we go. We appear for a brief moment and then we vanish away. I often in my own mind compare life to a procession. I see you, dear friends, going by me one by one, and vanishing, and others come on behind; but the point that I am apt to forget—and you do the same,—is that I am in the procession, and you are in it, too. We all count all men mortal but ourselves, yet all are marching towards that country from whose bourn no traveller returns.

Well now, because life is so short, do you not see where the comfort comes? Job says to himself, "I came, and I shall return; then why should I worry myself about what I have lost? I am going to be here only a little while, then what need have I of all those camels and sheep?" So, brethren, what God has given us, is so much spending-money on our journey, to pay our own fares, and to help our fellow-travellers; but we do not, any of us, need as much substance as Job had. He had seven thousand sheep. Dear me! what a task it must have been to drive and to feed such a large flock! "And three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen!" That is, a thousand oxen. "And five hundred she asses, and a very great household." Our proverb says, "The more servants, the more plagues"; and I am sure it is true that the more camels, the more horses, the more cows, the more of such things that a man has, the more there is to look after, and to cause him trouble. So Job seems to say to himself, "I am here for such a little time, why should I be carried away, as with a flood, even when these things are taken from me? I come and I go; let me be satisfied if other things come and go. If my earthly stores vanish, well, I shall vanish, too. They are like myself; they take to themselves wings, and fly away; and by-and-by I too shall take to myself wings, and I shall be gone." I have heard of one who called life, "the long disease of life"; and it was so to him, for, though he did a great work for his Master, he was always sickly. Well, who wants a long disease? "There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life." We want rather to feel that it is not long, that it is short, and to set small store by all things here below, and to regard them as things which, like ourselves, appear but for a time, and soon shall be gone.

Further, Job seems especially to dwell with comfort upon the thought, "*I shall return to the earth,* from which all the particles of my body originally came; I shall return thither." "Ah!" said one, when he had seen the spacious and beautiful gardens of a wealthy man, "these are the things that make it hard to die." You recollect how the tribe of Gad and the tribe of Reuben went to Moses, and said, "If we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan." Of course, they did not want to cross the Jordan if they could get all their possessions on the other side. But Job had not anything this side Jordan, he was cleaned right out, so he was willing to go. And really, the losses that a man has, which make him "desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better," are real gains. What is the use of all that clogs us here? A man of large possessions reminds me of my experience when I have gone to see a friend in the country, and he has taken me across a ploughed field, and I have had two heavy burdens of earth, one on each foot, as I have plodded on. The earth has clung to me, and made it hard walking. It is just so with this world, its good things hamper us, clog us, cling to us, like thick clay; but when we get these hampering things removed, we take comfort in the thought, "We shall soon return to the earth whence we came." We know that it is not mere returning to earth, for we possess a life that is immortal, we are looking forward to spending it in the true land that floweth with milk and honey; where, like Daniel, we shall stand in our lot at the end of the days;

therefore, we feel not only resigned to return to the womb of mother-earth, but sometimes we even long for the time of our return to come. A dear servant of God, whom you would all recognize if I mentioned his name, was talking with me concerning our dear departed brother, Hugh Stowell Brown, and he said, "All the brethren of my age and yours seem to be going home; they are passing away, the fathers and the leaders are going, and I could almost wish," he added, "that our Heavenly Father would put my name down as the next to go." I said that I hoped the Lord would not do so, but that our brother might be spared to labour a while longer here; but that, if I might put in another name, I would plead for my own to go in there instead of his. Happily, we have nothing to do with the date of our home-going, it is out of our hands; yet we are glad to feel that, when the time of our departure shall arrive, it will be no calamity, but a distinct advancement, for the Master to bid us to return to the dust whence we came. "Return, ye children of men," He will say, and we will joyfully answer "Yes, Father, here we are, glad to stretch our wings, and fly straight to yonder world of joy, expecting that even our poor bodies, by-and-by, at the trump of the archangel, shall come back to Thee, and we shall be like Thine Only-begotten Son, when we shall see Him as He is."

II. Secondly, Job seems to comfort himself, by noticing THE TENURE OF HIS EARTHLY POSSESSIONS. "Naked," says he, "came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither."

He feels himself to be very poor, everything is gone, he is stripped; yet he seems to say, "*I am not poorer now than I was when I was born.*" I had nothing then, not even a garment to my back, but what the love of my mother provided for me. I was helpless then; I could not do anything for myself whatever." One said to me, the other day, "All is gone, sir, all is gone, except health and strength." Yes, but we had not as much as that when we were born. We had no strength, we were too weak to perform the least though most necessary offices for our poor tender frame. David often very sweetly dwells upon his childhood, and still more upon his infancy; and we shall do well to imitate him. Old men sometimes arrive at a second childhood. Do not be afraid, brother, if that is your case; you have gone through one period already that was more infantile than your second one can be, you will not be weaker then that you were at first. Suppose that you and I should be brought to extreme weakness and poverty, we shall neither be weaker nor poorer than we were then. "But I had a mother," says one. Well, there are some children who lose their mother in their very birth; but if you had a mother to care for you then, you have a Father to care for you now; and, as a child of God, you surely feel that your mother was but the secondary agent to watch over you in your weakness; and God who gave that love to her, and moved her to care for you, will be sure to find that same love which flowed out of Him into her still stored up in His own bosom, and He will see you through. Do not be afraid, my brother, my sister, the Lord will see you through. It is wonderful that, after God has been gracious to us for fifty years, we cannot trust Him for the rest of our lives; and as for you who are sixty, seventy, or eighty years of age, what! has He brought you thus far to put you to shame? Did He bear you through that very weakest part of your life, and do you think He will now forsake you? David said, "I was cast upon Thee from the womb," as if then he had none but God to help him; and will not He who took care of us then take care of us even to the end? Aye, that He will; wherefore, let us be of good courage, and let the poverty and weakness of our infancy, as we think of it, cheer us if we are weak and poor now.

Then Job adds, "However poor I may be, I am not as poor as I shall be, for naked shall I return to mother-earth. *If I have but little now, I shall soon have still less.*" We have heard of a rustic who, when dying, put a crown-piece into his mouth, because he said that he would not be without money in another world; but then he was a clown, and everyone knew how foolish was his attempt thus to provide for the future. There have been stories told of persons who have had their gold sewn up in their shrouds, but they took not a penny with them for all their pains. Nothing can be taken with us; we must go back to the earth, the richest as poor as the poorest, and the poorest no poorer, really, than the richest. The dust of great Cæsar may help to stop a hole through which the blast blows, and the dust of his slave cannot be put to more ignoble uses. No, poor and weak as we may be, we are not as poor and weak as we shall be by-and-by; so let us just solace ourselves with this reflection. The two ends of our life are nakedness; if the middle of it should not always be scarlet and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, let us not wonder; and if it should seem to be all of a piece, let us not be impatient or complaining.

I want you to notice, also, what I think really was in Job's mind, that, notwithstanding that he was but dust at the beginning, and would be dust at the end, yet, still, there was a Job who existed all the while. "I was naked, but *I was*; naked shall I return thither, but *I shall be there*." Some men never find themselves till they have lost their goods. They, themselves, are hidden away, like Saul, among the stuff; their true manhood is not to be seen, because they are dressed so finely that people seem to respect them, when it is their clothes that are respected. They appear to be somebodies, but they are nobodies, notwithstanding all that they possess. The Lord brought His servant Job to feel, "Yes, when I had those camels, when I had those she asses, when I had those sheep, when I had those men-servants, they were not myself; and now that they are gone, I am the same Job that ever I was. The sheep were not a part of myself, the camels were not a part of myself; I, Job, am here still, lying in my wholeness and integrity before God, as much a servant of Jehovah, in my nakedness, as I was when I wrapped myself in ermine." O sirs, it is a grand thing when God helps us to live above what we have, and above what we have not! Then it is that He brings us to know ourselves as we are, in our God, not dependent upon externals, but maintained and strengthened by food of which the world knoweth nothing, which cometh not from milk of kine. Then are we robed in a garment that cometh not from fleece of sheep, and we possess a life that dependeth not on the swift dromedary, a true existence that is neither in flocks nor herds, nor pastures, nor fields, but delights itself in God, and stays itself on the Most High. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither," says Job, but "still it is I, the blessed of God, His same devoted servant, who will trust Him to the end." That was good talk for Job's heart, was it not? Though it may not all have been said in words, I doubt not that

something like it, or something much better, passed through the patriarch's mind, and thus he solaced himself in the hour of his sorrows and losses.

III. But now, thirdly, and perhaps the most blessed thing, is what Job said concerning THE HAND OF GOD IN ALL THINGS: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

I am so pleased to think that Job recognized *the hand of God everywhere giving.* He said, "The Lord gave." He did not say, "I earned it all." He did not say, "There are all my hard-earned savings gone." "Ah, me!" he might have said, "all the care for those sheep, and the dreadful expense of those camels, and the trouble that I have been at with those oxen; and now they are all gone, it does seem hard." He does not put it so, but he says, "The Lord gave them to me; they were a gift, and though they are gone, they were a gift from Him who had a right to take them back, for all He gives is only lent. 'A loan should go laughing home'; and if God lent me these things, and now has called them back, I will bless His name for having let me have them so long."

What a sweet thing it is, dear brothers and sisters, if you can feel that all you have in this world is God's gift to you! You cannot feel that, you know, if you came by it dishonestly. No, it is not God's gift then, and it brings no blessing with it; but *that which is honestly the result and fruit of your cheerful industry,* you may consider has come from God; and if, in addition, you have really sanctified your substance, and have given your fair proportion to help the poor and the needy, as Job did, if you can say that you have caused the widow's heart to sing for joy when you relieved her wants, then all you have is God's gift. God's providence is man's inheritance, and your inheritance has come to you from God's providence. Look at it all as God's gift; it will sweeten even that little loaf of bread and that tiny pat of butter,—which is all you will have to eat to-day or to-morrow,—if you regard it as God's gift. It will soften that hard bed upon which you lie, wishing that you were somewhat better covered from the cold, if you think of it as God's gift. A slender income will give us much content if we can see that it is God's gift.

Let us not only regard our money and our goods as God's gifts; but also our wife, our children, our friends. What precious gifts they often are! A man is truly rich who has a good help-meet; he is really rich who has godly children about him. Even though they may cost him much care, he is abundantly repaid by their affection; and if they grow up in the fear of the Lord, what a choice gift they are! Let us look at them all as God's gifts; let us not see them or anything else about the house without feeling, "My Father gave me this." Surely it will tend to draw the teeth of every sharp affliction if, while you have enjoyed the possession of your good things, you have seen God's hand in giving them to you.

Alas! some of you do not know anything about God. What you have, is not counted by you as God's gift. You miss the very sweetness and joy of life by missing this recognition of the divine hand in giving us all good things richly to enjoy.

But then, *Job equally saw God's hand in taking them away.* If he had not been a believer in Jehovah, he would have said, "Oh, those detestable Sabeans! Somebody ought to go and cut to pieces those Chaldeans." That is often our style, is it not?—finding fault with the secondary agents. Job has nothing to say about the Sabeans or the Chaldeans, or the wind, or the lightning. "The Lord," said he, "the Lord hath taken away." I believe that Satan intended to make Job feel that it was God who was at work when his messenger said, "The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep." "Ah!" said Satan, "he will see that God is against him." The devil did not succeed as he thought he had done, for Job could see that it was God's hand, and that took away the sting of the stroke. "The Lord hath taken away." Aaron held his peace when he knew that the Lord had done it, and the Psalmist said, "I was dumb with silence, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it"; and Job felt just that. "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." Never mind the secondary agents, do not spend your strength in kicking against this bad man or that; he is responsible to God for all the evil he has done, but at the back of these free agents there is a divine predestination, there is an over-ruling hand, and even that which in men is evil, may, nevertheless, in another light, be traced up distinctly to the hand of the Most High. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away."

Will you recollect that with regard to your children? If Job had lost his eldest son alone, he might have needed much grace to say, "The Lord gave him, and the Lord hath taken him away." Job *had* lost his eldest son, but he had lost six more sons, and he had lost his three daughters as well. I have known a mother say, "My two dear boys sickened and died within a week; I am the most tried woman who ever lived." Not quite, not quite, dear friend; there have been others who have excelled you in this respect. Job lost his ten children at a stroke. O Death, what an insatiable archer thou wast that day, when ten must fall at once! Yet Job says, "The Lord hath taken away." That is all he has to say about it: "The Lord hath taken away." I need not repeat to you the story of the gardener who missed a choice rose, but who could not complain because the master had plucked it. Do you feel that it is just so with all that you have, if He takes it? Oh, yes! why should He not take it? If I were to go about my house, and take down an ornament or anything from the walls, would anybody say a word to me? Suppose my dear wife should say to the servant, "Where has that picture gone?" and the maid replied, "Oh, the master took it!" Would she find fault? Oh, no! If it had been a servant who took it down, or a stranger who removed it, she might have said something; but not when I took it, for it is mine. And surely we will let God be Master in His own house; where we are only the children, He shall take whatever He pleases of all He has lent us for a while. It is easy to stand here and say this; but, brothers and sisters, let us try to say it if it should ever come to us as a matter of fact that the Lord who gave should also take away. I think Job did well to call attention to this blessed truth, that the hand of God is everywhere at work, whether in giving or in taking away; I do not know anything that tends more to reconcile us to our present sorrows, and losses, and crosses, than to feel, "God has done it all. Wicked men were the agents, but still God Himself has done it. There is a great mystery about it which I cannot clear up, and I do not want to clear it up.

God has done it, and that is enough for me. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' "

IV. Job's last comfort lay in this truth, that GOD IS WORTHY TO BE BLESSED IN ALL THINGS; "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Dear friends, *let us never rob God of His praise, however dark the day is.* It is a funeral day, perhaps; but should not God be praised, when there is a funeral, as well as when there is a wedding? "Oh, but I have lost everything!" And is this one of the days when there is no praise due to God? Most of you know that the Queen's taxes must be paid; and our great King's revenue has the first claim upon us. Let us not rob our King of the revenue of His praise. "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised." "Oh, but I have lost a child!" Yes, but God is to be praised. "But I have lost my mother." Yes, but God is to be praised. "I have a bad headache." Yes, but God is to be praised. One said to me, one evening, "We should have family prayer, my dear sir, but it is rather late; do you feel too tired to conduct it?" "No," I said, "I never was too tired yet to pray with my brethren, and I hope I never shall be." If it is the middle of the night, let us not go to bed without prayer and praise, for we must not rob God of His glory. "There is a mob in the street," but we must not rob God of His glory. "Our goods are getting cheaper and cheaper, and we shall be ruined in the market," but let us not rob God of His glory. "There is going to be, I do not know what, happening by-and-by." Yes, but we must not rob God of His glory.

"Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job means that *the Lord is to be blessed both for giving and taking.* "The Lord gave," blessed be His name. "The Lord hath taken away," blessed be His name. Surely it has not come to this among God's people, that He must do as we like, or else we will not praise Him. If He does not please us every day, and give way to our whims, and gratify our tastes, then we will not praise Him. "Oh, but I do not understand His dealings," says one. And are you really such a stranger to God, and is God such a stranger to you, that unless He enters into explanations, you are afraid that He is not dealing fairly with you? O sir, have you known the Lord for twenty years, and cannot you praise Him for everything? Brethren, some of us have known Him forty years now, perhaps some of you have known the Lord for fifty years; are you always wanting to have chapter, and verse, and explanations from Him before you will praise Him? No, no, I hope we have gone far beyond that stage.

God is, however, *specially to be praised by us whenever we are moved by the devil to curse.* Satan had said to the Lord concerning Job, "Put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face"; and it seemed as if God had hinted to His servant that this was what the devil was aiming at. "Then," said Job, "I will bless Him." His wife suggested afterwards that he should curse God, but he would do no such thing, he would bless Him. It is usually a wise thing to do the very opposite to what the evil one suggests to you. If he says, "Curse," do you bless. Remember the story of a man who was going to give a pound to some charitable institution. The devil said, "No, you cannot afford it." "Then," said the man, "I will give two pounds; I will not be dictated to in this way." Satan exclaimed, "You are a fanatic." The man replied, "I will give four pounds." "Ah!" said Satan, "what will your wife say when you go home, and tell her that you have given away four pounds?" "Well," said the man, "I will give eight pounds now; and if you do not mind what you are at, you will tempt me to give sixteen." So the devil was obliged to stop, because the more he tempted him, the more he went the other way. So let it be with us. If the devil would drive us to curse God, let us bless Him all the more, and Satan will be wise enough to leave off tempting when he finds that, the more he attempts to drive us, the more we go in the opposite direction.

This is all meant to be sweet, cheery talk to suffering saints; how I wish that everybody here had an interest in it! What will some of you do, what are some of you doing, now that you have lost all,—wife dead, children dead, and you are growing old, yet you are without God? O you poor rich people, who have no interest in God, your money must burn your souls! But you poor, poor, poor people, who have not anything here, and have no hope hereafter, how sad is your case! May God, of His rich mercy, give you even a little common-sense, for, surely, common-sense would drive you to Him! Sometimes, in distributing temporal relief, we meet with persons who have been out of work, and full of trouble, and have not had bread to eat, and we say to them, "Did you ever cry to God for help?" "No, sir, we never prayed in all our life." What are you at? Here is a child, crawling about a house, shivering for want of bread and clothes. "Did you never ask your father for anything?" "No, never." Come, friend, did God make you, or did you grow without Him? Did God create you? If He made you, He will have respect unto the work of His hands. Go and try Him, even on that low ground. Go and seek His face even as His creature, and see whether He does not help you. O unbelief, to what madness dost thou go, that even when men are driven to starvation, they will not turn to God! O Spirit of God, bless the sons of men! Even through their fears, and sorrows, and losses, bless them, and bring them in penitence to the Saviour's feet, for His dear name's sake! Amen.

THE DEATH OF THE CHRISTIAN

"Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."—Job v. 26.

WE do not believe all that Job's friends said. They spoke very often as uninspired men, for we find them saying many things that are not true; and if we read the book of Job through, we might say with regard to them, "miserable comforters are ye all," for they did not speak concerning God's servant, Job, the thing that was right. But, nevertheless, they gave utterance to many holy and pious sentences, which are well worthy of regard, as having come from the lips of three men distinguished in their age for their learning, talent, and ability, three grey-headed sires, who from experience were able to speak what they knew. Their mistakes are not to be wondered at, because they had not then that clear, bright, shining light, which we enjoy in these modern times. They had few opportunities to meet together; there were but few prophets in those days who taught them the things of the kingdom. We only marvel that without the light of the gospel revelation they were able to discover so much of the truth as they did. However, I must make a remark concerning this chapter, that I cannot but regard it as being in the main, not so much the utterance of the man—who here speaks—Eliphaz the Temanite—but the very word of God; not so much the simple saying of the unwise comforter who upbraided Job, as the speech of the great Comforter who consoles His people, and who only utters the thing that is right. The opinion is justified by the fact that this chapter is quoted by the apostle Paul. Eliphaz says, in the thirteenth verse, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." And we find the apostle Paul in the Corinthians, saying, "As it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness"; thus giving sanction to this passage as having been inspired of God, at all events as being most certainly truthful. Most certainly the experience of such a man as Eliphaz is worthy of much regard, and when speaking of the general condition of God's people, that they are hid from the scourge of the tongue, "that they are not afraid of destruction when it cometh," that they laugh at destruction and famine, and so on, we may accept his words as being proven by experience, and authenticated by inspiration. "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season." Here is a very beautiful comparison, the comparison of the aged Christian—for that I take it lies on the surface of the text—to a shock of corn. Go into the harvest field, and you shall see how much the wheat reminds you of the aged believer. How much anxiety has been expended on that field! When the seed first sprung up the farmer dreaded lest the worm should bite the tender shoots, and the blade should be devoured, or lest some sharp frost should consume the infant plant and cause it to wither and die. And, then, month after month, as the seasons came, how did he anxiously look towards heaven and long that the rains might come, or that the genial sunshine might pour out its vivifying floods of light upon the field. When it has come to somewhat of maturity, how greatly has he feared lest the mildew and blast should shrivel up the precious ears. It stands in the fields now, and in some respects he is freed from his anxiety. The months of his travail are over. He has waited patiently for the precious fruits of the soil, but now they are there. And so with the grey-headed man. How many years of anxiety have been expended upon him! In his youth how likely did it seem that he might be smitten down by death, and yet he has passed safely through youth, manhood and age. What varied accidents have been warded from him! How has the shield of the Providential Keeper been over his head to keep him from the shafts of the pestilence, or from the heavy hand of accident that might have smitten his life! How many anxieties has he had himself! How many troubles has he passed through! Look upon the hoary-headed veteran! Mark the scars that troubles have inflicted upon his forehead! And see, deep written in his breast, the dark mementos of the sharp struggles and trials he has endured! And now his anxieties are somewhat over; he is come very nearly to the haven of rest. A few short years of trial and trouble shall land him on fair Canaan's coast, and we look upon him with the same pleasure that the farmer regards the wheat, because the anxiety is over, and the time of rest is now approaching. Mark how weak the stem has become! how every wind shakes it to and fro; it is withered and dried! See how the head hangs down to earth, as if it were about to kiss the dust, and show whence it had its origin! So, mark you the aged man; tottering are his steps, "they that look out of the windows are darkened, the grinders cease because they are few, and the grasshopper has become a burden." Yet even in that weakness there is glory. It is not the weakness of the tender blade, it is the weakness of the full ripe corn, it is a weakness that shows its maturity, it is a weakness that gilds it with glory. Even as the colour of the wheat is golden, so that it looks more beauteous than when the greenness of its verdure is on it, so the grey-headed man has a crown of glory on his head. He is glorious in his weakness, more than the young man in his strength, or the maiden in her beauty. Is not a shock of corn a beautiful picture of the state of man, moreover, because very soon it must be taken home? The reaper is coming. Even now I hear the sickle sharpening. The reaper hath well edged it, and he shall soon cut the corn down. See! he is coming across the field to reap his harvest; and then, by-and-by, it shall be carried into the barn and safely housed, no more subject to blight, or mildew, or insect, or disease. There it shall be secured, where no snow can fall upon it, no winds can molest it. It shall be safe and secure; and joyful shall be the time when harvest home shall be proclaimed, and the shock of corn, fully ripe, shall be carried into the farmer's garner. Such is the aged man. He, too, shall soon be taken home. Death is even now sharpening his sickle, and the angels are getting ready their chariot of gold to bear him up to the skies. The barn is built; the house is provided; soon the great Master shall say, "Bind up the tares in bundles to burn, and gather the wheat into my barn."

This morning, we shall consider *the death of Christians in general;* not of the aged Christian merely, for we shall show you that while this text does seem to bear upon the aged Christian, in reality it speaks with a loud voice to every man who is a believer. "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."

There are four things we shall mark in the text. First, we shall consider that death is *inevitable*, because it says, "Thou *shalt* come." Secondly, that death is *acceptable*, because it does not read, "I will make thee *go* to thy grave," but "thou shalt *come* there." Thirdly, that death is always *timely:* "Thou shalt come to thy grave in *full age.*" Fourthly, that death to the Christian is always *honourable*, for the promise declareth to him, "Thou shalt go to thy grave in full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."

I. The first remark, namely, that death, even to the Christian, is INEVITABLE, is very trite, simple and common, and we need scarcely have made it, but we found it necessary, in order to introduce one or two remarks upon it. How hackneyed is the thought, that all men must die, and therefore, what can we say upon it? And yet we blush not to repeat it, for while it is a truth so well known, there is none so much forgotten; while we all believe it in the theory and receive it in the brain, how seldom it is impressed on the heart? The sight of death makes us remember it. The tolling of the solemn bell speaks to us of it. We hear the deep-tongued voice of time as the bell tolls the hours and preaches our mortality. But very usually we forget it. Death is inevitable to all. But I wish to make an observation concerning death, and that is, that while it is written, "It is appointed unto men once to die," yet a time shall come when some Christian men shall not die at all. We know that had Adam never sinned he would not have died, for death is the punishment of sin, and we know that Enoch and Elijah were translated to heaven without dying. Therefore it does seem to follow, that death is not absolutely necessary for a Christian. And, moreover, we are told in Scripture, that there are some who shall be "alive and remain," when Jesus Christ shall come; and the apostle says, "I tell you a mystery—we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." There shall be some who shall be found living, of whom the apostle says, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." We know that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom; but it is possible that they may be refined by some spiritual process, which shall preclude the necessity of dissolution. Oh! I have thought of that idea very much, and I have wondered whether it should not be possible that some of us might be in that happy number who shall not see death. Even if we are not, there is something very cheering in the thought: Christ did so conquer death that He not only delivers the lawful captive out of the prison, but he saves a band from the jaws of the monster, and leads them by his den unharmed! He not only resuscitates the dead, and puts new life into those that are slain by the fell scythe, but some He actually takes to heaven by a by-road. He says to death—"Avaunt, thou monster! On these thou shalt never put thy hand! These are chosen men and women, and thy cold fingers shall never freeze the current of their soul. I am taking them straight to heaven without death. I will transport them in their bodies up to heaven without passing through thy gloomy portals, or having been captives in thy dreary land of shades." How glorious is the thought, that Christ has vanquished death; that some men shall not die. But you will say to me, "How can that be? for the body has mortality mingled with its very essence." We are told it is true, by eminent men, that there is a necessity in nature that there should be death, since one animal must prey upon another; and even could all animals be taught to give up their prey, they must feed upon plants, and so devour certain minute insects which had hidden thereon. Death therefore seems to be the law of nature. Be it remembered that men have already lived far beyond the present allotted term, and it does seem most easy to conceive that the creature, which can subsist a thousand years, could exceed that period. But this objection is not valid, since the saints will not live for ever in this world, but will be removed to a habitation where laws of glory shall supersede laws of nature.

II. And now comes a sweet thought, that death to the Christian is always ACCEPTABLE—"Thou shalt *come* to thy grave." Old Caryl makes this remark on this verse—"A willingness and a cheerfulness to die. Thou shalt *come*, thou shalt not be dragged or hurried to thy grave, as it is said of the foolish rich man, Luke xii. 'This night shall thy soul be taken from thee.' But thou shalt come to thy grave, thou shalt die quietly and smilingly, as it were; thou shalt go to thy grave, as it were upon thine own feet, and rather walk than be carried to thy sepulchre." The wicked man, when he dies, is driven to his grave, but the Christian *comes* to his grave. Let me tell you a parable. Behold two men sat together in the same house: when Death came to each of them. He said to one, "Thou shalt die." The man looked at him—tears suffused his eyes, and tremblingly he said, "O Death, I cannot, I will not die." He sought out a physician, and said to him, "I am sick, for Death hath looked upon me. His eyes have paled my cheeks, and I fear I must depart. Physician, there is my wealth, give me health and let me live." The physician took his wealth, but gave him not his health with all his skill. The man changed his physician and tried another, and thought that perhaps he might spin out the thread of life a little longer. But, alas! Death came and said, "I have given thee time to try thy varied excuses, come with me; thou shalt die." And he bound him hand and foot, and made him go to that dark land of shades. As the man went, he clutched at every side post by the way; but Death, with iron hands, still pulled him on. There was not a tree that grew along the way but he tried to grasp it, but Death said, "Come on! thou art my captive, and thou shalt die." And unwillingly as the laggard schoolboy, who goeth slowly to school, so did he trace the road with Death. He did not *come* to his grave, but Death fetched him to it—the grave came to him.

But Death said to the other man, "I am come for thee." He smilingly replied, "Ah, Death! I know thee, I have seen thee many a time. I have held communion with thee. Thou art my Master's servant, thou hast come to fetch me home. Go, tell my Master I am ready; whene'er He pleases,

Death, I am ready to go with thee." And together they went along the road, and held sweet company. Death said to him, "I have worn these skeleton bones to frighten wicked men; but I am not frightful. I will let thee see myself. The hand that wrote upon Belshazzar's wall was terrible because no man saw anything but the hand; but," said Death, "I will show thee my whole body. Men have only seen my bony hand, and have been terrified." And as they went along, Death ungirded himself to let the Christian see his body; and he smiled, for it was the body of an angel. He had wings of cherubs, and a body glorious as Gabriel. The Christian said to him, "Thou art not what I thought thou wast: I will cheerfully go with thee." At last Death touched the believer with his hand—it was even as when the mother doth in sport smite her child a moment. The child loves that loving pinch upon the arm, for it is a proof of affection. So did Death put his finger on the man's pulse, and stopped it for a moment, and the Christian found himself by Death's kind finger changed into a spirit; yea, found himself brother to the angels; his body had been etherealized, his soul purified, and he himself was in heaven. You tell me this is only a parable; but let me give you some facts that shall back it up. I will tell you some of the death-bed sayings of dying saints, and show you that, to them, Death has been an agreeable visitant, of whom they were not afraid. You will not disbelieve dying men. It were ill to act the hypocrite's part at such a time. When the play is over men will take off the mask: and so with these men when they came to die—they stood out in solemn unclothed reality.

First, let me tell you what Dr. Owen said—that celebrated prince of Calvinists. While his works are to be found, I am not afraid that men shall lack arguments to defend the Gospel of Free Grace. A friend called to tell Dr. Owen that he had put to press his "Meditations on the Glory of Christ." There was a momentary gleam in his languid eye as he answered, "I am glad to hear it. Oh!" said he, "the long-wished for time has come at last, in which I shall see that glory in another manner than I have ever done, or was capable of doing in this world."

But, you may say, this man was a mere theologian, let us hear a poet speak.

George Herbert, after some severe struggles, and having requested his wife and nieces, who were weeping in extreme anguish, to leave the room, he committed his will to Mr. Woodnott's care, crying out, "I am ready to die—Lord, forsake me not now, my strength faileth; but grant me mercy for the merits of my Lord Jesus. And now, Lord, receive my soul." Then he laid himself back and breathed out his life to God. Thus the poet dies. That glorious fancy of his, that might have pictured gloomy things if it had pleased, was only filled with rapturous sight of angels. As he used to say himself, "Methinks I hear the church bells of heaven ringing." And methinks he did hear them when he came near the river Jordan.

"But," you will say, "one was a theologian, and the other a poet—it might have been all fancy." Now learn what an active man, a missionary, said—Brainerd.

He said, "I am almost in eternity. I long to be there. My work is done. I have done with all my friends. All the world in now nothing to me. Oh, to be in heaven, to praise and glorify God with His holy angels." That is what Brainerd said. He who counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and went among wild untutored Indians to preach the gospel.

But it is possible you may say, "These were men of ages gone by." Now, you shall have men of modern times.

And first, hear what the great and eminent Scotch preacher, Haldane, said. He raised himself a little, and distinctly repeated these words, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then we shall appear with Him in glory." He was then asked if he thought he was going home. He answered, "Perhaps not quite yet." Mrs. Haldane affectionately said, "Then you will not leave us very soon." He replied with a smile, "To depart and to be with Christ is far better." On being asked if he felt much peace and happiness, he twice repeated, "Exceeding great and precious promises." He then said, "But I must rise." Mrs. Haldane said, "You are not able to get up." He smiled, and answered, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with His likeness." She said, "Is that what rising up you meant?" He replied, "Yes, that is the rising I meant. I must rise."

And now, what said Howard—the great philanthropist, the man who while possessing true religion, and being the most eminent and distinguished of Christians, would, from his plain common-sense mode of acting, never be suspected of being a fanatic and an enthusiast? A few days before his death, when the symptoms of his disease began to assume a most alarming appearance, he said to Admiral Priestman, "You endeavour to divert my mind from dwelling on death; but I entertain very different sentiments. Death has no terror for me. I always look forward to it with cheerfulness, if not with pleasure."

But perhaps you may say, "We never knew any of these people. We should like to hear of somebody whom we did know." Well, you shall hear of one whom you have heard me affectionately mention. He was not of our denomination, but he was a very prince in Israel—I refer to Joseph Irons. Many of you heard the sweet and blessed things that proceeded out of his lips, and will perhaps be able to verify what is said of him. At intervals he repeated short portions of Scripture, and select sentences, such as, "How long, Lord?" "Come, Lord Jesus!" "I long to go home, to be at rest." Seeing his dear wife shedding tears, he said, "Do not weep for me; I am waiting for that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." After a pause, to recover his breath, he added, "He that has preserved me thus far, will never leave, or forsake me. Fear not: all is well. Christ is precious. I am going home, for I am a shock of corn fully ripe." Now that is a man you did know, many of you. And it proves the fact that I have asserted, that to a Christian, death is acceptable come when it may. I am sure I can say, with many of my brethren, here, that could I now have the greatest favour conferred on me that mortals could desire, I would ask that I might die. I never wish to have the choice given to me; but to die is the happiest thing man can have, because it is to lose anxiety, it is to slay care, it is to have the peculiar sleep of the beloved. To the Christian, then, death must be acceptable.

A Christian has nothing to lose by death. You say he has to lose his friends. I am not so sure of that. Many of you have many more friends in heaven than on earth; some Christians have more

dearly beloved ones above than below. You often count your family circle, but do you do as that little girl of whom Wordsworth speaks, when she said, "Master, we are seven." Some of them were dead and gone to heaven, but she would have it that they were all brothers and sisters still. Oh! how many brothers and sisters we have upstairs in the upper room in our Father's house; how many dear ones, linked with us in the ties of relationship, for they are as much our relations now as they were then! Though in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, yet in that great world, who has said that the ties of affection shall be severed, so that we shall not even there claim kindred with one another, as well as kindred with Jesus Christ? What have we to lose by death? Come when he may, should we not open the door for him? I would love to feel like that woman who said, when she was dying, "I feel like a door on the latch, ready to be opened to let my Lord in." Is not that a sweet state, to have the house ready, so that it will require no setting in order? When death comes to a wicked man, he finds him moored fast, he snaps his cable, and drives his ship to sea; but when he comes to the Christian, he finds him winding up the anchor, and he says, "When thou hast done thy work, and shipped the anchor, I will take thee home." With sweet breath he blows on him, and the ship is wafted gently to heaven, with no regrets for life, but with angels at the prow, spirits guiding the rudder, sweet songs coming through the cordage, and canvas silvered o'er with light.

III. Then thirdly, the Christian's death is always TIMELY—"Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age." "Ah!" says one, "that is not true. Good people do not live longer than others. The most pious man may die in the prime of his youth." But look at my text. It does not say, thou shalt come to thy grave in old age—but in a "full age." Well, who knows what a "full age" is? A "full age" is whenever God likes to take His children home. There are some fruits you know that are late in coming to perfection, and we do not think their flavour is good till Christmas, or till they have gone through the frost; while some are fit for table now. All fruits do not get ripe and mellow at the same season. So with Christians. They are at a "full age" when God chooses to take them home. They are at "full age" if they die at twenty-one; they are not more if they live to be ninety. Some wines can be drunk very soon after the vintage. Others need to be kept. But what does this matter, if when the liquor is broached it is found to have its full flavour? God never broaches His cask till the wine has perfected itself. There are two mercies to a Christian. The first is that he will never die too soon; and the second, that he will never die too late.

First, he will never die *too soon*. Spencer, who blazed out so brilliantly some years ago, preached so wonderfully, that many expected that a great light would shine steadily, and that many would be guided to heaven; but when suddenly the light was quenched in darkness, and he was drowned while yet in his youth, men wept, and said, "Ah! Spencer died too soon." So it has been sung of Kirk White, the poet, who worked so laboriously at his studies. Like the eagle, who finds that the arrow that smote him was winged by a feather from his own body, so was his own study the means of his death; and the poet said he died too soon. It was untrue. He did not die too soon; no Christian ever does. But say some, "How useful might they have been had they have lived." Ah! but how damaging they might have been! And were it not better to die than to do something afterwards that would disgrace themselves, and bring disgrace to the Christian character? Were it not better for them to sleep while their work was going on, than to break it down afterwards? We have seen some sad instances of Christian men who have been very useful in God's cause, but have afterwards had sad falls, and have dishonoured Christ, though they were saved and brought back at last. We could almost wish that they had died rather than lived. You don't know what might have been the career of those men who were taken away so soon. Are you quite sure they would have done so much good? Might they not have done much evil? Could we have a dream of the future, and see what they might have been, we should say, "Ah Lord! let it stop while it is well." Let him sleep while the music playeth, there may be hideous sounds afterwards. We long not to keep awake to hear the dreary notes. The Christian dies well: he does not die too soon.

Again, the Christian never dies *too late*. That old lady there is eighty years old. She sits in a miserable room, shivering by a handful of fire. She is kept by charity. She is poor and miserable. "What's the good of her?" says everybody: "she has lived too long. A few years ago she might have been of some use; but now look at her! She can scarcely eat unless her food is put into her mouth. She cannot move; and what good can she be?" Do not you find fault with your Master's work. He is too good a husbandman to leave His wheat in the field too long and let it shale out. Go and see her; and you will be reproved. Let her speak: she can tell you things you never knew in all your life. Or, if she does not speak at all, her silent unmurmuring serenity, her constant submission, teaches you how to bear suffering. So that there is something you can learn from her yet. Say not the old leaf hangeth too long on the tree. An insect may yet twist itself therein, and fashion it into its habitation. Oh say not the old sear leaf ought to have been blown off long ago. The time is coming when it shall fall gently on the soil; but it remaineth to preach to unthinking men the frailty of their lives. Hear what God says to each of us:—"Thou shalt come to thy grave in full age." Cholera! thou mayest fly across the land and taint the air: I shall die in a "full age." I may preach to-day, and as many days as I please in the week, but I shall die at a full age. However ardently I may labour, I shall die at a full age. Affliction may come to drain my very life's blood, and dry up the very sap and marrow of my being. Ah! but affliction thou shalt not come too soon—I shall die at a full age. And thou waiting-man! and thou tarrying woman! thou art saying, "O Lord, how long? how long? Let me come home." Thou shalt not be kept from thy beloved Jesus one hour more than is necessary; thou shalt have heaven as soon as thou art ready for it. Heaven is ready enough for thee, and thy Lord will say, "Come up higher!" when thou hast arrived at a full age—but never before nor after.

IV. Now the last thing is, that a Christian will die with HONOUR: "Thou shalt come to thy grave like a shock of corn cometh in in his season." You hear men speak against funeral honours, and I certainly do enter my protest against the awful

extravagance with which many funerals are conducted, and the absurdly stupid fashions that are often introduced. It would be a happy thing if some persons could break through them, and if widows were not obliged to spend the money which they need so much themselves, upon a needless ceremony, which makes death not honourable, but rather despicable. But, methinks that while death should not be flaunted out with gaudy plumes, there is such a thing as an honourable funeral which every one of us may desire to have. We do not wish to be carried away just as a bundle of tares, we would prefer that devout men should carry us to the grave and make much lamentation over us. Some of us have seen funerals that were very like a "harvest home." I can remember the funeral of a sainted minister under whom I once sat. The pulpit was hung in black, and crowds of people came together; and when an aged veteran in the army of Christ rose up to deliver the funeral oration over his remains, there stood a weeping people lamenting that a prince had fallen that day in Israel. Then, verily, I felt what Mr. Jay must have experienced when he preached the funeral sermon for Rowland Hill, "Howl fir tree, the cedar is fallen," there was such a melancholy grandeur there. And yet my soul seemed lit up with joy, to think it possible that some of us might share in the same affection, and that the same tears might be wept over us when we come to die. Ah! my brethren here, my brethren in office, my brethren in this church, it may somewhat cheer your hearts to know that when you depart, your death will be to us a source of the deepest grief and most piercing sorrow. Your burial shall not be that prophesied for Jehoiakim —the burial of an ass, with none to weep over him; but devout men will assemble and say, "Here lies the deacon who for years served his Master so faithfully." "Here lies the Sunday-school teacher" will the child say "who early taught me the Saviour's name;" and if the minister should fall, methinks a crowd of people following him to the tomb would well give him such a funeral as a shock of corn hath when "it cometh in in his season." I believe we ought to pay great respect to the departed saints' bodies. "The memory of the just is blessed." And even ye little saints in the church, don't think you will be forgotten when you die. You may have no grave-stone; but the angels will know where you are as well without a grave-stone as with it. There will be some who will weep over you; you will not be hurried away, but will be carried with tears to your grave.

But, methinks, there are two funerals for every Christian: one, the funeral of the *body;* and the other, the *soul.* Funeral, did I say, of the soul? No, I meant not so; I meant not so; it is a marriage of the soul; for as soon as it leaves the body the angel reapers stand ready to carry it away. They may not bring a fiery chariot as erst they had for Elijah; but they have their broad spreading wings. I rejoice to believe that angels will come as convoys to the soul across the ethereal plains. Lo! angels at the head support the ascending saint, and lovingly they look upon his face as they bear him upwards; and angels at the feet, assist in wafting him up yonder through the skies. And as the husbandmen come out from their houses and cry, "A joyous harvest home," so will the angels come forth from the gates of heaven, and say, "Harvest home! harvest home! Here is another shock of corn fully ripe gathered into the garner." I think the most honourable and glorious thing we shall ever behold, next to Christ's entrance into heaven, and His glory there, is the entrance of one of God's people into heaven. I can suppose it is made a holiday whenever a saint enters, and that is continually, so that they keep perpetual holiday. Oh! methinks there is a shout that cometh from heaven whenever a Christian enters it, louder than the noise of many waters. The thundering acclamations of a universe are drowned, as if they were but a whisper in that great shout which all the ransomed raise, when they cry "Another, and yet another comes"; and the song is still swelled by increasing voices, as they chant, "Blessed Husbandman, blessed Husbandman, Thy wheat is coming home; shocks of corn fully ripe are gathering into Thy garner." Well, wait a little, beloved. In a few years more you and I shall be carried through the ether on the wings of angels. Methinks I die, and the angels approach. I am on the wings of cherubs. Oh, how they bear me up—how swiftly and yet how softly. I have left mortality with all its pains. Oh, how rapid is my flight! Just now I passed the morning star. Far behind me now the planets shine. Oh, how swiftly do I fly, and how sweetly! Cherubs! what sweet flight is yours, and what kind arms are these I lean upon. And on my way ye kiss me with the kisses of love and affection. Ye call me brother. Cherubs; am I your brother? I who just now was captive in a tenement of clay—am I your brother? "Yes!" they say. Oh, hark! I hear music strangely harmonious! What sweet sounds come to my ears! I am nearing Paradise. 'Tis e'en so. Do not spirits approach with songs of joy? "Yes!" they say. And ere they can answer, behold they come—a glorious convoy! I catch a sight of them as they are holding a great review at the gates of Paradise. And, ah! there is the golden gate. I enter in; and I see my blessed Lord. I can tell you no more. All else were things unlawful for flesh to utter. My Lord! I am with Thee—plunged into Thee—lost in Thee just as a drop is swallowed in the ocean—as one single tint is lost in the glorious rainbow! Am I lost in Thee, Thou glorious Jesus? And is my bliss consummated? Is the wedding-day come at last? Have I really put on the marriage garments? And am I Thine? Yes! I am. There is nought else now for me. In vain your harps, ye angels. In vain all else. Leave me a little while. I will know your heaven by-and-by. Give me some years, yea, give me some ages to lean here on this sweet bosom of my Lord; give me half eternity, and let me bask myself in the sunshine of that one smile. Yes; give me this. Didst speak, Jesus? "Yes, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and now thou art Mine! thou art with Me." Is not this heaven? I want nought else. I tell you once again, ye blessed spirits, I will see you by-and-by. But with my Lord I will now take my feast of loves. Oh, Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Thou art heaven! I want nought else. I am lost in Thee!

Beloved, is not this to go to "the grave in full age, like as a shock of corn," fully ripe? The sooner the day shall come, the more we shall rejoice. Oh, tardy wheels of time! speed on your flight. Oh, angels, wherefore come ye on with laggard wings? Oh! fly through the ether and outstrip the lightning's flash! Why may I not die? Why do I tarry here? Impatient heart, be quiet a little while. Thou art not fit for heaven yet, else thou wouldst not be here. Thou hast not done thy work, else thou wouldst

have thy rest. Toil on a little longer; there is rest enough in the grave. Thou shalt have it there. On! on!

"With my scrip on my back, and my staff in my hand,
I'll march on in haste, thro' an enemy's land.
Though the way may be rough it cannot be long;
So I'll smooth it with hope, and I'll cheer it with song."

My dear friends, you who are not converted, I have no time to say anything to you this morning. I wish I had. But I pray that all I have said may be yours. Poor hearts, I am sorry I cannot tell you this is yours now. I would I could preach to every one of you, and say that you all shall be in heaven. But God knoweth there are some of you that are on the road to hell; and do not suppose you will enter heaven, if you go hell's road. Nobody would expect, if he proceeded to the north, to arrive at the south. Nay; God must change thine heart. By simple trust in Jesus, if thou givest thyself up to His mercy, even though the vilest of the vile, thou shalt sing before His face. And methinks, poor sinner, thou wilt say to me, as a poor woman did last Wednesday, after I had been preaching, when I believe everybody had been crying, from the least to the greatest, and even the preacher in the pulpit. As I went down, I said to one, "Are you chaff or wheat?" And she said, "Ah! I trembled to-night, sir." I said to another, "Well, sister, I hope we shall be in Paradise soon." And she replied, "*You* may, sir." And I came to another, and said, "Well, do you think you will be gathered with the wheat?" And she answered, "One thing I can say—if God ever lets me get into heaven, I will praise Him with all my might. I will sing myself away and shall never think I can sing loud enough." It reminded me of what an old disciple once said: "If the Lord Jesus does but save me He shall never hear the last of it." Let us praise God, then, eternally—

"While life, or thought, or being lasts,
Or immortality endures!"

Now may the Three-One God dismiss you with His blessing.

A CURE FOR UNSAVOURY MEATS: OR, SALT FOR THE WHITE OF AN EGG

"Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?"—Job vi. 6.

THIS is a question which Job asked of his friends, who turned out to be so unfriendly. Thus he battles with those "miserable comforters" who inflamed his wounds by pouring in verjuice and vinegar instead of oil and wine. The first of them had just opened fire upon him, and Job by this question was firing a return shot. He wanted the three stern watchers to understand that he did not complain without cause. If he had spoken bitterly, it was because he suffered grievously. He was in great bodily pain; he was enduring great mental depression; and at the same time he had been smitten with poverty and bereavement; he had, therefore, reason for his sorrow. He had no comforts left, and every arrow of grief was sticking in his flesh: if he did groan, he had something to groan for. His were not sorrows which he had imagined; they were real and true, and hence he asks this question first, "Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? or loweth the ox over his fodder?" If these creatures lift up their notes of complaint, it is when they are starving. When the wild ass cannot find a mouthful of grass anywhere, then his complaint is heard far and near. When the ox at the stall has no fodder—when he is fastened there, and no husbandman brings him provision—then he lows, and there is good reason for his bellowing. Job seems to say, "I do not complain without cause. If I still enjoyed my former comforts, or even a tithe of them, you should hear no voice of murmuring from me. But I am tried to the utmost. I am grievously afflicted, and there is overflowing cause for my moanings." He had lost all care to breathe; the zest of life was gone; no joy remained to make existence worth the having. He was like one who finds no flavour in his food, and loathes the morsel which he swallows. That which was left to him was tasteless as the white of an egg; it yielded him no kind of comfort; in fact, it was disgusting to him. He was fed, he says, upon meat which yielded him no solace. "The things that my soul refused to touch are as my sorrowful meat." Therefore, he virtually asks his friends, "How can you expect me to eat such meat as this without sighs and tears? Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? Is there any taste in the white of an egg?" He means that everything about him had lost its flavour, and life had become dull and dreary to him, and therefore they must not wonder that he uttered words of complaint.

The speech, also, to which Job had listened from Eliphaz the Temanite did not put much sweetness into his mouth; for it was devoid of sympathy and consolation. If you read it at home you will see that it was worthy to be the first of a singular selection of galling utterances. Job, we must admit, was sufficiently acid himself, and abundantly sarcastic; but his friends produced the irritation, and took care always to repay him double for all his wormwood. For every hard speech of his they returned compound interest. They grieved and vexed his upright soul till he said no more than the truth when he cried, "Miserable comforters are ye all." Here he tells them that Eliphaz had administered unto him unsavoury meat without salt;—mere whites of eggs, without taste. Not a word of love, pity, or fellow-feeling had the Temanite uttered. He had spoken as harshly and severely as if he were a judge addressing a criminal who was suffering no more than he deserved. Looking at the speech, and looking at all his surroundings, poor Job feels that he has very unsavoury meat

to eat, and he asks them whether they expect him to eat it without salt. They have given him something that is more gratifying to him than the white of an egg, and he enquires if they really think that he can accept this at their hands, and thank them for their treatment.

We may now forget the much-tortured patriarch Job, and apply this text to ourselves. "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Three thoughts arise out of it.

I. The first point will be this, that A WANT OF SAVOUR IS A VERY GREAT WANT in anything that is meant for food. I am not going to deliver a cookery lecture, and so I shall not enlarge upon the passage so far as it refers to the bread upon our table, or the food which we eat and drink. Everybody knows that all kinds of animal life delight in food that has a flavour in it; and even "dumb driven cattle" will turn away from dry, flavourless food, and will go a long way to find something that has a juice and a taste in it which suits the palate which God has created in them. It is exactly the same with regard to the food of our souls. It is a very great fault with a sermon when there is no savour in it. It is a killing fault to the people of God when a book contains a good deal of what may be true, but yet lacks holy savour—or what, in other words, we call "unction." Somebody says, "Tell us what unction is." I can much more easily tell you what it is not. You know a discourse when there is savour in it; and you also know when a sermon is dry, sapless, marrowless; and yet you could not state the difference in words. Some sermons could not even be suspected of anything like unction, their authors would sneer at you if you accused them of it; but salt is still to be had; the fat things, full of marrow, are not quite out of the market yet. But what kind of savour is that which we expect in a sermon?

I answer, first, it is *a savour of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Years ago, before ministers grew so wise as to question the inspiration of Scripture, and renounce the doctrine of atonement, there used to be men in the country whose ministry was full of savour to the people of God. There were numbers of Christians in London who would go to the north, or go to the south, or go to the east, or go to the west to hear such preachers, and count it a great feast to listen to them. What was there about them? Were they great critics? I do not suppose that the good men ever read a work on criticism. Were they profoundly learned? Assuredly they were not. Profoundly learned brethren were preaching in churches and chapels where there were more spiders than people. Those who displayed their learning and rhetoric had empty places, but these men were followed by multitudes, and wherever they spoke the places were too strait for them. Those who did not know the reason said one to another, "What is there about these men? We do not see any peculiar talent." And there was not much. "We do not see any profound learning." And there was none to see. "We do not hear anything of advanced thought and liberal ideas." No, these good men were innocent of these modern diseases. Yet there are people of God to-night, now grey-headed, who recollect the happy hours they spent, and the joyful seasons they knew while hearing these men, and how they journeyed home perhaps seven or eight or ten miles from such a sermon, and only wished they could go again the next night, when their labour was done, to be fed again. What was it that made this preaching so attractive, so edifying. What drew the Lord's people so far? What evoked such enthusiasm? Why, it was that the preacher spoke of his Lord, and never wandered from the cross. When we were children we learned Dr. Watts's catechism of the Bible; and I remember one question—"Who was Isaiah?" and the answer was, "He was that prophet who spoke more of Jesus Christ than all the rest." Who were these men, then, that were followed by God's people so earnestly? They were men that spoke more of Jesus Christ than all the rest. You have read Dr. Hawker's Morning and Evening Portions, perhaps? I do not suppose that you have learned much of fresh exposition from them, or that you have been struck with any great originality of idea in them; but if you have read, them profitably you have said to yourself, "Well this one point there is in Hawker,—his subject is Christ on the first January, Christ on the last of December, and Christ all the other days of the year." He speaks of nothing else but Christ. He seems to bring forth the Lord Jesus in his portions every day as a matter of course, just as your maid always puts the bread on the table, whatever else she does not place there. So it was with Hawker and men like him, Christ crucified, was their all in all. Their dear Lord and Master was never long absent from their discoursing. If they preached doctrine, it was "the truth as it is *in Jesus.*" If they preached experience, it was "to know *Him* and the fellowship of His sufferings." And if they went into practice, as they did, their idea of holiness was to be made like to Jesus and to follow Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. Now, I do not believe a sermon can have savour in it unless it has Christ in it, for He has the savour of all good ointments, and there is no sweetness without Him. What shall we say of Him? "Thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love Thee." His name is so fragrant that it perfumes heaven itself: Jehovah smells a savour of rest in the name, and person, and work of His well-beloved Son. Therefore an essential to savoury meat is that it shall have Christ in it. He has said, "My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed," and there is no meat and no drink that has such savour in it as this. Oh, that we might hear more of a crucified Christ in all our places of assembly!

The next necessity to secure savour is a devout spirit in the preacher—a *savour of devotion.* I am trying to explain savour by not attempting a definition, but by noticing its accompaniments. Why, those men who have now gone to heaven, whom you used to hear, seemed to be praying while they preached: their sermons were devotions as well as discourses; their rhetoric was rapture, their oratory was emotion. Their preaching came from the heart; but it came also from "the deep that lieth under," that secret reservoir of everlasting truth which is opened up by the Spirit to those who know the Lord, and to none else. They could say, "All my fresh springs are in Thee"; they drew up the truth which they preached out of this deep, out of the very heart of God. They preached the gospel of grace as men that knew it, loved it, lived on it. It was no irksome task to them to speak of Christ, and grace, and pardon, and covenant faithfulness. You could not always see traces of elaboration or even of preparation about their utterances; but you could see something

better—the sparkling salt of grace. If the midnight oil had not smeared their sermons, the unction of the Spirit had anointed them. Their heart was inditing a good matter, for they spake the things which they had made touching the King. They spake with such cheerfulness and reverence that it was good to hear them. They spake with profound belief that what they said was infallibly true, for had they not received it fresh from the Spirit of God? Coming from their heart, it went to your heart, and by their realizing faith you were helped to believe it joyfully. It is an ill sign when the teacher of truth does not himself believe it; for thus he becomes a virtual spreader of error. David said, "I believed: therefore have I spoken." Do you not believe, brother? Then go home and be quiet till you do. At least, do not come into the pulpit until you know what your Lord would have you say. Woe to the man who lets the smoke of undried wood come from off his hearth and blow into poor seekers' eyes. We want live coals from off the altar, and the less doubt-smoke the better. Where a man has evidently been with God to learn the truth, and has been baptized into the everlasting spirit of that truth, and therefore speaks what he does know and testifies what he has seen in the fear of the living God, there is a savour about his witness, and the saints discern it gladly. This holy savour cannot be imitated or borrowed; it must come of personal assurance. It is a holy thing, and the composition thereof is known only to the great Giver of all spiritual gifts, the Lord Himself. It is a holy anointing oil, which comes not on man's flesh, and is far removed from all carnality. It never comes on any man except as it descends from Him who is "the Head," and so drops even to the skirts of His garments. From Christ alone the true anointing comes, and blessed is he who is made partaker with Him.

Very well, then, as food without savour is an evil and undesirable sort of food, so is all Christian teaching unacceptable if it lack the savour of Christ, and of devotion.

Another matter goes to make up sweet savour in a discourse, and that is, a *savour of experience*. You used to delight in those men because they had tasted and tested the doctrines which they preached. The younger brethren were somewhat at a discount, because you said, "That good brother speaks fluently, but he cannot have experienced so much as the man of God under whom I have now sat for many years." You prefer to have the truth spoken to you by one who has felt for himself the renewing, upholding, and comforting power of divine grace; and I cannot blame you for your liking. If the preacher has done business on great waters, in deep soul trouble, or personal affliction, so much the better for you. If he is one who loves much because much has been forgiven him, so much the better for you. If he is a man conscious of his own infirmity and weakness, who speaks humbly of himself as out of the very dust, though he speaks confidently the word from heaven, so much the better for you. Such experience puts a kind of spice into the food which he presents to you. It is so in all our communications one to another. We do not speak with certainty of edification unless we speak of what we have ourselves enjoyed. I have been greatly benefited by hearing an aged blind man stand up and tell of the faithfulness of God Himself. I have been much encouraged at times by hearing a poor but gracious woman near to the gates of death telling with tears in her eyes of the goodness of the Lord to her. Testimonies from such people have weight in them. These people do not play at religion. Poor and tried people, people with aches and pains, people who have none of this world's comforts, people on the borders of the grave, tell us of the great Father's love, and when they do so there is great force of conviction in their testimony. We attach weight to every word they say because their experience is taken into consideration. I never heard a man who spoke more to my soul than dear Mr. George Müller. The sermon that I heard from him was like an address to a Sunday-school, it was so simple and unadorned; but then there was the man behind it—that simple-hearted child of God who has believed the promises, and has gone on doing wonders such as astonish all beholders. That man has no more doubt about God's answering his prayers than he has about twice two making four—why should he have? He acts out the truth which he has received—why should he not? Entertaining no modern questions and no ancient questions either, he triumphs by knowing the truth and living the truth, and rejoicing in the truth. Such a man is a pattern and example to us all, and there is a precious savour in what he utters, because he speaks experimentally of truths which he has carried out in his own life.

Thus three things help to make up savour in sermons—Christ as the doctrine, devotion as the spirit, and experience as adding weight to testimony.

But these three things are not the whole of it. There is a sacred something: it is not nameless, for I will name it by-and-by: it is a heavenly influence which comes into man, but which has no name among the things that belong to men. This sacred influence pervades the speaker, flavouring his matter, and governing his spirit, while at the same time it rests upon the hearer so that he finds his mind awake, his faculties attentive, his heart stirred. Under this mysterious influence the hearer's spirit is in a receptive condition, and as he hears the truth it sinks into his soul as snow-flakes drop into the sea. He finds himself warmed, and cheered, and comforted, and stirred up, as fainting men are wont to be when refreshed after a long fast. Now, what is this? Whence comes this savour? In a word, it cometh of *the Holy Ghost*. The Holy Spirit bears witness with the word upon the quickened heart and conscience of the people of God, and that word becomes life, light, and power to them.

All this we greatly need; and if we have it not, what shall we do? I have often trembled as I have come to preach here lest I should have to speak among you without the help of the Divine Spirit. It would be much better to be silent. I could almost wish that we had the liberty of our Quaker friends just to sit still until we feel that we are moved to speak; for sometimes we might do better to wait without a spoken word for the hour and a half rather than for one of us to talk without the guidance of the Spirit of God. Pray much, beloved, that there may be a great deal of dew about—that heavenly showers may fall on us and on all the churches of God. Let our belief in the Holy Ghost never become a mere compliment which we feel bound to pay Him; but in deep and reverent sincerity may we own that He is the great worker in the church—the real actor and doer of the wondrous works of quickening, saving, and comforting. Let us wait upon Him with lowly

spirits, feeling that we can do nothing without Him, but that if He be with us then all is well.

Take away from any preaching or any teaching Christ as the subject, devotion as the spirit, experience as the strength of testimony, and the Holy Ghost as being all in all, and you have removed all the savour; and what is left? What can we do with a savourless gospel? "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? Is there any taste in the white of an egg?" They said of a brother the other day, that he liked savoury doctrine. "He had a sweet tooth," they said. It was said in scorn; but if there is anything to be scoffed at in that matter I desire to be a partaker in the reproach, for I have a sweet tooth myself. I like such books as have savour in them; and I protest to you that whatever scorn it brings upon me, that the majority of modern books seem to me to be fit for nothing but to be burned. The old theology has the sweetness and the savour in it which the people of God delight in, and I for one mean to stick to it; for I cannot eat the white of your eggs; I cannot endure your unsavoury meat. I must hear of the electing love and covenant purpose of the Father—this is savoury meat such as my soul loveth. I must have teaching full of Christ and the doctrines of grace and the Holy Spirit, or my soul will die of famine. This is my first head.

II. Our second remark is this. I find a rendering given to the text, which, if it be not absolutely accurate, nevertheless states an important truth, namely, that THAT WHICH IS UNSAVOURY FROM WANT OF SALT MUST NOT BE EATEN. I shall only mention this second head as a note of caution. A word to the wise suffices.

There is a great deal in this world which is unsavoury for want of salt: I mean *in common conversation.* Alas, it is easy to meet with people—and even people wearing the Christian name—whose conversation has not a particle of salt in it. Nothing that tends to edification is spoken by them. Their talk has an abundance of gaiety, but no grace in it. They exhibit any amount of frivolity, but no godliness. In other conversation there is information weighty and solid upon common matters; but there is a lack of that spirit which God's people desire to live in, for the Lord Jesus is forgotten. Someone said to me the other day, "When we were young people, we knew many good old folk who used to meet together and talk about the Lord Jesus Christ by the hour together, and we used to sit and wonder whether we should ever join in such talk as that. But where do you hear it now?" So I said to him, "I hope that we can hear it in a great many places." "Ah," said he, "I do not meet with it. I find that the ordinary talk among professors has not much in it for the helping of souls onward towards heaven." I do not profess to form a judgment on this matter, but I will say this—that it is a great pity if holy converse be a scarce commodity; and it is well for you and for me to get away from that conversation which does not benefit us. If there is no salt in conversation, it will be unsavoury to a true Christian spirit, and the less he has of it the better.

Again, there is some talk in the world—I hope not among professors—which has no salt in it even of common morality; and consequently it corrupts, and becomes impure and obnoxious. Old Trapp says, somewhat roughly, that it is full of maggots, and that is perhaps what Job meant. That is to say, many persons use coarse allusions, and evil suggestions: to such things shut your ears. Things are often said which sparkle, but the flash is born of decay. The wit which owes its pungency to sin is of the devil. The brilliance which comes of corruption is not for holy eyes. Oh, child of God, never tolerate it in your company! If it be not in your power to stop evil communications, remove yourself out of their reach. It is not for us to associate with those whose lips are cankered with lascivious words. We have enough within these gunpowder hearts to make us afraid to go near the forge when the sparks are flying about. Let us keep ourselves from ever permitting corrupt communication to proceed out of our own lips: that would be horrible indeed. Let us avoid all company wherein the purity of a renewed heart would be in danger of taint. Yet I fear me that in our daily avocations we shall have grave cause to watch against the things which are unsavoury and corrupt, for the preserving salt is not so abundantly used in these days as it ought to be.

Now, *the same thing is true,* not only of common conversation, but *of a great deal of modern teaching.* Have nothing to do with teaching that is tainted with heresy, brethren. If a man's discoursing has not salt enough in it to keep false doctrine out of it, it is not the kind of food for you. Clean provender is not so scarce that you need to eat carrion. Some like their meat rather high, and there are hearers who are inclined to a preacher who has a sniff of heresy about him; but, as for us, our taste conducts us where salt is found. Where grace is lacking we are not eager to be feeding. The banquets of truth need not be supplemented by the tables of error.

But I shall not dwell upon this, because I require all my time for the third head.

III. The third point is, that THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS IN THE WORLD WHICH NEED SOMETHING ELSE WITH THEM. "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?"

There are many things in this world which we cannot tolerate by themselves: they need seasoning with them. One of the first of these may read us a lesson of prudence; that is, *reproof.* It is a Christian duty to reprove a brother who is in a fault, and we should speak to him with all gentleness and quietness, that we may prevent his going farther into evil, and lead him back to the right way. But will you please remember, brothers and sisters, that the giving of reproofs is dainty work, and needs a delicate hand. It was said of good Andrew Fuller that frequently he gave a rebuke so severely that it reminded you of one who saw a fly upon his brother's forehead, and seized a sledge hammer to knock it off. It is the habit of some brethren to do everything forcibly; but in this case one needs more love than vigour, more prudence than warmth, more grace than energy. Some persons have a very quick eye for the faults of others, and they have a ready tongue to descant upon them when they perceive them; to all which they add a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the fault. Now, these brethren always reprove in a wrong way. Listen. One of them cries,—"Come here, brother! Come here. Let me take that beam out of your eye." The aforesaid "beam" is really only a mote; and the brother who is addressed becomes indignant at such injustice, and will not have his eye touched at all. Why destroy your own influence by such unwisdom? If the mote can be removed, well and good; but if you will ruin the

eye in the process, would it not be better to let it alone? We have known persons who, to spread truth, have killed love, which is truth's life. They wish to set a brother right in doctrine, and, in order that his sight may be clearer, they knock his eye out, and call it "controversy." It is one thing to be "valiant for the truth," and quite another thing to be bitter for your own opinion. Rebuke, however kindly you put it, and however prudently you administer it, will always be an unsavoury thing: therefore, salt it well. Think over it. Pray over it. Mix kindness with it. Rub the salt of brotherly love into it. Speak with much deference to your erring friend, and use much tenderness, because you are not faultless yourself. Speak acknowledging all the excellences and virtues of your brother which may, after all, be greater than your own; and try, if you can, to wrap up what you have to say in gentle words of praise for something else wherein the friend excels. Express the rebuke in one of your Master's sentences, if you can find one that will exactly fit. Give your patient the pill silver-coated with gentleness; it will be received the more willingly and have none the less efficacy. If you speak unkindly, the reproved one may turn round upon you in anger, and if you ask him why he is wroth, he may answer, "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Do not expect your neighbour to eat your eggs without salt. Do not expect him to receive your words of rebuke without the true kindliness of voice and spirit which will act as salt. Be not silent about sin, but be not harsh in your rebuke of it. Savour your admonitions with affection, and may the Lord make them acceptable to those who need them.

Now for other matters which many people do not like themselves; I mean, *the doctrine of the gospel*. The true doctrines of the gospel never were popular, and never will be; but there is no need for any of us to make them more distasteful than they naturally are. The human heart especially revolts at the sovereignty of divine grace. Man is a king, so he thinks, and when he hears of another king he straightway grows rebellious. Man would have God bound hand and foot to give His mercy as man likes; and when the Lord defies the bond and declares, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," man burns with wrath. When the Lord saith, "It is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy," man is up in arms. He will not brook the divine prerogative. It becomes us who preach this doctrine to take care that we do not add needless offensiveness to it. No one of the doctrines of grace is palatable to man naturally. He does not like the truth of total depravity. Over that he grows exceeding wroth. He calls it a libel upon the nobility of human nature. I have often read of human nature as a noble thing; but I am sorry to say that I have never seen it in that respect. I am told that our fallen nature is sublime, and that we defame mankind when we speak of them as altogether fallen and say, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." It is little wonder that this is unsavoury to carnal pride. As to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Mrs. Toogood stamps her foot at such teaching—is she to be none the better for all her good works? Mr. Good-Enough gnashes his teeth at the idea that human merits cannot save. He cannot endure to hear that we must be saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and that the most moral and excellent need Christ quite as much as the most depraved and abandoned. Carnal minds have no taste for the gospel: they rave against the system of theology that glorifies God. Man wants to be the great Man, and he would have God to be the little god, and then he will be satisfied; but if God be set on high as filling all in all, then straightway many are offended.

Brothers and sisters, since we want people to receive these doctrines, what must we do? We must mix an abundance of salt with them. If the gospel be distasteful we must add a flavouring to it. What shall it be? We cannot do better than flavour it with holiness! Where there is a holy life men cannot easily doubt the principles out of which it springs. If it be so that men and women are kindly, generous, tender, affectionate, upright, truthful, Christ-like, because of the doctrines they hold, then the world begins to think that there must be truth in those doctrines. The evangelical school must always draw its strongest arguments first from the gospel, and next from the lives of its believers; and if we cannot point to those who profess this faith as being famous for holiness, what will the world say? In former ages holy living has been our battle-axe and weapons of war. Look at the Puritanic age. To this day it is the stumbling-block of infidelity. In these times it is very common to laugh at the Puritans, and to say that their faith is outworn, and that we have got beyond their teaching; and yet the very same men who say this cannot read Carlyle's writings without marvelling at Oliver Cromwell, and the great men who trooped around him. Do they never say to themselves, Upon what meat did these men feed that they have grown so great? They cannot turn to the lives of the Puritans without reading how they saturated all England with godliness, till as you passed down Cheapside in the morning you would have noticed that there was scarcely a single house in which the blinds were not drawn down because the inhabitants were at family prayer. The whole land felt the force of truth and righteousness through these men—these poor, benighted, foolish Puritans, whom our boys fresh from college call by ill names. In their contests for truth the Puritans were as mighty as Cromwell's Ironsides in the days of battle, when they drove the foe before them like chaff before the wind. Then there followed an age of drivelling, in which our Nonconformity existed, but gradually dwindled down, first into Arminianism, and then into Unitarianism, until it almost ceased to be. Men know that it was so, and yet they would act it all over again. They read history, and yet demand that the old doctrines should again be given up, and the experiment be tried again of starving our churches with human philosophies. Oh, fools, and slow of heart! Will not history teach them? No, it will not if the Bible does not. If they hear not Christ and His apostles, neither will they believe even though another Unitarian ghost should pass before their eye. Surely evil days are near, unless the church shall again clasp the truth to her heart.

But I diverge. The point I had in hand was this—that in the case of the Puritans their doctrines were rendered respectable and forceful by their glorious lives; and it must be so now. Holy living must salt our doctrines. We must be like Christ that men may believe what we have to say about Christ.

Now, a third egg which cannot be eaten without

salt is *affliction*. Afflictions are very unsavoury things. I think I hear one say, "I should not mind any affliction except the one which now oppresses me." Brother, you speak as other foolish brethren have done before you. This has been my language in my turn. Somebody sitting next to you would not mind your affliction at all; at least, he thinks so; it is his own cross which is so galling. The loads borne by people in yonder street have no great weight for you; but if you had to carry a sack of flour yourself, the sack would prove very heavy. We all know the weight of our burden, but we underestimate that of others. People in trouble know where their own shoe pinches; yet other people's shoes pinch too, and other people's crosses are weighty. "No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." Afflictions are unsavoury meat. What is to be done with them, then? Why, let us salt them, if we can. Salt your affliction with patience, and it will make a royal dish. By grace, like the apostle, we shall "glory in tribulations also." Look at those who endure constant infirmities. Do you know any? I do. A dear sister has been blind many years, and yet I do not know a happier woman than she is. She has more visions of joy than the most of us, though her eyes are closed to the light of the sun. I know a brother in the ministry who has lost his sight almost entirely; but he preaches more sweetly than ever he did; he has become a seer in our Israel, enjoying a depth of insight into truth which few possess. Truly the lame take the prey! Some that are deaf hear the voice of their Master better than others. And so infirmities become things to glory in, since Christ's power the better rests upon us.

It is so when the Lord gives grace to the poor man and he becomes contented with his lot. Has he not far greater joy than the rich man who still craves for more? Many of God's poor prisoners in the martyr days were happier in prison than ever they were out of it: in the days of the Covenanters, when they worshipped God on the bleak hill or by the moss side, the Lord was specially near to them. When those times had passed away, and they went to kirk decorously, and sat with the congregation undisturbed, they said, "Ah, man, the Lord was not here to-day as He was out on the brae and on the hill-side." The Master was transfigured before His disciples among the mists of the glens. Then He wore no veil over His face, but He revealed Himself so clearly that the sanctuary among the hills was none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven. The Lord salted their afflictions with His presence, and with the abundant power of the Holy Ghost, and so they enjoyed a sweet savour in them. It is even thus with you and me.

> "I can do all things, or can bear
> All sufferings, if my Lord be there;
> Sweet pleasures mingle with the pains,
> While His left hand my head sustains."

There now, brother, do not go on eating that egg without salt; no longer say to yourself, "Here is nothing but the white, with no taste in it. I cannot bear to eat such loathsome food." Put the salt in, brother: put the salt in, sister. Have you been forgetting that salt? Have you failed to ask of the Lord grace equal to your day?—grace to see that "all things work together for good to them that love God"? Be forgetful no longer, but throw in a pinch of salt; then the tasteless thing will go down comfortably enough and you will bless the name of the Lord for it.

I will not detain you longer to speak about *persecution*, though that is another unsavoury article, with which salt of consolation is much to be desired.

But, lastly, there is *the thought of death*. Is not death an unsavoury thing in itself? The body dreads dissolution and corruption, and the mind starts back from the prospect of quitting the warm precincts of this house of clay, and going into what seems a cold, rarefied region, where the shivering spirit flits naked into mystery untried. Who likes to sit down and think of his last hour,—the corpse, the coffin, and the shroud? The spade, and the mattock, and the falling clods make poor music for gay minds? Who cares for charnel houses? Oh, but dear friends, thoughts of death, when they are salted, are among the richest, daintiest things that ever come to the believer's table; for what is it to die? Is it not to end our pilgrimage, and come to the place where the many mansions be? Is it not to quit the storm-tossed seas for the Fair Havens where all is bliss for ever? Death strips the soul of its garments, and by itself this seems a trying process; but season it well, and you will long for evening in order to undress, that you may rest with God. Salt it well, and you will almost grow impatient of your length of days, and look for your last hours as children do for their holidays, when they may go home. Salt it well, and your heart will grow like hers whose husband tarries away, and she reckons how long it will be before he will come home again to her house and to her heart. You will cry, "Why are His chariots so long in coming?" I have known saints to salt their thoughts of death until they were transfigured into antepasts of heaven, and they began to drink of that wine of the kingdom which the Beloved will drink new with us in the day of His appearing. Oh, happy spirits who can do this! "What salt," say you, "shall I mingle with my thoughts of death?" Why the thought that you cannot die: since because *He* lives you shall live also. Add to it the persuasion that though you be dead, yet shall you live. Thoughts of the resurrection and the swinging open of the pearly gates, and of your entrance there; thoughts of the vision of the Well-beloved's face; thoughts of the glory that shall be yours for ever and ever at His own right hand—these are the things with which to savour your meditations among the tombs.

As for you that are not in Christ, you *must* eat this unsavoury meat, and there will be no salt with it. I see you put it away from you. You say, "No, I do not mean to think of death." O, man, but you will have to die, and it may be full soon. O, woman, you will have to die; the seeds of death are in your bosom now. As surely as you live, you will have to die; and after death the judgment. This is the meat which will be laid in your dish, and there will be no leaving it. This is the white of the egg, and you must even down with it, whether you will or no. It has not taste which your palate can enjoy; it has no savour about it but that of fear. Ah, when your conscience awakes, what will you do with the burning thought that, dying, you must go where hope can never come? O soul, if you pass out of this world as you are, you can never see the face of God with joy, but you must be driven from His presence and from the glory of His power to know what that meaneth—"Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." They say that everlasting

does not mean everlasting. What then? Are the righteous to perish after a while? In these two sentences the same word must mean the same thing—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." If eternal life lasts for ever, so must eternal punishment. When the righteous cease to be, the wicked will cease to be; when the godly cease their joy, the ungodly will cease their misery; but not till then. That is unsavoury meat for you. The Lord help you to salt it, even yet, by believing in Jesus, and so finding eternal salvation. Amen.

THE HAND OF GOD IN THE HISTORY OF MAN

"Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?"—Job vii. 1

I WAS settling myself down yesterday to meditate upon the Word of God, and to prepare my mind to preach the gospel to you to-day, when, on a sudden, I had my subject marked out for me by a mournful messenger, for the angel of death pointed to it with his finger. There came into my chamber an honoured elder of this church, who in broken, accents told me "our beloved brother, Henry Olney is dead." He is my near neighbour, and I was in his house so lately that I could not realise the news. It seems that when he left the City at noon he felt a severe rheumatic pain in his shoulder, and on reaching home he sent for a doctor, who prescribed a slight remedy and advised him to lie down. He did so, and with a gasp or two he expired. A man in the prime of life, and apparently in full vigour of health, he went to his business for the last time that morning, and returned to die. The blow has fallen so suddenly that I am stunned and staggered by it, nor do I think that either of his three brothers, whose familiar faces we miss this morning, have yet recovered from the amazement caused by the stroke. Many around me were with him so short a time since that it is hard to believe one's own eyes and feel sure that there he lies a cold corpse, motionless upon the bed. But, O, my brethren, how true it is that in the midst of life we are in death; and those often die first who least expected to go. If I had said to you this morning that our brother William Olney was gone, you would have said, "We are grieved at our loss, but we do not wonder, for he has been long sick"; but here the strong and stalwart brother, who ailed nothing, has been taken away, while, thank God, the languishing invalid is still spared to us. Thus do they remain who expected to depart, and they depart who expected to remain. Who among us can reckon upon a single hour? We talk of being living men: let us correct ourselves, and feel from this moment that we are dying men, whose every breath brings them nearer to the grave. We are and are not; we walk in a vain show, and are disquieted in vain. We are unsubstantial as the shadows of the flying clouds which on a summer's day flit over the face of the field and are gone.

When I look at that seat where our departed friend sat for years, the Lord seems to have come very near to us. I could almost put off my shoes from my feet in awful consciousness of His terrible presence. We can no longer think of the Lord as far away in heaven, He has been among us, He who toucheth the hills and they smoke, has set His eyes upon our brother, and lo! he is not. Let me put it in a gentler manner: our Lord came into His garden to gather lilies, and His hand has been filled to our sorrow. When our heavenly Father comes so near to us, and in so solemn a manner, let us ask Him wherefore He contendeth with us. Let us in solemn reverence approach Him that we may hear His answer, and may be obedient to His word. The flower of the field stands amid the grass unconscious that the mower's scythe is busy, and though swath after swath has fallen beneath the pitiless stroke, the floweret smiles gaily, it cares not for its associate in the same field, and recks not of its own speedy fall. Its leaves are wet with dew, and its colours are bright in the sun, it mourns not for its fellows, but rejoices in unconsciousness of all that happens around it. In this respect ye are not as the grass of the field, but are endowed with understanding, so that ye are able to be instructed, or at least warned, by the fall of those around you. The sheep in their folds remark not that their fellows are taken away to the slaughter. The cattle graze in the meadows in happy ignorance that death is abroad. Ye, however, are not "dumb, driven cattle." To you it is given to know your own mortality, and you cannot suffer your comrades to be taken away one after another so rapidly, without feeling emotion, and gathering wisdom. Ye will hear the rod, and Him that hath appointed it, and this morning ye will ask grace that the dead may be your schoolmasters and yourselves the scholars who cry "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

As best I shall be able this morning, I shall try and teach you, by the help of God's Spirit, one lesson. It is this—*divine appointment rules human life*; and when we have learned that lesson, we shall, in the second place, *draw inferences from this truth.*

I. First, then, let us consider a truth which, I trust, none of us have ever denied, but have heartily accepted ever since we have been believers. THERE IS A DIVINE APPOINTMENT RULING ALL HUMAN LIFE. Not that I single out man's existence as the sole object of divine forethought, far rather do I believe it to be but one little corner of illimitable providence. A divine appointment arranges every event, minute or magnificent. As we look out on the world from our quiet room it appears to be a mass of confusion. He who studies history and forgets God might think that he was looking out on chaos and old night, for events seem flung together in terrible disarray, and the whole scene is as darkness itself, without any order. Events happen which we deeply deplore—incidents which appear to bring evil, and

only evil, and we wonder why they are permitted. The picture before us, to the glance of reason, looks like a medley of colour, with dark shades where lights seemed needful, and glowing colour where we might have looked for masses of black. Human affairs are a maze of which we cannot discover the clue. The world appears to be a tangled skein, and we weary ourselves with vain endeavours to disentangle it.

But, brethren, the affairs of this world are neither tangled, nor confused, nor perplexing to Him who seeth the end from the beginning. To Him all things are in due course and order, and before Him all forces keep rank and file. God is in all, and rules all. In the least as well as in the greatest, Jehovah's power is manifested. He guides the grain of dust in the March wind, and the comet in its immeasurable pathway; He steers each drop of spray which is beaten back from the face of the rock, and He leads forth Arcturus with his sons. God is the dictator of destinies, and appoints both means and ends. He is the King of kings, ruling rulers and guiding counsellors. Alike in the crash of battle and in the hush of peace, in the desolation of pestilence and famine, and in the joy of abounding harvests He is Lord. He doeth according to His will, not only in the army of heaven, but amongst the inhabitants of this lower world. Yon fiery steeds, which dash so terribly along the highway of time, are not careering madly: there is a charioteer whose almighty hands have held the reins for ages, and will never let them go. Things are not in the hurly-burly which we imagine, but driven onward by a power which is irresistible, they are under law to God, and speed onward without deviation towards the goal which He designs. All is well, brethren! It is night, but the watchman never sleepeth, and Israel may rest in peace. The tempest rages, but it is well, for our Captain is governor of storms. He who trod the waves of the Galilean lake is at the helm, and at His bidding winds and waves are quiet.

Our main point is that God rules mortal life; and He does so, first, *as to its term*—"Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?" He rules it, secondly, *as to its warfare*, for so the text might most properly be read—"Is there not an appointed warfare for man upon earth?" And, thirdly, He rules it *as to its service*, for the second clause of the text is, "Are not his days as the days of an hireling?"

First, then, *God's determination governs the time of human life.* We shall all acknowledge this as to *its commencement.* Not without infinite wisdom did any infant's life commence there and then, for no man is the offspring of chance. Not without a world of kindness did your life commence, dear friend, just where and when it did. Our child's little hymn, in which he thanks God that he was not "born a little slave to labour in the sun," contains a good deal of truth in it. A man's whole life is mainly guided by its commencement; had we been born as thousands are where God was never known we might have been idolators at this hour. Who would wish to have first seen the light at the era when our naked forefathers sacrificed to idols? Who would wish to have stepped upon the stage of life amid the dense darkness of popery, when our childish hands would have been lifted up by superstitious parents in adoration of the Virgin Mary, and we should have been taught to worship some cast clout or rotten rag, superstitiously believed to be a relic of a saint? It is no small thing to have been born in the nineteenth century, when works of grace are to be seen on every side. Many of us should bless the Lord every day because in infancy we lay upon a Christian woman's bosom, and were lulled to sleep with the sound of holy hymns, of which the name of Jesus was the theme. Our tiny feet were taught to run in the ways of righteousness, as far as parental instruction could effect the same, and this was no insignificant advantage. Blessed are the eyes which see the things which we see, and hear the things which we hear! All this is by the appointment of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our presence on earth in this day of grace was a matter altogether beyond our control, and yet it involves infinite issues; therefore let us with deepest gratitude bless the Lord, who has cast our lot in such an auspicious season.

The *continuance* of life is equally determined of God. He who fixed our birth has measured the interval between the cradle and the grave, and it shall not be a day longer or a day shorter than the divine decree. How many times your lungs shall heave and your pulses beat have been fixed by the eternal calculator from of old. What reflections ought to arise out of this! How willing we should be to labour on, even if we be weary, since God appoints our day and will not over-weary us, for He is no hard taskmaster. How glad we ought to be even to suffer if the Lord so ordains. It is sweet music that God draws forth from patient sufferers, and though the strings have to be painfully tightened ever and anon with many a grief and pang to us, yet if those dear hands of the Chief Musician can fetch out richer melody from those tightened strings, who among us would wish to have it otherwise, or ask to have the harp withdrawn from that beloved Harper's hand before the wondrous strain is o'er? No, let us wait, for He appoints. If our griefs were the offspring of chance, we might pine to have them ended, but if the loving Lord appoints, we would not hurry Him in His processes of love. Let the Lord do what seemeth Him good. Here is good cheer for those who have lain so long upon the bed of pain, and who are apt to ask—"Will it never end? O Lord, will the chariots of salvation never come? Have the angels quite forgotten Thy servant in his sickness? Must he for ever remain a prisoner under his infirmity, loneliness, and decay? Hast Thou placed me as a sentinel to stand upon my watch-tower through a night which will never end, and shall I never be relieved from my weary guard? Shall I never know rest? Must I for ever peer into the dark with these eyes so red with weeping?" Courage, brother! Courage, sister, the Lord, the ever-merciful, has appointed every moment of thy sorrow and every pang of thy suffering. If He ordains the number ten, it can never rise to eleven, neither shouldst thou desire it to shrink to nine. The Lord's time is best: to a hair's breadth thy span of life is rightly measured. God ordains all: therefore peace, restless spirit, and let the Lord have His way.

So, too, has He fixed life's *termination.* "Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth?" a time in which the pulse must cease, the blood stagnate, and the eye be closed. Yes, my brethren, it is of no use for us to indulge any idle dream of living for ever here; a time of departure must come to every one of us, unless the Lord Himself should appear on a sudden, and then we shall not die, but be changed. There is no man among us that liveth and shall not see death. In this war there is no discharge. Not

only do the Scriptures teach us so, but our common sense and reason put the matter beyond all question.

What mean the grey hairs which fall like snow flakes upon our heads? What mean that stooping gait and failing strength? What mean the dimness of the eye and the tottering of the limbs? Do they not all show that the house is about to come down, for the lath and plaster of it are beginning to give way? Yet our earthly house will not fail us till the time ordained of heaven. There is an appointed time for death, and God has fixed how we shall die, when we shall die, and where we shall die.

> "Plagues and deaths around me fly,
> Till He please I cannot die;
> Not a single shaft can hit
> Till the God of love sees fit."

Diseases eager to slay are in ambush all around us, but none of their swords can come at us till Jehovah give them leave. Behold the Lord shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust, nor shall nightly pestilence nor midday destruction make thee afraid.

> "What though a thousand at thy side
> At thy right hand ten thousand died,
> Our God His chosen people saves
> Amongst the dead, amidst the graves."

We are immortal till our work is done, but that work will not last for ever, and when it is concluded we shall have fulfilled our day, and shall receive our summons home.

All this is true; none will venture to dispute it, but let us remember that it is true for ourselves at this moment; for you, my brethren and sisters, it is true while here you sit. Realise it, and do not look on others as dying men while you yourselves are secure of long life. Be you also prepared to meet your God suddenly, for so you may be called to do. This fact is most solemn. We shall not live, but die, and that death may come in an instant. As I saluted my brethren this morning in the vestry I could not help expressing my pleasure and surprise that any of us were alive, for certainly it was quite as much a wonder that certain of us were alive, as that our friend should be dead. We might as readily have been taken away as he, and even more readily. God had ordained *his* death, He might have ordained ours. "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the the Son of man cometh."

Yet this fact, to my mind, is most strengthening. The doctrine of predestination, when really believed, is like steel medicine, infuses a deal of iron into the mental system and builds up strong men. I am not such a predestinarian as Mahomet, who bade his soldiers rush to the fight, "for," said he, "when your time comes to die you will die at home as well as in the battle, and Paradise is to be found beneath the shadow of swords." But still I see that while the doctrine makes some men slumber, it is to nobler souls a mighty source of energy, and a fountain of courage. If duty calls you into danger—if you have to nurse the sick who are laid low with foul disease—never shrink, but run all risks if love to God or man demand them of you. You will not die by a stray arrow from death's quiver; the Lord alone can recall your breath. Your death is not left to chance; it is determined by a heavenly Father's gracious will; therefore be not afraid. Be not so fearful of pain, or so anxious to preserve life, as to be held back where Jesus calls you on, for in such a case he that saveth his life shall lose it. You may not be reckless, and rush on danger without reason, that were madness; but you will, I trust, be brave and never fear to face death when the voice of God calls you into peril.

Moreover, how consoling is this truth; for, if the Father of our Lord Jesus arranges all, then our friends do not die untimely deaths. The beloved of the Lord are not cut off before their time; they go into Jesus' bosom when they are ready to be received there. God has appointed the times for the ingathering of His fruits; some of them are sweet even in early spring, and He gathers them; others are as a basket of summer fruit, and He takes these also while the year is young, while yet another company need to remain among us till autumn mellows them: each class shall be gathered in its season. Now of all this we are by no means competent judges. We know nothing, for we are infants of a day; God knoweth best. It were better that our friend should die, as die he did, than that he should live, else had he lived. Be sure of that. Yes, God has appointed the commencement, the continuance, and the conclusion of this mortal life.

But we must now consider the other translation of our text. It is generally given in the margin of the Bibles. "Is there not an appointed *warfare* to man upon earth?" which teaches us that *God has appointed life to be a warfare.* To all men it will be so, whether bad or good. Every man will find himself a soldier under some captain or another. Alas for those men who are battling against God and His truth, they will in the end be clothed with dishonour and defeat. I shall, however, speak mainly of the righteous, and truly their experience shows that life is one long struggle, from which we never cease till we hear the word, "Thy warfare is accomplished." Brethren, life is a warfare, and therefore we are all men under authority. No Christian is free to follow his own devices; we are all under law to Christ. A soldier surrenders his own will to that of his commander: his captain saith to him, "Go," and he goeth, or "Do this," and he doeth it. Such is the Christian's life—a life of willing subjection to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. In consequence of this we have our place fixed and our order arranged for us, and our life's relative positions are all prescribed. A soldier has to keep rank and step with the rest of the line. He has a relation to the man on his right, and to his comrade on his left, and he bears a relation which he must not violate to each officer, and especially to his commander-in-chief. God has appointed to you, then, dear brother, to be a father or to be a son, to be a master or to be a servant, to be a teacher or to be taught; see that you keep your place. As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place. In our appointed warfare happy is the man who from first to last keeps in order with the forces of the Lord of Hosts, and cheerfully fulfils the divine purposes.

As we have a warfare to accomplish, we must expect hardships. A soldier must not reckon upon ease. During a campaign he has neither house nor home. Perhaps last night he pitched his tent in a happy valley, but he must up and away, and his tent must to-morrow be exposed on the bleak mountain side. He has renounced the luxuries of life and the joys of repose. Forced marches, light slumbers, scant fare, and hard blows are his portion—he would be foolish to look for ease and enjoyment during a

campaign. O ye sons of men, the Lord has appointed life to be a warfare; wherefore, then, do you wrap yourselves about with silken garments, and sew pillows for all arm-holes, and say to yourselves, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry"? Ye must not do so, and if the Lord by trial prevents your doing so ye must not quarrel with Him, but must feel that such treatment must be expected in this war.

If life be a warfare, we must look for contests and struggles. The Christian man must not expect to go to heaven without opposition. A soldier who never meets an enemy at all is not renowned. We count his valour light, and reckon him to be as some vain carpet knight "whose best delight is but to wear a braid of his fair lady's hair." The man who is scarred and gashed, maimed and wounded, he is the hero to whom men pay homage. You must fight if you would reign. Your predecessors swam through seas of blood to win the crown; and, though the form of battle may be changed, yet the spirit of the enemy is unaltered; you must still contend against sin and bear up under trouble, for only through much tribulation will you inherit the kingdom of God.

It is a warfare, brethren, for all these reasons, and yet more so because we must always be upon the watch against danger. In a battle no man is safe. Where bullets fly, who can reckon upon life a moment? Brethren, the age is peculiarly dangerous. Perhaps every preacher before me has said as much, and every preacher after me will say the same for his times—yet still, I say, in this peculiar age there are a thousand perils for the soul, from superstition on the one hand and scepticism on the other; from rude self-reliance and indolent trust in others, from a wicked world and an apostate church. You must not wonder that it is so, for war is raging. The enemy has not laid down his weapons, the war drum is still beaten; therefore do not lay down your arms, but fight manfully for your King and country—for Christ and for His Church.

Blessed be God that the text says "Is there not an *appointed* warfare?" Then, brethren, it is not our warfare, but one that God has appointed for us, in which He does not expect us to wear out our armour, or bear our own charges, or find our own rations, or supply our own ammunition. The armour that we wear we have not to construct, and the sword we wield we have not to fabricate. All things are ready for us. Our great Captain manages the commissariat with unquestioned skill and unbounded liberality. Yea, the warfare is so much His warfare that He is with us in it. The Greek soldiers when they marched against the Persians, traversed many a weary league, but that which comforted them and made every man a hero was that Alexander marched when they marched. If he had been carried luxuriously, like the Persian monarch, while they were toiling over the hills and dales, they might have murmured; if he had been seen to drink of costly wines while they were parched with thirst, they might have complained. But Alexander, like a great commander as he was, marched in the ranks with his soldiers, so that they saw him faint and weary as they were, and wiping the sweat from his brow when they did the same; and when, as was his due, they brought him the first crystal draught they could obtain he put it on one side and said, "Give it to the sick soldiers, I will not drink till every man can take a draught." O glorious Jesus, surely Thou hast done the same and more. Resistance Thou hast borne even unto blood, Thou hast known toil and agony, even to a sweat of gore, and suffering, and weakness, and self-denial Thou too hast drank of, for Thou savest others, Thyself Thou couldst not save. Courage, brother, then. Our warfare is of the Lord. Let us go forth to it, conquering and to conquer.

Thirdly. *The Lord has also determined the service of our life.* All men are servants to some master or another, neither can any of us avoid the servitude. The greatest men are only so much the more the servants of others. The prime minister is only the first and most laborious of servants. The yoke upon the neck of the emperor is heavier than that which galls the shoulders of the serf. Despots are the most in bondage of all men. Happy will it be for us if through divine grace we have chosen Jesus for our Master and have become His servants for life: then indeed we are free, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light, and in learning of Him we shall find rest unto our souls. If we are now the servants of the Lord Jesus, this life is a set time of a labour and apprenticeship to be worked out. I am bound by solemn indentures to my Lord and Master till my term of life shall run out, and I am right glad to have it so. Jacob, when he had served seven years was glad to serve seven more for the love of Rachel, and we for love of Jesus would serve seventy times seven if He desired it, but even then the longest term of life would have an end, even as ours also will. Here below our term is fixed, even as the days of an hireling.

Now, a servant who has let himself out for a term of years has not a moment that he can call his own, nor have any of us, if we are God's people. We have not a moment, no, not a breath, nor a faculty, nor a farthing that we may honestly reserve. We have transferred ourselves to Jesus Christ for ever, and we belong wholly to Him. A servant does nothing of his own head, he does what his master tells him: this also is our condition. We have an appointed service, and we receive orders from our Lord, which orders are our law. A servant has his occupations prescribed; he may have to work indoors or outdoors, he may have to be near the house or far off in the field. He may be sent on errands, or bidden to stay at home, but he does not choose his labour or the place of it, he accepts what is chosen for him by his superior. Are we not glad to have it so? Does not our heart say, "anything, everything for Jesus?" That should be our spirit. The servant, moreover, expects to be sometimes weary and spent, is it not natural? To a servant who applies for your situation, and says, "I do not expect to work hard; I want large wages and little work," you would say, "Yes, there are many of your mind, but I shall not employ one of the sort if I know it." Your Lord and Master thinks the same. You must expect to toil in His service till you are ready to faint, and then His grace will renew your strength.

A servant knows that his time is limited. If it is weekly service, he knows that his engagement may be closed on Saturday; if he is hired by the month, he knows how many days there are in a month, and he expects it to end; if he is engaged by the year, he knows the day of the year when his service shall be run out. As for us, we do not know when our term will be complete; but we do know that conclude it will, therefore we would live in view of that

conclusion. It is as well that the Lord has not told us when the appointed end will be, or we might have loitered till near the close ; but He has left that period unrevealed that we may be always labouring, and waiting for His coming. None the less is it sure that there is an appointed time, and our work will come to an end.

The hireling expects his wages ; that is one reason for his industry. We, too, expect ours—not of debt truly, but of grace, yet still a gracious reward. God does not employ servants without paying them wages, as many of our merchants now do. His own children they are, and therefore they would be glad enough to serve without a hope of wage ; but that is not God's way ; He prefers that they also should have " respect unto the recompense of reward." While the child's relationship be carried out with blessed liberality, so shall the servant's relation too, and wages shall be liberally given. Let us look forward, brethren and sisters ; let us look forward to the great day when the Master shall call His servants together and give them their wages. The reward, if it were of debt, would be a very scanty one, and, in fact, it would be none at all, for we are unprofitable servants ; but, the wages being of grace, there is room for giving every man his penny, room for giving to us exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think. There I leave the subject of service : it is all appointed for us, let us fulfil it.

II. Secondly, and briefly, THE INFERENCES TO BE DRAWN FROM THIS FACT. First, there is *Job's inference.* Job's inference was that as there was only an appointed time, and he was like a servant employed by the year, he might be allowed to wish for life's speedy close, and therefore he says—" As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work." Job was right in a measure but not altogether so. There is a sense in which every Christian may look forward to the end of life with joy and expectancy, and may pray for it. I wish that some believers were in a state of mind which would fairly admit of their doing so. Many of us can heartily sympathize with the songster who penned the verses beginning—

> " I would not live always, I ask not to stay
> Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way ;
> The few fleeting mornings that dawn on us here
> Are enough for life's sorrows, enough for its cheer.
>
> " Who, who would live always away from his God—
> Away from yon heaven, that blissful abode,
> Where rivers of pleasure flow o'er the bright plains,
> And the noontide of glory eternally reigns ? "

At the same time, there are needful modifications to this desire to depart, and a great many of them ; for, first, it would be a very lazy thing for a servant to be always looking for Saturday night, and to be always sighing and groaning because the days are so long. The man who wants to be off to heaven before his life's work is done does not seem to me to be quite the man that is likely to go there at all ; for he that is fit to go there and serve God, is one who is willing to stop here and do the same. Besides, while our days are like those of a hireling, we serve a better master than other servants do. There are employers of such a kind that servants might be very glad never to see their faces any more, they are so sharp, so acid, so domineering ; but our Master is love itself. Blessed be His name, His service is perfect freedom. We are never so happy and never so truly helping ourselves as when we are altogether serving Him. For my part, I can say of Him that I love my Master, I love His service, I love His house, I love His children, and I love everything about Him ; and if He were going to discharge me at the end of this life, I would beg Him to let me live here for ever, for I could not bear to be dismissed. It is one of my dearest hopes in going to heaven that He will employ me still. Moreover, we are not like other servants, for this reason—that we are one with our Master, His brethren, His spouse, His body ; and we are under such deep obligation to Him that it is unspeakable joy to work for Him. If He gave us no wages it would be wage enough to be allowed to wait upon Him.

> " For why, O blessed Jesu Christ,
> Should I not love Thee well ?
> Not for the sake of winning heaven,
> Or of escaping hell."

But because of Thy own sweetness, goodness, and dear love to me, ought I not to be Thine for ever ? Yes, yes ; under some aspects you might feel that it was better to depart and be with Christ, but from other points of view you see differently, and check the wish, so that, like Paul, you are in a strait betwixt two, and which to choose you know not. It is a great mercy that the choice does not lie with you, all things are settled for you. Thus you see there are facts which modify Job's inference, and forbid our excessive longing to close life's weary day.

I will tell you *the devil's inference.* The devil's inference is that if our time, warfare, and service are appointed, there is no need of care, and we may cast ourselves down from the pinnacle of the temple, or do any other rash thing, for we shall only work out our destiny. So argues the arch-enemy, though he knows better. How many men have drawn most damnable conclusions from most blessed truths ; and these men know, when they are doing it, that their conclusions are absurd. " Oh," say they, " we need not turn to Christ, for if we are ordained to eternal life we shall be saved." Yes, sirs, but why will you eat at meal-time to-day ? Why do you eat at all ? for if you are to live you will live. Why go to bed to-night ? If you are ordained to sleep you will sleep. Why will you take down your shop shutters to-morrow and exhibit your goods, and try to sell them ? If you are predestined to be rich you will be rich. Ah, I see, you will not act the thing out. You are not such fools as you look ; you are more knaves than fools, and your excuse is a piece of deceit. If it be not so, why not act upon it in daily life ? He has a false heart who dares to suck out of the blessed truth of predestination the detestable inference that he may sit still and do nothing. Why, sirs, nothing in the world more nerves me for work than the belief that God's purposes have appointed me to this service. Being convinced that the eternal forces of immutable wisdom and unfailing power are at my back, I put forth all my strength as becometh a " worker together with God." The bravest men that ever lived, like Cromwell and his Ironsides, believed in God's decrees, but they also kept their powder dry. They relied upon everlasting purposes, but also believed in human responsibility, and so must you and I. Your years are appointed, but do not commit lewdness or drink with the drunken or you will shorten your days. Your warfare is appointed, O man, but

do not go and play the fool, or your troubles will be multiplied. Your service is allotted you, O believer, but do not loiter, or you will grieve the Spirit of God and mar your work.

I will now give you *the sick man's inference*—" Is there not an appointed time to men upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of an hireling?" The sick man, therefore, concludes that his pains will not last for ever, and that every suffering is measured out by love divine. Truly disease is a bitter draught, but Jehovah Rophi often prescribes it as a medicine for spiritual disease. When the Lord knows that the appointed affliction has wrought out all His purpose He will either raise up the patient to walk among the sons of men again or else He will take him to His bosom in glory. Therefore, let him be patient, and in confidence and quietness shall be His strength.

Next comes *the mourner's inference*—one which we do not always draw quite so readily as we should. It is this: "My child has died, but not too soon. My husband is gone; ah, God, what shall I do? Where shall my widowed heart find sympathy? Still he has been taken away at the right time. The Lord has done as it pleased Him, and He has done wisely." If you have not yet come to mourning over the dead, but have every day to sympathize with a living sufferer who is gradually melting away amidst wearisome pain and constant anguish, ask grace to enable you to feel "It is well." It is a grand triumph of grace when the heart is neither stoical, unsympathetic, nor rebellious; when you can grieve but not rebel in the grieving, mourn without murmuring, and sorrow without sinning. Pray for some who have this trial. Pray for them that grace may be perfect in their weakness.

Furthermore, let us draw *the healthy man's inference*. Do you know what inference I have drawn from the sudden death of my friend? I thought—in a moment it struck me—"Ah, if I had died last Saturday afternoon instead of Mr. Henry Olney, should I have left all the concerns that I have in hand quite in order?" I have no end of business—too much a great deal; and I resolved "I will get all square and trim as if I were going off, for perhaps I am." Dear brother, I want you to feel the same. You are a healthy man, but be prepared to die. Have your will made and your accounts squared, and fit for your successor to take up. What thou doest do quickly! Have your will made, and if you are wealthy do not forget the Lord's work. Mr. Whitfield used to say, "I could not sleep at night if I had left my gloves out of their place, for," said he, "I would leave everything in order." Trim the ship, brother, for you know not what weather is coming. Clear the decks for action, for no one knows when the last enemy will be in sight. Your best Friend is coming, make ready for His entertainment. Be as a bride adorned for her husband, and not as a slattern who would be ashamed to be seen.

Lastly, there is *the sinner's inference*. "My time, my warfare, and my service are appointed, but what have I done in them. I have waged a warfare against God, and have served in the pay of the devil, what will the end be?" Sinner, you will run your length, you will fulfil your day to your black master; you will fight his battle and earn your pay, but what will the wages be? The end cometh, and the wage-paying, are you ready to reap what you have sowed? Having taken sides with the devil against yourself and against your God, are you prepared for the result? Look to it, I pray you, and beseech the Lord, through Jesus Christ, to give you grace to escape from your present position and enlist on the side of Christ.

I ask you, sirs, who are sitting in this gallery here, and who have not believed in Jesus, and ye men and women all over this building who are unregenerate, if instead of the decease of the brother who has fallen I had to speak of your death, where must you have been? We are not among those who would have read a hypocritical service over you and thanked God that you were taken if you died in sin. We would not have insulted the Most High by saying that we ourselves hoped to die in that fashion. We dare not so have blasphemed the majesty of heaven. You know we should have laid you into the grave very silently, with many a tear more salt than usual, because deep down in our spirit there would have been that dreary thought, "He died impenitent. He died unregenerate. He is lost! he is lost!" Weep not for our brother, smitten in his prime, whose children mourn him! Weep not for him, though his sorrowing wife bends o'er his corpse, and cannot persuade herself that his spirit is gone! Weep not for him, but weep for those who have died and are lost for ever, driven from the presence of God! In their eternal warfare there will be no discharge, and in their dreadful slavery there will be no end, for there is no appointed time for man when once he leaves this earth. Time is over, and the angel who puts one foot upon the sea, and another upon the land, swears by the Eternal that time shall be no more, and so the condition of the lost spirit is finally settled, settled for ever. Beware, therefore, and be wise, for Christ's sake and your own. Amen.

"AM I A SEA, OR A WHALE?"

"Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?"—Job vii. 12.

JOB was in great pain when he thus bitterly complained. These moans came from him when his skin was broken and had become loathsome, and he sat upon a dunghill and scraped himself with a potsherd. We wonder at his patience, but we do not wonder at his impatience. He had fits of complaining, and failed in that very patience for which he was noted. Where God's saints are most glorious, there you will find their spots. The weaknesses of the saints lie near their strength. Elijah is the bravest of the brave, and flees from Jezebel; Moses is the meekest of the meek, and speaks in passion; Job is the most patient of men, and cries, "I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." As part of his bitter complaint, he said,

" Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me ? "

He seemed to be watched and whipped, and then watched again. It seemed to him that God concentrated all His strength upon him in afflicting him. He was beaten black and blue ; and whereas other culprits had forty stripes save one, he had fifty stripes save none. He was spared no suffering, and he cries at last, " I am watched, and checked, as if I were a great sea needing always to be held in bounds, or a terrible sea-monster wanting always a hook in its jaws. Lord, why dost Thou harass me thus ? I am such a poor, insignificant thing, that it seems out of Thy usual way to be so rough upon one so feeble. The raging ocean, or the mighty leviathan, may need such watching, but why dost Thou spend it on me ? Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me ? "

I shall not moor myself to Job's sense of the words ; but I shall spread my sail for a voyage further out to sea. This sort of talk may have been used by many a man who is now within hail of my voice—may have been used by sailors now before me.

Let me point out the channel along which I shall steer in my discourse. We shall begin by saying that *some men seem to be narrowly watched by God.* They think that the Lord's eye is as much fixed on them as though they were great as a sea, or huge as a whale. My second point will be, that *they do not like this watching.* They complain about it, and wish they could get rid of it. Therefore they argue against it with God. Our third head is, that *their argument is a bad one.* They think they are very hardly done by ; but the fact is, that *all they complain of is in love.* See, my mess-mates, the way I shall try to steer ; but if the heavenly wind blows me out of my course, don't be surprised if I tack about, and go nobody knows where.

I. I have, first, to say that SOME MEN SEEM TO BE SPECIALLY TRACKED AND WATCHED BY GOD. We hear of persons being " shadowed " by the police, and certain people feel as if they were shadowed by God ; they are mysteriously tracked by the Great Spirit, and they know and feel it. Wherever they go, an eye is upon them, and they cannot hide from it. They are like prisoners under arrest—they can never go out of reach of the law. They cannot get away from God, do what they may. There are men who have been in this condition for years ; *and they know what I mean.*

All men are really surrounded by God. He is not far from every one of us. " In Him we live, and move, and have our being." " Whither shall we flee from Thy presence ? " to the heights above, or to the depths beneath ? to oceans frozen into ice, or seas whereon the sun shines with burning heat ? In vain we rise or dive to escape from God. " Thou God seest me," is as true in the watches of the night as in the blaze of day. God is with us, and we are always beneath His eye. Yet there are certain people to whom this is more clear than it is to others.

Some are singularly aware of the presence of God. Certain of us never were without a sense of God. As children, we could not go to sleep till we said, " Our Father which art in heaven." As youths, we trembled if we heard God's holy name blasphemed. As men, engaged in the cares of life, we have seen the Lord's goodness, all along. We delight to see Him in every flower that blooms, and to hear His voice in every wind that blows. It has made us happy to see God in His works. " The fool hath said in his heart, No God " ; but this folly we never cared for. We knew that God was good, even when we felt we had offended Him. He has taught us from our youth, and manifested Himself to us. Softly has the whisper fallen on our ear, " God is near thee : God is with thee : God hath an ear to hear thee : God hath a heart to love thee : God hath a hand to help thee." I have known those who, even when they have sinned and gone against their consciences, have never at any time quite lost a sense of the nearness of God, even though its only fruit was fear—a fear which hath torment.

With others God's watch is seen in a different way. They feel that they are watched by God, because *their conscience never ceases to rebuke them.* The voice of conscience is not pitched to the same key in all men ; neither is it equally loud in all people. Conscience can be made like a muzzled dog, and then it cannot bite the thief of sin. Conscience can grow like a man with a cold, who has lost his voice. But it is not so with all men, even after years of sin. Some have a naturally tender conscience, and while living in sin they are never easy. They make merry all the day, for " they count it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away " ; but dull care, like the chickens, comes home to roost at night. The sailor in company is jolly ; but if he has to keep a lone watch beneath the silent stars his heart begins to beat, and his conscience begins to call him to account for the follies of the day. He starts in his sleep ; he dreams over his past sin and the judgment to come ; for conscience will wake even when the rest of the man sleeps. " You were wrong," says conscience ; and his voice is very solemn.

Even great sin in certain men has not prevented conscience speaking out honestly to them. Again and again the inward monitor cries, " You were wrong, and you will suffer for it." We read that " David's heart smote him " : the heart deals us an ugly knock. When the blow is within us it tells. I am addressing some who, though they do not feel pleased about it, yet must know that there is a something within that will not let them sin cheaply. God has a bit in their mouths, and a bridle upon their jaws ; and every now and then He gives a tug at it, and pulls them right up. They are not at home in sin. They have not yet got their sea-legs upon the ocean of vice. They sing the songs of the devil with a quake and a shake, which shows that the music does not suit them. Thus God has set a watch upon them : they carry a detective in their bosoms.

In some this watching has gone farther, for *they are under solemn conviction of sin.* They are convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. God's custom-house officer has boarded them, and their smuggling is found out. I remember when I was in that state myself—a criminal who dared not deny his guilt, but dreaded punishment. I would not go back to that condition for a hundred worlds. *Then* there was no rest for me. I was only a youth ; but boyish sports lost their relish for me, because I knew that I was a sinner, and that God must punish sin. I awoke in the morning, and my first act for many a day was to read a chapter of the Bible, or a page of some arousing book, which kept my conscience still awake. The Holy Spirit put me in irons, and there I lay both day and night. My bed was at times a very weary place to me, because the eyes of God's anger seemed to be ever

watching me. I knew I had offended God, and I had not yet found out the way of reconciliation by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, it may be that I speak to some here, who have been to the ends of the earth, and they have said, "Well, when we get away where the Sabbath bell is never heard, we shall get rid of these fears, and take our swing in sin." They sailed off, and as soon as they reached port, they hurried to a place of vicious amusement, where no one knew them. But the dog of fear howled at their heels, and merriment seemed mockery to them. On the lone ocean the very stars pierced their hearts with their rays. At length their mess-mates began to notice it and call them Old Sobersides. "Jack, what ails you?" was the frequent question; and well it might be, for Jack was very heavy, and it is hard to be merry with a broken heart. In some such fashion as this the man feels that God has set a watch upon him, and that he has become like a sea which never rests, or a whale which roams the waste of water, and knows no home. God watched him; and though he would gladly have run the blockade, he could not find an hour in which his vessel was left alone.

Certain men are not only plagued by conscience and dogged by fear, but *the providence of God seems to have gone out against them.* Just when the man had resolved to have a bout of drinking, he fell sick of a fever, and had to go to the hospital. He was going to a dance; but he became so weak that he had not a leg to stand upon. He was forced to toss to and fro on the bed, to quite another tune from that which pleases the ball-room. He had yellow fever, and was long in pulling round. God watched him, and put the skid on him just as he meant to have a break-neck run downhill. The man gets better, and he says to himself, "I will have a good time now." But then he is out of berth, and perhaps he cannot get a ship for months, and he is brought down to poverty. "Dear me!" he says, "everything goes against me. I am a marked man"; and so he is. Just when he thinks that he is going to have a fair wind, a tempest comes on and drives him out of his course, and he sees rocks ahead. After a while he thinks, "Now I am all right. Jack is himself again, and piping times have come." A storm hurries up; the ship goes down, and he loses all but the clothes he has on his back. He is in a wretched plight: a shipwrecked mariner, far from home. God seems to pursue him even as He did Jonah. He carries with him misfortune for others, and he might well cry, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me?" Nothing prospers. His tacklings are loosed; he cannot well strengthen his mast; his ship leaks; his sails are rent; his yards are snapped; and he cannot make it out. Other people seem to get on, though they are worse than he is. Time was when he used to be lucky too; but now he has parted company with success, and carries the black flag of distress. He is driven to and fro by contrary winds; he makes no headway; he is a miserable man, and would wish that the whole thing would go to the bottom, only he dreads a place which has no bottom, from which there is no escape, if once you sink into it. The providence of God runs hard against him, and thus he sees himself to be a watched man.

Yes, and God also watches over many *in the way of admonition.* Wherever they go, holy warnings follow them. They cannot escape from those who would be friends to their souls. They seem to be surrounded with a ring of prayers and sermons and holy talks. The boy said, "If I could get away from my mother I should be free! I have been tied long enough to her apron strings. I am old enough to do as I like. If I can get away from my father's chidings and prayings, I shall have a fine time of it." So the boy ran away, and went to sea; and when he got on board, a good old sailor tackled him, and talked to him about his soul; and then another pleaded with him. The boy said to himself, "Why I have got out of the frying-pan into the fire. I came here to be out of the way of religion, and here it is!" I have known a sailor to go from port to port, and wherever he has landed there has been some gracious man or woman waiting to lead him to Christ. May it be often so! May the Bethel flag be found flying in all waters, till every runaway says, "Why, I am watched wherever I go!" May it be as it was with our dear friends Fullerton and Smith on board the steamboat! Mr. Fullerton spoke to a rough man, and asked him if he was saved; and the man was angry, cross, vexed, and went to the other side of the vessel. There he complained to Mr. Smith, "That man over there asked me if I was saved; he is a fool!" "Very likely," said Smith; "but then, you see, he is a fool for Christ. I think it is better to be a fool for Jesus than to be wise for the devil." He began to plead with him, when the man cried out, "There is a regular gang of them; I cannot go anywhere but they are on to me." It has been made hot for some of you by the British and Foreign Sailors' Society, which has placed missionaries in so many ports. "There's a gang of them," and wherever you go you stumble on an earnest Christian man, who will not let you alone. If I could stir up Christian people here, I would make it hard for sinners, so that wherever they went they would find a hand outstretched to stop them from going to destruction. Oh, that each one might be met with tears and entreaties; that thus each one might be snatched from the waves of fire and landed on the rock of salvation! Some here present have had to dodge a great deal to keep out of the way of gospel shots. Their track has been followed by mercy, and they have been pursued by swift cruisers of grace. They have been like fish taken in a net—surrounded on all sides, and neither able to pass through the meshes, nor to break the net, nor to leap out of it. Oh, that the net of Christ's love may so entangle you all, that you may be His for ever!

That is our first point: there are some men who seem specially watched of God.

II. Secondly, we notice that THEY ARE VERY APT TO DISLIKE THIS WATCHING. Job is not pleased with it. He asks, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me?" These people, to whom God pays such attention, are foolish enough to murmur that they are so hedged in, and they are vexed to be made to feel that God has His eye upon them.

Do you know what they would like? *They want liberty to sin.* They would like to be let loose, and to be allowed to do just as their wild wills would suggest to them. They would cast off every restraint and have their fling of what the world calls "pleasure." They would climb from sin to sin, hand over hand. They would like to empty all the cups on the devil's sideboard, and be as merry as the worst of men when they are taking it free and easy. That is why they

would send their consciences to sleep, drown their fears, and escape from chastening providences and warning admonitions. They would like to live where no Christian person would ever worry them again with wearisome exhortation. They demand liberty: liberty to put their hand into the fire! liberty to ruin themselves! liberty to leap into hell before their time! Liberty! what destruction has been wrought in thy name! Free thinking! Free living! Free loving, and all that! What misuse of terms! What a libel upon the name of freedom, to use the word "free" in connection with the slavery of sin! Yet I am speaking to some who say, "That is just what I want. I want to cut myself clear of all this hamper which blocks me up from having my own way." Ah me! this is the cry of a man who is bent on soul-suicide!

They wish also that they could be as hard of heart as many others are. Some men can drink any quantity, and yet do not seem as if they were greatly affected by it; and many a young sailor has wished that he could pour down his grog without a wink, after the style of the old toper. He meets with a foul-mouthed being who can swear till all is blue, while he himself has only dropped an oath or two, and then felt wretched. The young man begins to wish that he was as tough as old Jack, and as much a dare-devil as he. The hardened profligate is foolishly envied, and looked upon as a man of "pluck." But is it true bravery to ruin one's soul? Is it manly to be wicked? Is it a great gain to have a seared conscience? We don't envy the blind because they cannot see danger, nor the deaf because they cannot hear an alarm; and why envy the hardened old sinner because he has become spiritually blind and deaf? There are monsters, both on land and on sea, whose very breath is pestilent, and whose talk is enough to choke up a town with vice; and yet certain young men, whom God will not allow to descend into such rottenness, are almost angry that they are restrained. A tender conscience is a great possession, but these simple ones know not its value. They wish that they could have a heart as hard as the nether millstone. Ah, poor souls! you know not what you wish; for you have no idea how deep is the curse that lies in a callous conscience. When God gave Pharaoh up to hardness of heart, it was a tremendous punishment for his pride and cruelty; and, short of hell, there is no judgment that God can inflict like letting a man have his own way. "Let him alone," says God, "he is joined to idols"; and if the Lord says that, there is only one other word more dreadful, and that is the final sentence,—"Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." O you beginners in vice who cannot yet stifle the cries of your suffering consciences, I pray that you may see your folly, and no longer do violence to your own mercy.

Men do not like this being surrounded by God—this wearing the bit and kicking strap—because *they would drop God from their thoughts.* If to-morrow we could hear, by telegram from heaven, that God was dead, what crowds would buy the newspaper! It would be the greatest relief in the world to many a godless wretch if he could feel sure that there was no God. To some of us this news would be death: we should have lost our Father, our Comforter, our Saviour, our all. Alas! many wish that there were no God; and if they cannot persuade themselves that there is none—and it is very hard for a sailor to do *that*—yet they try to forget Him. If God is out of mind, He is as good as out of the world to the careless sinner. When God comes with inward fears, and awakens conscience, and sends cross providences, so that the man feels pulled up and made to pause; then he knows that there is a God, for he feels a power which works against his sin, from which he cannot get away. He longs to be clear of this secret force; but it wraps him about on every side. He does not read his Bible, and yet scripture rises in his memory. It is long since he bent his knee in prayer; he has almost forgotten what his mother said to him when she lay a-dying; but still he feels that there is a God, and, somehow, that belief sounds a trumpet blast through his soul, summoning him to his last account. Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come to judgment! The call rings in his ears, and he cannot get away from the terrible sound. Then it is that he cries, "Why am I thus? Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me?"

Once more, there are some who do not like to be shadowed in this way, because *they want to have their will with others.* Shall I speak a sharp word, like a two-edged sword? There are men—and seamen to be found among them—who are not satisfied with being ruined themselves, but they thirst to ruin others. They lay traps for precious souls, and they are vexed that their victims should escape them. They are angry because certain poor women are not altogether in their power. Woe unto the men who lead women astray! I have heard of sailors who, in every port they enter, try to ruin others. I charge you to remember that you will have to face these ruined ones at the day of judgment. You sailed away, and they never knew where you went; but the Lord knew. It may be, when you lie in hell, eyes will find you out, and a voice will cry aloud, "Are you here? You are the man that led me to perdition!" You will have to keep everlasting company with those whom you dragged down to hell; and these will for ever curse you to your face. I say there are men who would like to have full license to commit wantonness, and they are grieved that they are hindered in their carnival of sin. May God grant that you may be stopped altogether; and instead of lusting to pollute others, may you have a desire to save them! May God grant that the channel of evil may be blocked for you, and may you be piloted into the waters of repentance and faith!

This is why some kick against God. I fear these people will be much vexed with me for speaking so plainly; but you must not think that it will alarm me should you be angry. I am rather glad when fellows get angry with my preaching. "Oh," I say to myself, "those fish feel the hook in their jaws, and so they struggle to escape." Of course a fish does not like the hook which lays hold of him. These angry hearers will come again. You people with whom the sermon goes in at one ear and out at the other, you get no good whatever; but a man who fires up with wrath, and says, "How dare that fellow speak thus to me?" is sure to listen again; and it is very likely that God will bless him. But whether it offends you or pleases you—I repeat my warning—I charge you, do not drag others down to hell with you. If you must go there yourselves, seek not to destroy those around you. Do not teach boys to drink, and to swear; neither tempt frail women to commit uncleanness with you. God help you to

shake off all vice; for I know that vile habits are often the reason why men kick against the restraint of God's loving hand.

III. And now I have got to the very heart of my text. The third part is this—that THIS ARGUMENT AGAINST THE LORD'S DEALINGS IS A VERY BAD ONE. Job says, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me?" Listen. *To argue from our insignificance is poor pleading;* for the little things are just those against which there is most need to watch. If you were a sea, or a whale, God might leave you alone; but as you are a feeble and sinful creature, which can do more hurt than a sea, or a whale, you need constant watching. In life, men fall by very little things. One does not need to watch against his dog one half so much as against a horse-fly, or a mosquito, for these will sting you when you least expect it. The little things want most watching, therefore it is poor reasoning when we complain that God watches us as if we were a sea, or a whale.

After all, *there is not a man here who is not very like a sea,* or a sea-monster in this respect, that he needs a watch to be set over him. A man's heart is as changeable and as deceitful as the sea. To-day it is calm as a sea of glass, unruffled by a breath of air. Oh, trust not yourself upon it, for before to-morrow's sun is up, your nature may be rolling in tremendous billows of passion. You cannot trust the sea, but it is more worthy of confidence than your heart. Here you are to-night, and oh, how good you look as you sit and listen, and then stand up and sing! Ah, my men! I should not like to hear you if you take to blaspheming your Maker, as many do. When you are down in the forecastle with a little band of praying men, how very good you feel! Let us see you when you are on shore, and there is plenty of grog about. It is easy to have a calm sea when there is no wind, but how different is the ocean when a gale is blowing! We are all very well when far away from temptation, but how are we when the devil's servants are around us? Then, I fear, that too often good resolutions prove to be

> "False as the smooth, deceitful sea,
> And empty as the whistling wind."

It may be that I speak to one who has undergone a dreadful change. Once you led others in the way of righteousness, but now you draw them into evil. Once you sailed under the Bethel flag, but now the old Pirate of the infernal lake is your captain. You have gone back to your old ways, and have again become the slave of the world, the flesh and the devil. Your religious profession had no foundation. Ah me! you need not say, "Am I a sea, or a whale?" for seas and sea-monsters are more to be trusted than you are. The sea is immeasurable; and, as for you, your sinfulness is unsearchable. Your capacity is almost without measure: your mind reaches far, and touches all things. Man's mind can rise in rebellion against the God of the whole earth, till, like the raging waves of the sea, it threatens to put out the lights of heaven. When man is in a rebellious state he will rage in his thoughts as though he would wash away the shores of heaven, and beat like the surf upon the iron rocks of hell. A man is an awful mystery of iniquity when left to himself. You cannot fathom his pride, nor measure his daring. Deep down in his mind there are creeping things innumerable, both small and great beasts; for all manner of evils and sins multiply in the heart like fishes in the sea. Do not say, "Am I a sea, or a sea-monster, that Thou settest a watch over me?" for the Lord may answer, "You are more capacious for evil than a sea, and more wild than a sea-monster."

I shall now go further, and show that, by reason of our evil nature, *we have become like the sea.* This is true in several ways; for, first, *the sea is restless, and so is our nature.* "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." You need not go far to find hearts always agitated; always seeking rest, and finding none. They know not Christ; and until they do know Him, they cannot rest. They are always seeking a something; they know not what. They run first in one direction, and then in another, but they never follow the right thing. When they are thoughtful no good comes of their thoughts. Their waters cast up—what? Pearls and corals? No; "mire and dirt." I do not need to explain those words. If any of you have to keep company with these restless beings, you know how foul-mouthed they can be. They cast up worse things than mire and dirt when they are stirred up. Oh, say not, "Am I a sea, or a whale?" Think of yourself as being as restless as a whale when the harpoon is in him; as restless as the sea when a storm is moving its lowest depths.

Let us say, next, that *the sea can be furious and terrible, and so can ungodly men.* When a man is in a fury, what a wild beast he can be! A landsman looks on the sea when it has put on its best behaviour, and he says, "I should not mind going a voyage. It must be splendid to steam over such a sea! I feel I shall make a splendid sailor." Let him look at that same ocean by-and-by. Where is the sea of glass now? Where are the gentle waves, which seemed afraid to ripple too far upon the sand? The sea roars and rages and raves. The Atlantic in a storm is terrible; but have you ever seen a tempest in a man's nature? It is an awful sight, and one which causes gracious eyes to weep. What a miserable object is a man with the drink in him! He was as decent a fellow as one could talk with; but now that the drink has mastered him the devil has come on board, and you will do well to give him a wide berth. The same is true of passion. Concerning angry men our advice would be, "Put not to sea in a storm, neither argue with a man in a passion." You do not know what he will do, and he does not know himself. Such a man will be grieved enough when he sobers down; but meanwhile, while the storm is on, he cares for nothing. His eyes flash lightning, his face is black as tempest, his mouth foams, and his tongue rages. In his case, "The sea roars, and the fulness thereof." When you feel the Lord's restraint, you need not ask, "Am I a sea, or a whale?" for your own heart may answer, "You can be more furious than the sea itself."

Think, again, *how unsatisfied is the sea.* It draws down and swallows up stretches of land and thousands of tons of cliff, but it is not filled up. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full." Huge Spanish galleons went to the bottom, with thousands of gold and silver pieces on board; but the sea was never the richer. When, on some dreadful night, our coasts are strewn with wrecks, and hundreds of lives are lost, the devouring deep is never the more satisfied. The sea is a hungry monster, which could swallow a navy, and then open its mouth for more. Are not many men made of the same craving sort? If you

gave them half a world they would cry for the other half; and if they had the whole round globe they would weep for the stars. Man's mind never rests in sweet content till God Himself satisfies it with Himself. O man, without true religion it is your fate to go for ever hungering and thirsting; or, like the sea, yeasting and foaming, after you know not what.

Human nature is like the sea for mischief. How destructive is the ocean, and how unfeeling! It makes widows and orphans by the thousand, and then smiles as if it had done nothing! Terrible havoc it can work when once its power is let loose! Do not talk of the destructiveness of the sea; let the reckless sinner think of the destructiveness of his own life. You that are living in sin, and in vice, what wrecks you have caused! How many who set out on the voyage of life, and bade fair to make a splendid passage, have gone upon the rocks *through you!* A foul word, a loose song, a filthy act, and a gay craft has become a wreck. Conscience can fill in the details. Ah me! one cannot say to God, "Am I a sea, or a sea-monster?" or He might well reply, "No shark has devoured so many as the drunkard in his cups, the swearer in his presumption, and the unclean in his lust!" Ah me! I could weep to think how much of mischief any one of you who are unconverted may yet do! The Lord deliver you from being left derelict, to cause wreck to others!

We must not forget that *we are less obedient to God than the sea is.* Nothing keeps back the sea from many a shore but a belt of sand; and though it rages in storm and tempest, the sea goes back in due time and leaves the sand for children to play upon. It knows its bounds and keeps them. When the time comes for the tide to rise, the obedient waters march upon the shore in unbroken ranks, and fill up every creek. They do not linger behind their time. When the moment comes to stay where they are, they rest at flood. Then comes the instant to begin the ebb, and no matter how boisterous the waves may be, they fall back at God's bidding. What, after all, is more orderly than the great sea? Would to God we were like it in this! How readily this great creature yields! A little wind springs up, and its waves answer at once to the breath of heaven. When the sun crosses the line, the equinoctial gales know their season; while at all times the great currents cease not the flow which God has appointed them. The sea is obedient to the Lord, and so was that great fish of which we read just now: "The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." As for us, we refuse to obey; and when left to ourselves, what law can restrain us? Is there anything in heaven or earth which a proud sinner will not venture to attempt? God blocks up the road to hell with hedge, and ditch, and chain; but we break over them. He digs a trench across our way, and we leap over it. He piles a mountain in the road, and as if our feet were like hinds' feet, we leap upon the high places of presumption. A man will go against wind and tide in his determination to be lost. O sea! O sea! thou art but a child with thy father, as compared with the wicked and rebellious heart of man! It is a bad argument, then. We need to be looked after. We need to be watched. We need to be kept in check, even more than a sea or a whale. We need the restraining providence and constraining grace of God to keep us from deadly sin.

IV. Last of all, I would remark that ALL THEY COMPLAINED OF WAS SENT IN LOVE. They said, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me?" but if they had known the truth they would have blessed God with all their hearts for having watched over them as He has done.

First, God's restraint of some of us *has kept us from self-ruin.* If the Lord had not held us in we might have been in prison; we might have been in the grave; we might have been in hell! Who knows what would have become of us? An old Scotchman said to Mr. Rowland Hill, what I am quite sure would have been as true of me. He looked into Mr. Hill's face so keenly and so often, that at last good Rowland asked him, "Why are you looking at my face so much?" "I was thinking," said the Scotchman, "that if you had not been converted by the grace of God, you would have been a terrible sinner." And, surely, this would have been my case. Nothing half-and-half would have contented me. I should have gone to the end of my tether. Is not the same true of some of you? How many times has the Lord laid His own hand on us to stay us from a fatal step! If we were checked in our youth, and brought there and then to Jesus, it was a gracious deed on God's part. If we have been hindered during a sinful manhood, and have at length been made to bow before the will of the Lord, this also is great grace. Left to ourselves, we should have chosen our own destruction. Do you not think that God's taking you apart, and giving you a tender conscience, and admonishing you so often, proves His great love to you? Surely someone has prayed for you. There is a mother here to-night. I hope she will not mind my telling you what she did last Tuesday when I was sitting in my vestry. She brought me a little brown paper parcel with £50 in it, and she gave it for the British and Foreign Sailors' Society. She has a son whom she has not heard of for years. He went to sea, and she cannot find him, or get any tidings of his whereabouts; but she hopes that a missionary of this Society may meet him in some strange place, and bring him to the Saviour. She prays that it may be so, and, therefore, she brings her self-sacrificing offering—a great sum, I am sure, for her—that she may help to support the good Society which, she hopes, may be a blessing to her boy. There are other sailors to whom God's love is seen in their being followed up by a mother's pleadings. Ah, friend! the Lord would not have checked you so if He had not intended to bless you. That broken leg of yours is to keep you from running too far into sin. That yellow fever was sent to cool the fever of your sin. Your missing that ship caused you to miss shipwreck and death. These mishaps were all tokens of love to you. The Lord would not let you perish. He resolves to save you. You are one of His chosen. Christ bought you with His blood, and He means to have you for His own. If you will not come to Him with a gentle breeze He will fetch you by a storm. Yield to the pressure of His love. If you will be as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding, He will break you in and manage you with bit and bridle; but it would be far better if you would be ruled by love.

I think I see tokens of electing love upon you in those very things which you have kicked against. The Lord is working to bring you to Himself, and to Himself you must come. The prodigal son was driven home by stress of weather. If his father had had the doing of it, he could not have worked the

matter better. His hungry belly and his pig-feeding fetched him home. The unkindness of the citizens of the far country helped to hurry him back to his father. Hardship, and want, and pain, are meant to bring you back, and God has used them to that end; and the day will come when you will say, "I bless God for the rough wave which washed me on shore. I bless God for the stormy providence which drowned my comfort, but saved my soul."

Once more, and I have done. *God will not always deal roughly with you.* Perhaps to-night He will say His last sharp word. Will you yield to softer means? They say that oil poured on troubled waters will make them smooth: God the Holy Ghost can send to your troubled soul a lifelong calm. The winds and waves on the Galilean sea all went to sleep in an instant. How? Why, when Jesus came walking on the water He said to the warring elements, "Be still." The waves crouched like whipped dogs at His feet, though they had roared like lions before. He said to the winds, "Hush!" and they breathed as softly as the lips of a babe. Jesus is here at this hour. He that died on Calvary looks down on us: believe on Him. He lifts His pierced hands, and cries, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved." Will you not look to Him? Oh, that His grace may lead you at once to say, "He is all in all to me!" Here is a soul-saving text for you: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Accept the Saviour; and though you be as a sea, or as a whale, you shall no longer complain of the Lord's watching you, but you shall rejoice in perfect liberty. He is free who loves to serve his God. He makes it his delight that he is watched of the Lord. The Lord bless sailors! May we all meet in the Fair Havens! May the flag of your Society bless every sea, because God blesses its missionaries! I wish for it the utmost prosperity, and I judge it to be worthy of the most generous aid of all Christian men. In all respects it is exactly to my mind. The Lord send prosperity to it! Amen.

A SERMON FROM A RUSH

"Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish."—Job viii. 11–13.

ISAAC walked in the fields at eventide to meditate. I commend him for his *occupation.* Meditation is exceedingly profitable to the mind. If we talked less, read less, and meditated more, we should be wiser men. I commend him for *the season* which he chose for that occupation—at eventide. When the business of the day was over, and the general stillness of nature was in harmony with the quiet of his soul. I also commend him for the *place* which he selected—the wide expanse of nature—the field. Wise men can readily find a thousand subjects for contemplation abroad in the open country. Our four-square room is not very suggestive; but when a man walks in the fields, having the Lord in his heart, and his whole mental faculties directed towards heavenly things, all things aid him in his pleasing occupation. If we look above to sun, moon, and stars, all these remind us of the grandeur of God, and make us ask ourselves, "What is man, that the Lord should be mindful of him, or the son of man, that Jehovah should visit him?" If we look below, the green meadows, or golden cornfields, all proclaim divine care and beauty. There is not a bird that sings, nor a grasshopper that chirps in the grass, which does not urge us to praise and magnify the name of the Most High: while the plants, from the hyssop on the wall to the cedar which spreads its boughs so gloriously on Lebanon, exhibit to observant eyes the wisdom of the great Creator of all things. The murmuring brook talks to the listening ear in hallowed whispers of Him whose cloudy throne supplies its stream; and the air, as it sighs amid the trees, tells in mysterious accents of the great unseen, but ever-active Spirit of the living God.

The great book of nature only needs to be turned over by a reverent hand, and to be read by an attentive eye, to be found to be only second in teaching to the Book of Revelation. He who would have us forget to study the fair creation of God, is foolish; he would have us neglect one book by a great Author, in order that we may the better comprehend another from the same hand. The pages of inspiration reveal God far more clearly than the fields of creation; but having once obtained the light of God the Holy Spirit, we can then enter the world of nature, which has become consecrated to our best devotions, and find that "in His temple doth every one speak of His glory."

Down by the river's brink let us go, like Pharaoh's daughter, and perhaps among the rushes we shall find a subject for thought, of which we may say, as she did of Moses, "I drew it out of the water." The flag, as it waves in yonder marsh, has a word of warning, and whosoever hath ears to hear, let him hear.

I claim your attention for a preacher who is not often heard: lend him your ears, and when any shall ask you, "What went ye out for to see?" you need not blush to answer, "A reed shaken by the wind." The rush shall, this morning, by God's grace, teach us a lesson of self-examination. Bildad, the Shuhite, points it out to us as the picture of a hypocrite: so, going to our work at once, we shall have three things to talk about this morning. The hypocrite's religion: first, *what is it like?* secondly, *what it lives on;* and thirdly, *what will become of it?*

I. First, then, THE HYPOCRITE'S PROFESSION: WHAT IS IT LIKE?

It is here compared to a rush growing in the mire, and a flag flourishing in the water. This comparison has several points in it.

I. In the first place, hypocritical religion may be compared to the rush, for *the rapidity with which it grows.* True conversions are often very sudden—as

to wit, the conversion of Saul on his road to Damascus, and the conversion of the Philippian jailer, when suddenly startled out of his sleep and made to cry "What must I do to be saved?" But the after-growth of Christians is not quite so rapid and uninterrupted: seasons of deep depression chill their joy; hours of furious temptation make a dreadful onslaught upon their quiet; they cannot always rejoice; their life is chequered; they are emptied from vessel to vessel, and are acquainted with grief. True Christians are very like oaks, which take years to reach their maturity: many March winds blow through them before they are well rooted; and oftentimes tempest, and flood, and drought, and hurricane exercise their tremendous powers upon them. Not so the hypocrite: once having made a profession of being converted, things generally go very smoothly with him. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." They are strangers to lamentations over inbred corruption. When believers talk of a warfare within, they are astonished. If we groan out, "O wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" these gentlemen say, "What bad people these Christians must be, to talk in that way! What black hearts they must have! and how inconsistent for them to claim to be children of God!" The hypocrite can always pray well, and sing well; He meets no hindrances in coming to a mercy-seat, has no groans to mingle with his formal songs. The backs of living men ache under their loads, but a steam-engine having no living sensibilities knows no pains; a horse may stumble from weariness, but a locomotive never; even so the mechanical professor goes on and on and on at even rate, when living souls enjoy no such perfect equanimity. Strong temptations do not grieve the mere professor; the devil does not care to molest him; he knows he is sure of him, and so he lets him very much alone. The Pharisee's house stood very firmly, though it was built on sand; and it neither shook, nor stirred, till the flood came; it was as firm to all human appearance as if it had been founded on the Rock of Ages. When the trial-hour came, then the destruction was terribly complete; but meanwhile, its foundations were digged without labour, and its timbers were set up without trouble. It is an ill sign, dear friend, if thou never hast to search thy heart with deep anxiety lest thou shouldst be deceived. To have such strong faith that you never waver is one thing; but to be filled with such strong presumption that you never examine yourself is quite another. "Tush!" says this man, "I can do all things; I can run and not be weary; I can walk and not faint; I do not understand these sighings of Little-faith, and limpings of Ready-to-halt; I cannot understand all this noise about conflict within—I am peaceable and quiet always." Yes, so it may be. Alas! many have heard the voice, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." So like the rush by the river, the hypocrite grows up suddenly and flourishingly in divine things, to all appearance, and finds it easy work to be green and fair in the ways of the Lord.

2. The rush is of all plants one of the most *hollow and unsubstantial.* It looks stout enough to be wielded as a staff, but he that leaneth upon it shall most certainly fall. It is a water-loving thing, and it partakes of the nature of that on which it feeds; it is unstable as water, and it does not excel; it has a fine appearance, but it is of no service whatever where stability is wanted. So is it with the hypocrite; he is fair enough on the outside, but there is no solid faith in Christ Jesus in him, no real repentance on account of sin, no vital union to Christ Jesus. He can pray, but not in secret, and the essence and soul of prayer he never knew. He has never wrestled with the angel, never sighed and cried unto God, and been "heard in that he feared." He has a pretended confidence, but that confidence never was founded and bottomed on the finished work of Jesus Christ. He was never emptied of self, never brought down to feel that all his own doings, and willings, and powers, are less than nothing and vanity. If there had been a deep repentance, and a real confidence, and a true life in Jesus, then he had not been the hypocrite that he now is. O, dear friends, while I speak upon these things, I have over my spirit the overshadowing of a great gloom. What if some of us should be found to have been as unsubstantial as the rush by the river, when God comes to judge the world? What, when you need a hope to bear you up in the hour of death, what if it should snap beneath you? You high professors, you ancient members and revered church officers, you eloquent preachers of the Word, what if all your profession should, like the baseless fabric of a vision, pass away? You have been drinking of the cup of the Lord, you have been feasting at His sacramental table, you have talked a great deal of rich experiences, you have boasted of the graces which you think the Spirit of God has given you; but what if it should all be a delusion? What if you should have fostered in your soul self-deception, and should now be traversing the way of darkness, while you dream that you are in the way of light? May the Lord search us, and give us that true, solid, substantial, real, earnest-hearted faith in Christ which will stand the test.

The reed is hollow, and has no heart, and the hypocrite has none either; and want of heart is fatal indeed. When the Roman augur killed the victim to take an omen from the inwards, he always considered it to be the worst sign of all if no heart was found, or if the heart was shrivelled. "Their heart is divided," said Hosea, "now shall they be found wanting." God abhors the sacrifice where the heart is not found. Sirs, if you cannot give God your hearts, do not mock Him with solemn sounds upon thoughtless tongues. If you do not mean your godliness, do not profess it. Above all things, abhor mere profession. Jonathan Edwards tells us that in the great revival in America there were conversions of all sorts of people, from harlots upwards, but not one single conversion, he said, of ungodly professors. Those seemed to have been the only persons upon whom the Spirit of God did not descend. Beware, then, of having the outward form of religion, and being hollow and heartless like the rush, for then thy case is desperate indeed.

3. A third comparison very naturally suggests itself, namely, that the hypocrite is very like the rush for *its bending properties.* When the rough wind comes howling over the marsh, the rush has made up its mind that it will hold its place at all hazards. So if the wind blows from the north, he bends to the south, and the blast sweeps over him; and if the wind blows from the south, he bends to the north, and the gale has no effect upon him. Only grant the rush one thing, that he may keep his place, and he will cheerfully bow to all the rest. The hypocrite will yield to good influences if he be in good society.

"Oh yes, certainly, certainly, sing, pray, anything you like." With equal readiness he will yield to evil influences if he happens to be in connection with them. "Oh, yes, sing a song, talk wantonness, run into gay society, attend the theatre, take a turn with the dice; certainly, if you wish it; 'When we are at Rome we do as Rome does.'" Anything to oblige anybody is his motto. He is an omnivorous feeder, and like the swine can eat the vegetable of propriety, or the flesh of iniquity. One form of doctrine is preached to him,—very well, he would not wish to contend against it for a moment; it is contradicted by the next preacher he hears,—and really there is a great deal to be said on the other side; so he holds with hare and hounds too. He is all for heat when the weather is hot, and quite as much for cold when it is the season; he can freeze, and melt, and boil, all in an hour, just as he finds it pay best to be solid or liquid. If it be most respectable to call a thing black, well, then, it is black; if it will pay better to call it white, well then it is not so very black, in fact it is rather white, or white altogether if you like to call it so. The gross example of the Vicar of Bray comes at once to one's mind, who had been a papist under Henry VIII, then a protestant under a Protestant reign, then a papist under Mary then again a Protestant under Elizabeth; and he declared he had always been consistent with his principle, for his principle was to continue the Vicar of Bray. Some there are, who are evidently consistent in this particular, and in the idea that they will make things as easy for themselves as they can, and will get as much profit as they can, either by truth or error. Do you not know some such? They have not an atom of that stern staff of which martyrs are made in the whole of their composition. They love that modern goddess, charity. When Diana went down Charity went up; and she is as detestable a goddess as ever Diana was. Give me a man who will be all things to all men to win souls, if it be not a matter of principle; but give me the man who, when it comes to be a matter of right and wrong, will rather die than deny his faith; who could burn, but could not for a moment conceal his sentiments, much less lay them aside until a more convenient season. True godliness, such as will save the soul, must not be the mere bark, but the heart, the sap, the essence of a man's being—it must run right through and through, so that he cannot live without it. That religion is not worth picking up from a dunghill which you do not carry every day about with you, and which is not the dearest object for which you live. Beloved, we must be ready to die for Christ, or we shall have no joy in the fact that Christ died for us.

4. Yet again, the bulrush has been used in Scripture as a picture of a hypocrite, from its habit of *hanging down its head.* "Is it to hang thy head like a bulrush?" asks the prophet, speaking to some who kept a hypocritical fast. Pretended Christians seem to think that to hang down the head is the very index of a deep piety. To look piously miserable—to speak in a wretched tone of voice—to be constantly lamenting the wickedness of the times, and bewailing the badness of the harvests and the wickedness of our legislature—to see nothing anywhere but what is vile, deceptive, and abominable, is thought to be the trade mark of superfine godliness. It is the mark of a hypocrite to wear always a sad countenance; Job says of the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" and the answer that he expected was, "No, it is altogether impossible!" A real hypocrite finds no satisfaction in his religion; he goes through with it because he thinks he must; he walks to his place of worship with his books under his arm just as a culprit might be supposed to walk up the gallows stairs, and when he gets to a place of worship, he is very proper in all his demeanour—very proper indeed, but he is never joyous. Smile on Sundays! Shocking! What! enjoy anything like mirth at any time! Awful! Now, you understand all about this. There are some things which you must handle very tenderly, because they will break if you don't. A man, dressed in shoddy garments, walks very demurely for fear the rubbish should rend, but good broadcloth allows us liberty of action without fear of such an accident. Gingerbread religionists may only be looked at in their sombre aspects, but genuine believers are not ashamed to be viewed even when their cheerfulness is at its full. A person who has bought a pair of shoes made of brown paper must mincingly tread with delicate steps; but he, who according to Scripture, is shod with iron and brass may, with manly gait, march on, and even leap for joy without fear. I love Christian preciseness of action, but I abhor hypocritical decorum and formalistic exactness of worship. I would advocate holy cheerfulness, a Christian freedom which lets the whole man show itself, a freedom of sorrowing when it is the time for sorrow, and a freedom of rejoicing when it is the time for rejoicing. That constrained, stiff starched religion, which some people think such a great deal of, is nothing but the bulrush religion of the hypocrite and the Pharisee, and the sooner we away with it the better. The man whose heart is right with God does not stop always to be saying, "How will this look?" His heart tells him, as he reads the Word, that such a course is right, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he follows it. Right with him is delight. He knows that evil is not denied to him as though he were debarred from pleasure, but that it is only kept from him as a tender parent would keep poison from a child. Our life is the life of liberty; and we find of true religion, that "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

5. Once more; the rush is well taken as an emblem of the mere professor from *its bearing no fruit.* Nobody would expect to find figs on a bulrush, or grapes of Eshcol on a reed. So it is with the hypocrite, he brings forth no fruit. The hypocrite gets as far as this: "I do *not* drink, I do *not* swear, I do *not* cheat, I do *not* lie, I do *not* break the Sabbath." His religion is all negative; but when it comes to anything positive he fails. What have you ever done for Christ? You may look at the whole of the hypocrite's life, and it yields nothing. Perhaps he has given a guinea or two to a charity. Yes; but did he give it *to God*? He has been kind to the poor. Did he look at the poor as being God's poor, and care for them because God cares for them? Did he do it for God? Throughout the whole life of the hypocrite there is nothing in which he really serves God. What! not when he has made that long prayer? He did it either to satisfy his conscience or to please those who were listening to him. Did he really pray to God and do it for God's glory, and in order that he might have fellowship with God? If so, he is no hypocrite but the hypocrite proper, though he has left off many wrong things, yet he has not advanced so far as to

bring forth fruit meet for repentance; he has not run in the way of holiness; he has not sought after the image of Christ; he does not delight in communion with Christ; he has no faith, no joy, no hope, no conformity to the spirit of the Master; he lacks fruit, and therefore he is as the rush, and not as a plant of the Lord's right hand planting.

I will not stay further to work out this parallel; only if any words have seemed to strike you, let them strike you. If there has been a sentence in what I have said that suited my own case, I do desire to feel its power. The worst is, that some of you who are most sincere will be troubled when you search yourselves, when we do not want you to be; and others who are really hypocrites are the very last persons to think they are so. When our young members come to me in such trouble, crying, "Sir, I am afraid I am a hypocrite," I always think, "I believe you are not, or else you would not be afraid of it." But those who are never afraid, who have just written it down as a matter of fact that all is well with them, should listen to the word of the prophet, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." The worm may be in the centre of the apple, when the cheek of the fruit is still beautiful to look upon. God save us from hypocrisy, and grant us grace to see ourselves in a true light.

II. Secondly, we have to consider WHAT IT IS THAT THE HYPOCRITE'S RELIGION LIVES ON. "Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water?" The rush is entirely dependent upon the ooze in which it is planted. If there should come a season of drought, and the water should fail from the marsh, the rush would more speedily die than any other plant. "Whilst it is yet in its greenness and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb." The Hebrew name for the rush signifies a plant that is always drinking; and so the rush lives perpetually by sucking and drinking in moisture. This is the case of the hypocrite. The hypocrite cannot live without something that shall foster his apparent piety. Let me show you some of this mire and water upon which the hypocrite lives.

Some people's religion cannot live without *excitement*: revival services, earnest preachers, and zealous prayer-meetings keep them green; but the earnest minister dies, or goes to another part of the country; the Church is not quite so earnest as it was, and what then? Where are your converts? Oh! how many there are who are hot-house plants; while the temperature is kept up to a certain point they flourish, and bring forth flowers, if not fruits; but take them out into the open air, give them one or two nights' frost of persecution, and where are they? My dear hearers, beware of that godliness which depends upon excitement for its life. I do not speak against religious excitement: men get excited over politics, and science, and trade—why should they not be excited about the far weightier things of religion? But still, though you may indulge yourself with it sometimes, do not let it be your element. I am afraid that many Churches have been revived and revived, till they became like big bubbles full of wind, and now they have almost vanished into thin air. The grace which man gives, man can take away. If your piety has sprung up like a mushroom, it will be about as frail. Doubtless many are converted at revivals who run well and hold out; and then their conversion is the work of the Spirit of God; but there are as many, I fear, of another kind, who get delirious with excitement; who fancy that they have repented, dream that they have believed, and then imagine themselves to be the children of God, and go on in such a delusion perhaps year after year. Beware! beware! Some hypocrites can no more live without excitement, than the rush can live without water; but, dear hearers, pray that you may be like the palm tree, which even in the desert, still continues green, and brings forth its fruit in the year of drought.

Many more professors live upon *encouragement*. You are the child of godly parents: those parents naturally look with great delight upon the first signs of grace in you, and they encourage and foster, as they should do, everything that is good. Or you belong to a class such as some of those most blessed classes which meet here, presided over by tender, loving spirits, and whenever you have a little difficulty you can run to these kind helpers; whenever any fresh temptation arises you find strength in their warnings and counsels. This is a very great privilege. I wish that in all Churches they would practise the text, "Encourage him" more and more. We ought to comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak. But, dear friends, beware of the piety which depends upon encouragement. You will have to go, perhaps, where you will be frowned at and scowled at, where the head of the household, instead of encouraging prayer, will refuse you either the room or the time for engaging in it. You may meet with hard words, bitter sneers, and cruel mockings, because you profess to be a Christian. Oh! get grace which will stand that fiery trial. God give you a grace that will be independent of human helpers, because it hangs upon the bare arm of God Himself.

Some, too, we know, whose religion is sustained by *example*. It may be the custom in the circle in which you move to attend a place of worship; nay, more, it has come to be the fashion to join the Church and make a profession of religion. Well, example is a good thing. When I was crossing the Humber from Hull to New Holland the other day, a steamer came in with sheep on board, and there was some difficulty in getting them from the boat to the pier; but the butcher first dragged one sheep over the drawbridge, and then the others came along readily enough. Example is a good thing; one true sheep of Christ may lead the rest in the way of truth and obedience; but a religion which depends entirely on other people, must obviously go to ruin when subjected to the temptation of an evil example. Why, if you simply join the Church because other young people do it, or profess such-and-such a faith because it happens to be the prevailing doctrine in the district where you reside, why, then, your religion will depend on the locality, and when you move somewhere else, your religion will move off too, or you from it. Young man, avoid this feeble sort of piety. Be a man who can be singular when to be singular is to be right. If the whole world shall run headlong down the broad road, be it yours to thread your way through the crowd against the current along the uphill way of life. The dead fish floats down the stream, the live fish goes against it. Show your life by shunning unholy example.

Furthermore, a hypocrite's religion is often very much supported by the *profit* that he makes by it. Mr. By-ends joined the Church, because, he said, he

should get a good wife by making a profession of religion. Besides, Mr. By-ends kept a shop, and went to a place of worship, because he said, the people would have to buy goods somewhere, and if they saw him at their place very likely they would come to his shop, and so his religion would help his trade. Thus he argued that there were three good things—a profession of religion, a good wife, and a good trade as well. Suppose, Mr. By-ends, that your religion involved your missing the supposed good wife, and losing the good customers, what about it then? "Why, then," says he, "I'm very sorry, but really we must look to the main chance; we must not commit ourselves too far." That is Mr. By-ends' way of judging. He does not look upon the things of God as the main chance; they are means to an end—that is all. I fear me there is much of this everywhere; you will know best, any of you, how far you are affected by it. I am sure there are few, if any of you, who can be suspected of coming here to gain trade, for the thing does not answer in such a city as London; but in country towns this operates marvellously. You can have the dissenting trade if you go to meeting, or you can have the Church trade if you go to the steeple-house. Well, worshippers of the golden calf, do you know what Christ will do with you, if you are found in His temple, when He comes? That scourge of small cords will be on your backs. "Take these things hence," He will say, as He sees your tables, and your doves, and your shekels; "My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer, ye have made it a den of thieves." The rush will grow where there is plenty of mire, plenty of profit for religion, but dry up the gains, and where would some people's religion be? Pray, with all your might against this loathsome disgusting sin of making a protension to godliness, merely for the sake of getting something by it. Yet, doubtless, there are crowds who do this.

With certain persons their godliness rests very much upon their *prosperity*. "Doth Job serve God for nought?" was the wicked question of Satan concerning that upright man; but of many it might be asked with justice, for they love God after a fashion because He prospers them; but if things went ill with them they would give up all faith in God. I remember two who joined this church, I remember them with sorrow; I faintly hope good things of them, but I frequently fear the worst. They joined this church when things were going very well; but almost from that very time they had a succession of losses, and they imputed this to their having made a profession of religion, and so gave up outward religious duties. Whether they did that out of a scrupulous honesty, I scarce can tell, or whether it really was this, that they could not receive evil at the hand of God as well as good, I do not know; I am inclined to fear it was the latter. There are some who quarrel with the Most High. If they can clearly see that, since the time of their supposed conversion, the world has gone prosperously with them, then they will love God in their poor carnal way; but if it has been nothing but adversity, then they are astonished, and think God is not kind to them. Do you know that the promise of the old covenant was prosperity, but the promise of the new covenant is adversity? Listen to this text: "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit"—what! "He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." If you bring forth fruit you will have to endure affliction. "Alas!" says one, "that is a terrible prospect." Ah! but, beloved, this affliction works out such comfortable fruit, that the Christian, who is the subject of it, has learned to rejoice in tribulations, because as his tribulations abound so his consolation aboundeth by Christ Jesus. Rest assured, if you are a godly man, you will be no stranger to the rod. Trials must and will befall. Do not let me mislead anybody into the idea of praying for trouble. I have heard of one who did so; he never did it but once; many trials made him wiser. The true-born child knows how to bear the rod, but he will not ask for it; if he asked for it he would be very silly, and it would be of no service to him. You will have it sooner or later, and though, it may be, months and years will roll very quietly with you, yet there will be days of darkness, and you ought to rejoice that there are such, for in these you will be weaned from earth and made meet for heaven; you will be delivered from your clingings to the present, and made to long, and pine, and sigh for the things which are not seen but eternal, so soon to be revealed to you.

To conclude this point. The hypocrite is very much affected by the *respectability* of the religion which he avows. John Bunyan's pithy way of putting it is, "Many walk with religion when she wears her silver slippers"; but they forsake her if she goes barefoot. May I ask you this question? What would you do if to follow Christ were penal according to the laws of the land? If you had to live under perpetual jeopardy of life for reading the Word, would you hide it as the saints of God did, behind the wainscoat or under the floor, and read it down in the cellar or up in the garret at spare moments? Could you come forward in the day of trial as those did in Pliny's time, and say, "I am a Christian"? Do you think that like poor Tomkins, when Bonner held his finger over the candle to let him see what it was like, you could still say you could burn, but you could not turn? Could you stand as some of the martyrs did at the stake, telling those who looked on that if they did not clap their hands at last they might know their religion was not true, and so at the very last, when their poor fingers were all on fire, they would still lift them up, and wave their hands to and fro, and cry out, "None but Christ! none but Christ!" Do you think you would have the grace to suffer for Christ Jesus? You may say, "I fear I should not." My dear friends, that fear is a very natural one; but mark you, if you can bear the ordinary trials of the day, the constant trials of the world, and take them before God and exhibit Christian patience under them, you may *hope* that as a believer in Christ you would have more grace given you when the trials became more severe, and so you would be able to pass through them as the saints did of old. But mark you, if the present trials and troubles of the day are too much for you, and you cannot exhibit Christian patience under them, I am compelled to ask you in the language of Jeremiah, "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" This may help us to try ourselves.

III. We have a third point to close with, and that is, WHAT BECOMES OF THE HYPOCRITE'S HOPE?

"While it is yet in its greenness and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God, ; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish." Long before the Lord comes to cut the hypocrite down, it often happens that *he dries up for want of the mire on which he lives.* The excitement, the encouragement, the example, the profit, the respectability, the prosperity, upon which he lived fail him, and he fails too. Alas, how dolefully is this the case in all Christian churches! Little have we had to mourn over defections during the years of our ministry; but we have had some sorrowful, very sorrowful cases, and I doubt not we shall have more. "Lord, is it I?" "Lord, is it I?" is a question that may be passed round among professing Christians now. I fear that there are those here this morning who one day will deny the Lord that bought them, and crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. "Oh!" says one, "it cannot be me." Do not be too sure, friend, do not be too sure! If I could come in prophetic spirit to some of you who *will* do this, and look you in the face, and tell you what you will do, you would say like Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" And I should have to settle my countenance until I became ashamed, and look at you yet again, and say, "You are no dog, and yet you will play the dog, and return to your vomit, and become yet again what once you were, only with this aggravation, that you will have sinned against light and against knowledge, against sacred influences and professed enjoyments of divine love." You have cleansed the house, you have swept it, you have garnished it, and the evil spirit is gone; but if the Holy Spirit has not driven him out, if this has not been a work of power on the part of God, that evil spirit, will come back, and he will take unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they shall enter in and dwell there, and your last end will be worse than the first. Better not to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to be turned back again. The worst of men are those traitors who leave the army of truth to side with the foe. I believe in the doctrine of the final perseverance of every true child of God; but there are in all our churches certain spurious pretenders who will not hold on their way, who will blaze and sparkle for a season, and then they will go out in darkness. They are "wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Better far make no pretension of having come to Christ, and of having been born again, unless through divine grace thou shalt hold fast to the end. Remember the back door to hell! Remember the back door to hell! There is a public entrance for the open sinner; but there is a back door for the professed saint; there is a back door for the hoary-headed professor, who has lived many years in apparent sincerity, but who has been a liar before God. There is a back door for the preacher who can talk fast and loudly, but who does not in his own heart know the truth he is preaching; there is a back door to hell for Church members, who are amiable and excellent in many respects, but who have not really looked unto the Lord Jesus Christ and found true salvation in Him. God grant that this may wake some, who otherwise would sleep themselves into perdition.

Yet again, where the rush still continues green because it has mire and water enough on which to feed, another result happens, namely, that *ere long the sickle is used to cut it down.* So must it be with thee, professor, if thou shalt keep up a green profession all thy days, yet if thou be heartless, spongy, soft, yielding, unfruitful, like the rush thou wilt be cut down, and sorrowful will be the day when, with a blaze, thou shalt be consumed. Oh! to be cut down at the last. Death, I hope, beloved, will be to many of you the season of your greatest joy; you will climb to Pisgah's top with weary footsteps, but when once there, the vision of the landscape will make amends for all the toil. The brooks, and hills, and vales, with milk and honey flow; and your delighted eyes shall gaze upon your portion, your eternal heritage. But oh! how different will be our lot, if instead of this, "Tekel" shall be written upon us at the last, because we are found wanting. "O my God! my God! hast Thou forsaken me? Am I, after all, mistaken? Have I played the hypocrite, and must I take the mask off now? Have I covered over the cancer? Have I worn a golden cloth over my leprous forehead, and must it be rent away? and must I stand, the mock of devils and the laughter of all worlds? What! have I drunk of Thy cup, have I eaten with Thee in the streets, and must I hear Thee say, 'I never knew thee, depart from Me thou worker of iniquity'? Oh! must it be?" Then how hard will be the bed on which I die! How stuffed with thorns that pillow! How tortured and anguished my poor broken heart, when every prop is knocked away, and the house comes tumbling down about my ears, when every drop of comfort is dried up, and even here the thirsty spirit lacks a drop of cordial to afford it comfort! O my dear hearers, by the eternal God I do conjure you, seek a genuine religion. Do not put off self-examination. I dare not put if off on my own account, and I do pray you do not postpone it on yours. If I have not said a word to comfort and to cheer this morning, forgive that lack of service, for my aim is to drive at this one thing—it will in the end be the best and most comforting to you all, if you will set to work now, and with diligence try yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Cry to God to aid you in this; you cannot do it well yourself, for "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" Oh cry to Him—"Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my ways." Time is flying: set about the business ere it is gone. Death is coming on: search yourselves ere the darkness thickens into midnight gloom. The judgment-day will soon arrive; the King will sit upon the great white throne. Oh! before *He* judges you, judge yourselves, that ye be not judged. The division will soon take place between the goats, and the sheep. Oh, seek to be under Christ the heavenly Shepherd now, that ye be not banished from His presence at the last. What more can I say? It is not your body that is at stake—it is not your estates that are in jeopardy—your souls, your undying souls, destined to heaven's glories or to hell's miseries are now in question. Search yourselves, search yourselves, and God Almighty search you too.

Ah! there are some of you who have no need to search. Without any trial you know yourselves to be on the wrong side; and there are others of you who, when you have searched, will be still afraid that you are wrong. Ah! well, whatsoever we are, or may have been, remember Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Looking to that thorn-crowned head, those dear hands and feet nailed to the tree, that blessed heart all set abroach by the soldier's spear—looking there, looking there only, looking there now, we find salvation. Believers, you have looked before; but if that be a matter of question, look now. "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Repeat that glance which gave you comfort. There is life still in a look at that Crucified One; there is life at this moment for thee. Jesu! Thy people look to Thee again! Thou Lover of our souls! accept us! O, you who never looked before, He reigns in glory, mighty to save. Repentance and remission of sins He gives. Only do but trust Him with your souls. Have done with all your works, your willings, your prayings, your tears, your everything as a ground of confidence, and trust in Him who died for sinners, and you "shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hands." The Lord grant we may be found right at last; for Jesus' sake! Amen.

A BLOW AT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

"If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse."—Job ix. 20.

EVER since man became a sinner he has been self-righteous. When he had a righteousness of his own he never gloried of it, but ever since he has lost it, he has pretended to be the possessor of it. Those proud words which our father Adam uttered, when he sought to screen himself from the guilt of his treason against his Maker, laying the blame apparently on Eve, but really upon God who gave him the woman, were virtually a claim to blamelessness. It was but a fig leaf he could find to cover his nakedness, but how proud was he of that fig-leaf excuse, and how tenaciously did he hold to it. As it was with our first parents so it is with us: self-righteousness is born with us, and there is perhaps no sin which has so much vitality in it as the sin of righteous self. We can overcome lust itself, and anger, and the fierce passions of the will better than we can ever master the proud boastfulness which rises in our hearts and tempts us to think ourselves rich and increased in goods, while God knoweth we are naked, and poor, and miserable. Tens of thousands of sermons have been preached against self-righteousness, and yet it is as necessary to turn the great guns of the law against its walls to-day as ever it was. Martin Luther said he scarcely ever preached a sermon without inveighing against the righteousness of man, and yet, he said, "I find that still I cannot preach it down. Still men will boast in what they can do, and mistake the path to heaven to be a road paved by their own merits, and not a way besprinkled by the blood of the atonement of Jesus Christ." My dear hearers, I cannot compliment you by imagining that all of you have been delivered from the great delusion of trusting in yourselves. The godly, those who are righteous through faith in Christ, still have to mourn that this infirmity clings to them; while as to the unconverted themselves, their besetting sin is to deny their guiltiness, to plead that they are as good as others, and to indulge still the vain and foolish hope that they shall enter into heaven from some doings, sufferings, or weepings of their own. I do not suppose there are any who are self-righteous in as bold a sense as the poor countryman I have heard of. His minister had tried to explain to him the way of salvation, but either his head was very dull, or else his soul was very hostile to the truth the minister would impart; for he so little understood what he had heard, that when the question was put, "Now then, what is the way by which you hope you can be saved before God?" the poor honest simpleton said, "Do you not think, sir, if I were to sleep one cold frosty night under a hawthorn bush, that would go a great way towards it?" conceiving that his suffering might, in some degree at least, assist him in getting into heaven. You would not state your opinion in so bold a manner; you would refine it, you would gild it, you would disguise it, but it would come to the same thing after all; you would still believe that some sufferings, repentings, or believings of your own might possibly merit salvation. The Romish Church indeed, often tells this so very plainly, that we cannot think it less than profanity. I have been informed that there is in one of the Romish chapels in Cork, a monument bearing these words upon it, "I. H. S. Sacred to the memory of the benevolent Edward Molloy; a friend of humanity, the father of the poor; he employed the wealth of this world only to procure the riches of the next; and leaving a balance of merit in the book of life, he made heaven debtor to mercy. He died October 17th, 1818, aged 90." I do not suppose that any of you will have such an epitaph on your tombstones, or ever dream of putting it as a matter of account with God, and striking a balance with Him, your sins being on one side and your righteousness on the other, and hoping that a balance might remain. And yet the very same idea, only not so honestly expressed—a little more guarded, and a little more refined—the same idea, only taught to speak after a gospel dialect—is inherent in us all, and only divine grace can thoroughly cast it out of us.

The sermon of this morning is intended to be another blow against our self-righteousness. If it will not die, at least let us spare no arrows against it; let us draw the bow, and if the shaft cannot penetrate its heart, it may at least stick in its flesh and help to worry it to its grave.

I. Endeavouring to keep close to my text, I shall start with this first point—that THE PLEA OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS CONTRADICTS ITSELF. "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."

Come, friend, thou who dost justify thyself by thine own works, let me hear thee speak. "I say that I have no need of a salvation by the blood and righteousness of another, for I believe that I have kept the commands of God from my youth up, and I do not think that I am guilty in His sight, but I hope

that I may be able in my own right to claim a seat in paradise." Now, sir, your plea and this declaration of yours is in itself a condemnation of you, because upon its very surface it is apparent that you *are committing sin while you are pleading that you have no sin.* For the very plea itself is a piece of high and arrogant *presumption.* God hath said it, let Jew and Gentile stop his mouth, and let all the world stand guilty before God. We have it on inspired authority that "there is none righteous, no, not one." "There is none good, save One, that is God." We are told by the mouth of a prophet sent from God, that "all we like wandering sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." And thou, in saying that thou art righteous, dost commit the sin of calling God a liar. Thou hast dared to impugn His veracity, thou hast slandered His justice. This boast of thine is in itself a sin, so great, so heinous, that if thou hadst only that one sin to account for, it would be sufficient to sink thee to the lowest hell. The boast, I say, is in itself a sin; the moment that a man saith, "I have no sin," he commits a sin in the saying of it,—the sin of contradicting his Maker, and making God a false accuser of His creatures.

Besides, dost thou not see, thou vain and foolish creature, that thou hast been guilty of *pride* in the very language thou hast used? Who but a proud man would stand up and commend himself? Who, but one who was proud as Lucifer, would in the face of God's declaration declare himself to be just and holy? Did the best of men ever speak thus? Did they not all of them acknowledge that they were guilty? Did Job, of whom God said that he was a perfect and an upright man, claim perfection? Did he not say, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me?" Oh! proud wretch, how art thou puffed up! How hath Satan bewitched thee; how hath he made thee lift up thine horn on high and speak with a stiff neck. Take heed to thyself, for if thou hadst never been guilty before, this pride of thine were quite sufficient to draw Jehovah's thunderbolts out of the quiver, and make Him smite thee once for all to thine eternal destruction.

But further, the plea of self-righteousness is self-contradictory upon another ground; for all that a self-righteous man pleads for, is *comparative* righteousness. "Why," saith he, "I am no worse than my neighbours, in fact a great deal better; I do not drink, or swear; I do not commit fornication or adultery; I am no Sabbath breaker; I am no thief; the laws of my country do not accuse, much less condemn me; I am better than the most of men, and if I be not saved, God help those who are worse than I am; if I cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, then who can?" Just so, but then all that you claim is that you are righteous as compared with others. Do you not see that this is a very vain and fatal plea, because you do in fact admit that you are not *perfectly* righteous:—that there is *some* sin in you, only you claim there is not so much in you as in another. You admit that you are diseased, but then the plague-spot is not so apparent in you as in your fellow-man. You admit that you have robbed God and have broken His laws, only you have not done it with so desperate an intent, nor with so many aggravations as others. Now this is virtually a plea of guilty, disguise it as you may. You admit that you have been guilty, and against you the sentence comes forth—"*The soul that sinneth it shall die.*" Take heed to thyself that thou find no shelter in this refuge of lies, for it shall certainly fail thee when God shall come to judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity.

Suppose now for a moment that a command is issued to the beasts of the forest that they should become sheep. It is quite in vain for the bear to come forward and plead that he was not so venomous a creature as the serpent; equally absurd would it be for the wolf to say that though stealthy and cunning, and gaunt, and grim, yet he was not so great a grumbler nor so ugly a creature as the bear; and the lion might plead that he had not the craftiness of the fox. "It is true," saith he, "I wet my tongue in blood, but then I have some virtues which may commend me, and which, in fact, have made me king of beasts." What would this argument avail? The indictment is that these animals are not sheep, their plea against the indictment is that they are no less like sheep than other creatures, and that some of them have more gentleness and more docility than others of their kind. The plea would never stand. Or use another picture. If in the courts of justice, a thief, when called up, should argue, "Well, I am not so great a thief as some; there are to be found some living in Whitechapel or St. Giles's who have been thieves longer than I have, and if there be one conviction in the book against me, there are some that have a dozen convictions against them." No magistrate would acquit a man on such an excuse as that, because it would be tantamount to his admission of a degree of guilt, though he might try to excuse himself because he had not reached a higher degree. It is so with you, sinner. You have sinned. Another man's sins cannot excuse you; you must stand upon your own feet. At the day of judgment you must yourself make a personal appearance and it will not be what another man has done that will condemn, or acquit you, but your own personal guilt. Take heed, then, take heed, sinner; for it will not avail thee that there are others blacker than thyself. If there be but a spot upon thee thou art lost; if there be but one sin unwashed by Jesus' blood, thy portion must be with the tormentors. A holy God cannot look even upon the least degree of iniquity.

But further, the plea of the self-conceited man is, that he has done his best, and can claim a *partial* righteousness. It is true, if you touch him in a tender place he acknowldges that his boyhood and his youth were stained with sin. He tells you that in his early days he was a "fast lad"; that he did many things which he is sorry for now. "But then," says he, "these are only like spots in the sun; these are only like a small headland of waste ground in acres of fruitful soil; I am still good; I am still righteous, because my virtues exceed my vices, and my good deeds quite cover up all the mistakes that I have committed." Well, sir, do you not see that the only righteousness you claim is a *partial* righteousness? and in that very claim you do in fact make an admission that you are not perfect; that you have committed some sins. Now I am not responsible for what I am about to state, nor am I to be blamed for harshness in it, because I state neither more nor less than the very truth of God. It is of no saving avail to you that you have not have committed ten thousand sins, for if you have committed one, you are a lost soul. The law is to be kept intact and entire, and the least crack, or flaw, or breakage, spoils it. The robe of righteousness in which you must stand at last must be without spot or blemish, and if there be but one microscopic stain upon it, which is supposing

what is never true, yet, even then the gates of heaven never can admit you. A perfect righteousness you must have, or else you shall never be admitted to that wedding feast. You may say, "I have kept such a commandment and have never broken it," but if you have broken another you are guilty of the whole, because the whole law is like one rich and costly vase—it is one in design and fashion. Though you break not the foot, and stain not the margin, yet if there be any flaw or damage, the whole vessel is marred. And so if you have sinned in any point, at any time and in any degree, you have broken the whole law; you stand guilty of it before God, nor can you be saved by the works of the law, do what you may.

"It is a hard sentence," says one, "and who can bear it!" Indeed, who *can* bear it? Who *can* bear to stand at the foot of Sinai and hear its thunders roar? "If so much as a beast touch the mountain it must be stoned or thrust through with a dart." Who can stand when the lightnings flash and God descends upon Mount Paran and the hills melt like wax beneath His feet? "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the law to do them." Cursed is the man who sins but once, yea, hopelessly cursed so far as the law is concerned. Oh! sinnner, I cannot help turning aside from the subject for a moment to remind you that there *is* a way of salvation, and a way by which the law's demands can be fully satisfied. *Christ* bore all the punishment of all believers, so that they cannot be punished. Christ kept the law of God for believers, and He is willing to cast about any and every penitent sinner that perfect robe of righteousness which He Himself has wrought out. But *you* cannot keep the law, and if you bring up your self-righteousness the law condemns both it and you; Out of your own mouth it condemns you, inasmuch as you have not done all things and have not kept all the law. A great rock lies in your path to heaven; a mountain insurmountable; a gulf impassable; and by that road no man shall ever enter into eternal life.

The plea of self-righteousness, then, is in itself self-contradicting, and has only to be fairly stated to an honest man for him to see that it will not hold water for a single moment. What need of laboured argument to disprove a self-evident lie? Why should we tarry longer? Who but a very fool would maintain a notion which flies in its own face and witnesses against itself?

II. But now I pass to the second point, THE MAN WHO USES THIS PLEA CONDEMNS THE PLEA HIMSELF.

Not only does the evil plea cut its own throat, but the man himself is aware when he uses it that it is an evil, and false, and vain refuge. Now this is a matter of conscience, and therefore I must deal plainly with you; and if I speak not what you have felt, then you can say I am mistaken; but if I speak what you must confess to be true, let it be as the very voice of God to you. Men *know* that they are guilty. The conscience of the proudest man, when it is allowed to speak, tells him that he deserves the wrath of God. He may brag in public, but the very loudness of his bragging proves that he has an uneasy conscience, and therefore he makes a mighty din in order to drown its voice. Whenever I hear an infidel saying hard things of Christ, it reminds me of the men of Moloch, who beat the drums that they might not hear the screams of their own children. These loud blasphemies, these braggart boastings, are only a noisy way of drowning the shrieks of conscience. Do not believe then these men are honest. I think all controversy with them is time thrown away. I would never controvert with a thief about the principles of honesty, or with a known adulterer concerning the duty of chastity. Devils are not to be reasoned with, but to be cast out. Parleying with hell serves no one's turn except the devil's. Did Paul argue with Elymas? or Peter with Simon Magus? I would not cross swords with a man who says there is no God; *he knows there is a God.* When a man laughs at Holy Scripture, you need not argue with him; he is either a fool or a knave—perhaps both. However villainous he may be, his conscience has some light; he knows that what he speaks is untrue. I cannot believe that conscience is so dead in any man as to let him believe that he is speaking the truth when he denies the Godhead; and much more I am certain that conscience never did give assent to the utterance of the braggart, who says he deserves eternal life, or has no sin of which to repent, or which by repentance may be washed away without the blood of Christ; he knows within himself that he speaks that which is false. When Professor Webster was shut up in prison for murder, he complained to the prison authorities that he had been insulted by his fellow-prisoners, for he said that through the walls of the prison he could hear them always crying out to him, "Thou bloody man! thou bloody man!" As it was not consistent with law that one prisoner should insult another, the strictest enquiry was made, and it was found that no prisoner had ever said such a word, or that if he had said it, Webster could not have heard it. It was his own conscience; it was not a word coming through the walls of the prison, but an echo reverberating from the wall of his bad heart, as conscience shouted, "Thou bloody man! thou bloody man!" There is in all your hearts a witness who will not cease his testimony; it cries, "Thou sinful man! thou sinful man!" You have only to listen to it, and you will soon find that every pretence of being saved by your good works must crumble to the ground. Oh! hear it now, and listen to it for a moment. I am sure *my* conscience says, "Thou sinful man! thou sinful man!" and I think yours must say the same, unless you are given up of God, and left to a seared conscience to perish in your sins.

When men get alone, if in their loneliness the thought of death forces itself upon them, they boast no more of goodness. It is not easy for a man to lie on his bed seeing the naked face of death, not at a distance, but feeling that his breath is breathing upon the skeleton, and that he must soon pass through the iron gates of death—it is not easy for a man to plead his self-righteousness then. The bony fingers thrust themselves like daggers into his proud flesh. "Ah!" saith grim Death, in tones which cannot be heard by mortal ear, but which are listened to by the mortal heart—"Where now are all thy glories?" He looks upon the man, and the wreath of laurel that was upon his brow fades and falls to the earth like blasted flowers. He touches his breast, and the star of honour which he wore moulders and is quenched into darkness. He looks at him yet again—that breast-plate of self-righteousness which glittered upon him like golden mail, suddenly dissolves into dust, like the apples of Sodom before the touch of the gatherer, and the man finds himself to his own surprise naked, and poor, and miserable, when most he needed to be rich, when most he required to be happy and to be blessed. Aye,

sinner, even while this sermon is being uttered, you may seek to refute it to yourself, and say, "Well, I believe I am as good as others, and that this fuss about a new birth, imputed righteousness, and being washed in blood, is all unnecessary," but in the loneliness of your silent chamber, especially when death shall be your dread and grim companion, you shall not need me to state this, you shall see it clearly enough yourselves; see it with eyes of horror; and feel it with a heart of dismay, and despair, and perish because thou hast despised the righteousness of Christ.

How abundantly true, however, will this be at the day of judgment. I think I see that day of fire, that day of wrath. You are gathered as a great multitude before the eternal throne. Those who are robed in Christ's fine linen, which is the righteousness of the saints, are caught up to the right hand. And now the trumpet sounds; if there be any that have kept the law of God, if there be faultless ones, if there be any that have never sinned, let them stand forth and claim the promised reward; but, if not, let the pit engulf the sinner, let the fiery thunder-bolt be launched upon the impentitent offenders. Now, stand forth, sir, and clear thyself! Come forth, my friend, and claim the reward, because of the Church you endowed, or the row of almshouses that you erected. What! what! does your tongue lie dumb in your mouth? Come forward, come forward—you who said you had been a good citizen, had fed the hungry, and clothed the naked—come forward now, and claim the reward. What! what! is your face turned to whiteness? Is there an ashy paleness on your cheek? Come forward, ye multitudes of those who rejected Christ, and despised His blood. Come now, and say, "All the commandments have I kept from my youth up." What! are you seized with horror? Has the better light of judgment driven out the darkness of your self-righteousness? Oh! I see you, I see you, ye are not boasting now; but you, the best of you, are crying, "Ye rocks, hide me; ye mountains, open your stony bowels; and let me hide myself from the face of Him that sits upon the throne." Why, why such a coward? Come, face it out before your Maker. Come up, infidel, now, tell God there is no God. Come, while hell is flaming in your nostrils; come, and say there is no hell; or tell the Almighty that you never could bear to hear a hell-fire sermon preached. Come now, and accuse the minister of cruelty, or say that we love to talk on these terrible themes. Let me not mock you in your misery; but let me picture to you how devils shall mock you. "Aha!" say they "where is your courage now? Are your ribs of iron and your bones of brass? Will you dare the Almighty now, and dash yourselves upon the bosses of His buckler, or run upon His glittering spear?" See them, see them as they sink! The gulf has swallowed them up; the earth has closed again, and they are gone; a solemn silence falls upon the ear. But hark below, if you could descend with them, you would hear their doleful groans, and hollow moans, as they now feel that the God omnipotent was right and just, and wise, and tender, when He bade them forsake their righteousness, and flee to Christ, and lay hold on Him that can save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

III. THE PLEA IS ITSELF EVIDENCE AGAINST THE PLEADER.

There is an unregenerated man here, who says, "Am I blind also?" I answer in the words of Jesus, "But now ye say we see, therefore your sin remaineth." You have proved by your plea, in the first place, that you have never been enlightened of the Holy Spirit, but that you remain in a state of ignorance. A deaf man may declare that there is no such thing as music. A man who has never seen the stars, is very likely to say that there are no stars. But what does he prove? Does he prove that there are no stars? He only proves his own folly and his own ignorance. That man who can say half a word about his own righteousness has never been enlightened of God the Holy Spirit; for one of the first signs of a renewed heart is, that it abhors itself in dust and ashes. If thou dost to-day feel thyself to be guilty, and lost, and ruined, there is the richest hope for thee in the gospel; but if thou sayest, "I *am good*, I have merits," the law condemns thee, and the gospel cannot comfort thee; thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, and thou art ignorant that all the while thou art talking thus, the wrath of God abideth on thee. A man *may* be a true Christian, and *may* fall into sin, but a man cannot be a true Christian and boast in his self-righteousness. A man may be saved, though infirmity may bespatter him with much mire; but *he* cannot be saved who does not know that he has been in the filth, and is not willing to confess that he is guilty before God. There are, in one sense, no conditions of salvation on our part, for whatever may be conditions, God gives; but thus I know, there never was a man yet who was in a state of grace who did not know himself, in himself, to be in a state of ruin, a state of depravity and condemnation. If you do not know this, then I say your plea of self-righteousness condemns you for ignorance.

But then again, inasmuch as you say that you are not guilty, this proves that you are impenitent. Now the impenitent can never come where God is. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins"; "but if we say that we have no sin, we make God a liar, and the truth is not in us." God will pardon all men who confess their iniquity. If we weep and lament, and take with us words, and say, "We have grievously sinned, forgive us—we have greatly erred, have mercy upon us, through Jesus Christ," God will not refuse the cry; but if we, out of our impenitent and hard hearts, put ourselves upon God's justice, God will give us justice, but not mercy, and that justice shall be the meting out to us of the full vials of His indignation, and of His wrath for ever and ever. He that is self-righteous is impenitent, and therefore he is not, and cannot be saved.

Further than this, the self-righteous man, the moment that he says he has done anything which can recommend him to God, proves that he is not a believer. Now, salvation is for believers, and for believers only. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." Sir, you will be damned with all your self-righteousness, and your self-righteousness shall be like Dejanira's tunic, which she gave to Hercules, and which he put upon him, and, as the old fable hath it, it became a robe of fire to him; he tried to drag it away, but he pulled away pieces of his living, quivering flesh each moment, and perished miserably. Such shall your self-righteousness be to you. It seems a pleasant draught, and intoxicates for the moment; it is deadly and damnable as the venom of asps, and as the wine of Gomorrah. O soul! would that thou wouldst flee, above all things, from self-righteousness; for a self-righteous man does not and

cannot trust Christ, and therefore he cannot see the face of God. None but the naked man will ever go to Christ for clothing; none but the hungry men will ever take Christ to be his food; none but thirsty souls will ever come to this well of Bethlehem to drink. The thirsty are welcome; but those who think they are good, are welcome neither to Sinai nor to Calvary. They have no hope of heaven, no peace in this world, nor in that which is to come.

Ah! soul, I know not who thou art; but if thou hast any righteousness of thine own, thou art a graceless soul. If you have given all your goods to feed the poor; if you have built many and many a sanctuary; if you have gone about with self-denial among the houses of poverty to visit the sons and daughters of affliction; if you have fasted thrice in the week; if your prayers have been so long that your throat has become hoarse through your crying; if your tears have been so many that your eyes have become blinded through your weeping; if your readings of Scripture have been so long that the midnight oil has been consumed in abundance;—if, I say, your heart has been so tender towards the poor and the sick and the needy that you would have been willing to suffer with them, to bear all their loathsome diseases, nay, if adding all this you could give your body to be burned, yet if you trusted in any one of these things your damnation would be as sure as though you were thief or drunkard. Understand me, I mean what I say. I want you not to think I speak unguardedly now. Christ said of the Pharisees of old the very thing that I have said of you. They were good and excellent in their way; but, said He, the publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of God before *you*, because they *would* go the wrong way, while the poor publicans and harlots were led to go the right way. The Pharisee who went about to make a righteousness of his own, did not submit to the righteousness of Christ; the publican and the harlot, knowing that they had nothing whereof to glory, came to Christ and took Him as He was, and gave their souls up to be saved by His grace. Oh! that we may do the same; for until we get rid of self-righteousness we are in a state of condemnation, and dying, the sentence must be executed upon us for ever and ever.

IV. I close now upon the last point, namely, that this plea, if we retain it, not only accuses the pleader now, but IT WILL RUIN THE PLEADER FOR EVER.

Let me show you two suicides. There is a man has sharpened a dagger, and seeking out his opportunity he stabs himself to the heart. There he falls. Who shall blame any man for his death? He slew himself; his blood be on his own head.

Here is another: he is very sick and ill; he can scarcely crawl about the streets. A physician waits upon him; he tells him, "Sir, your disease is deadly; you must die; but I know a remedy which will certainly heal you. There it is; I freely give it to you. All I ask of you is, that you will freely take it." "Sir," says the man, "you insult me; I am as well as ever I was in my life; I am not sick." "But," says the other, "there are certain signs which I mark in your countenance which prove to me that you will have a deadly disease about you, and I warn you." The man thinks a moment; remembers that there have been certain signs in him of this very sickness; a monitor within tells him that it is so. He obstinately replies to the physician a second time —"Sir, if I want your physic I will send for it, and if I need it I will pay for it." He knows all the while there is not a farthing in his pocket, and that he cannot get credit anywhere; and there stands the life-giving cup before him which the physician at great expense has obtained, but which he freely gives to him and bids him freely take. "No," says the man, "I will not take it; I may be somewhat sick, but I am not worse than my neighbours; I am not more ill than other people, and I shall not take it." One day you go to his bed and you find he has slept his last sleep, and there he lies stone dead. Who slew this man? Who killed him? His blood be on his own head; he is as base a suicide as the other.

Now I will show you two more suicides. There is a man here who says—"Well, let what will happen in the next world, I will have my fill in this. Tell me where there are pleasures to be had and I will have them. Leave the things of God to old fools, and such like; I shall have the things of the present and the joys and delights of time." He drains the cup of drunkenness, frequents the haunt of folly, and if he knows where there is any vice pursued he rushes after it. Like Byron; he is a very thunderbolt, launched from the hand of an arch-fiend; he flashes through the whole firmament of sin, and blazes himself out, until decayed in body and soul, he dies. He is a suicide. He defied God; he went against the laws of nature and of grace, despised warnings, declared he would be damned, and he has got what he richly deserved.

Here is another. He says, "I despise these vices; I am the most upright, honest, and commendable of men. I feel that I do not need salvation, and if I did need it I could get it myself. I can do anything you tell me to do, I feel I have mental force and manly dignity enough remaining in me to accomplish it. I tell you, sir, you insult me when you bid me trust in Christ." "Well," he says, "I consider there is such dignity in manhood, and so much virtue in me, that I need not a new heart, nor will I succumb and bend my spirit to the gospel of Christ on free-grace terms." Very well, sir, when in hell you lift up your eyes, and *you will do so* as surely as the most profligate and profane, your blood will be upon your own head; and you will be as truly a suicide as he who wantonly and wickedly dashed himself against the laws of God and man, and brought himself to a sudden and hasty end by his iniquity and crimes.

"Well," says one, "this is a sermon well adapted to self-righteous persons, but I am not one." Then what are you, sir? Are you a believer in Christ? "I cannot say I am, sir." Why are you not, then? "Well, I would be, but I am afraid I may not believe in Christ." You are self-righteous, sir. God commands you to believe in Christ, and you say you are not fit. Now what does this mean but that you are wanting to make yourself fit, and this after all is the spirit of self-righteousness; you are so proud that you will not take Christ unless you think you can bring something to Him—that is it. "Ah! no," says one poor broken-hearted soul, "I do not think that is fair with me, for I do feel as if I would give anything, if I might hope to be saved; but oh, I am such a wretch! I am such a wretch! I cannot believe." Now, that after all is self-righteousness. Christ bids you trust Him. You say, "No, I will not trust Thee, Christ, because I am such-an-one and such-an-one." So, then, you are wanting to make

yourself somebody, and then Jesus Christ is to do the rest. It is the same spirit of self-righteousness only in another garb. "Ah!" saith one, "but if I did but feel my need enough, as you just now said, sir, then I think I would trust Christ." Self-righteousness again, you want your sense of need to save you. "Oh! but, sir, I cannot believe in Christ as I would." Self-righteousness again. Let me just utter a solemn sentence which you may masticate at your leisure. If you trust to your faith and to your repentance, you will be as much lost as if you trusted to your good works or trusted to your sins. The ground of your salvation is not *faith*, but *Christ;* it is not repentance, but Christ. If I trust my trust of Christ, I am lost. My business is to trust Christ; to rest on Him; to depend, not on what the Spirit has done in me, but what Christ did for me, when He did hang upon the tree. Now be it known unto you, that when Christ died, He took the sins of all His people upon His head, and there and then they all ceased to be. At the moment when Christ died, the sins of all His redeemed were blotted out. He did then suffer all they ought to have suffered; He paid all their debts; and their sins were actually and positively lifted that day from *their* shoulders to *His* shoulders, for "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And now, if you believe in Jesus, there is not a sin remaining upon you, for your sin was laid on Christ; Christ was punished for your sins before they were committed, and as Kent says:

> "Here's pardon for transgressions past,
> It matters not how black their caste;
> And oh! my soul with wonder view,
> For sins to come here's pardon too."

Blessed privilege of the believer! But if you live and die unbelievers, know this, that all your sins lie on your own shoulders. Christ did never make any atonement for you; you were never bought with blood; you never had an interest in His sacrifice. You live and die in yourselves, lost; in yourselves, ruined; in yourselves, utterly destroyed. But believing—the moment you believe, you may know that you were chosen of God from before the foundation of the world. Believing, you may know that the righteousness of Christ is all yours; that all He did, He did for you; that all He suffered, He suffered for you. You do in fact, in the moment you believe, stand where Christ stood as God's accepted Son; and Christ stands where you stood as the sinner, and suffers as if He had been the sinner, and dies as if He had been guilty—dies in your room, place, and stead.

Oh! Spirit of God, give faith this morning. Win us all from self; knit us all to Christ; may we be saved now by His free grace, and be saved in eternity.

WASHED TO GREATER FOULNESS

"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me."—Job ix. 30, 31.

I FEEL certain that I am sent on a special errand at this time. Before my mind's eye I see a soul whose awful reflections are hurrying him to despair. He refuses counsel, and will not listen to direction, for dread has made him desperate. I would have a word in the ear of that worried and wearied one. See ye not the man? He has battled long against a dark temptation, but at last he is beaten. He feels that he can hold out no longer. He can scarcely take breath; the air grows hot and stifling around him, as he faces the question—what next? Accustomed as I am to look down on these crowded aisles and up at these closely-packed galleries, I feel a strange curiosity as I gaze into the mass; for I know that there is one man among all of you to whom I have a private message. I carry dispatches from the King of kings to one who is grievously troubled, and is become as a woman forsaken and despised. My Lord and Master described Himself in parable as leaving the ninety-and-nine to seek for one lost sheep: I must now copy His example. You will not grudge me for this service, I am sure. I quit the throng that I may find the bewildered one, and bring him safe and sound to the fold.

Turning to my text, let me say, that as one is startled by a shriek, or saddened by a groan, so these sharp utterances of Job astonish us at first, and then awake our pity. How much are we troubled with brotherly compassion as we read the words,—"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me"! The sense of misery couched in this passage baffles description. Yet this is but one of a series, in which sentence after sentence reveals a fresh chamber of horrors. The similitudes of grief are here piled up in heaps, with what an old author has spoken of as the "rhetoric of sorrow." Physical sufferings had produced a strain on Job's mind, and he sought relief by expressing his anguish. Like some solitary prisoner in the gloomy keep of an old castle, he graves on the walls pictures of the abject despondencies which haunt him. His afflictions are aggravated by vain efforts to alleviate them: he wounds his hand with the rough hammer and nail with which he is engraving his griefs. Of such tortures many of us have had a taste.

From my experience, as a patient myself, smitten down with soul-sickness; and from my observation as a pastor, into whose ears the woes of awakened sinners are constantly poured, I have somewhat learned to understand the imagery of Job. The sufferer is in double straits. While he is tossed about by Satan, his friends are discharging their arrows at him, and the Almighty troubleth him. To help such a sufferer we must be careful to distinguish between the causes of his sorrow, and divide between his affliction itself and the further sorrows which he has brought upon himself by his unwise efforts to escape from it.

Such, then, is the line of thought we will pursue. I shall make four divisions; three of them are to be

found in the text, and the fourth will follow on, as an important consequence. First, we shall notice that *a quickened soul becomes conscious of guilt;* secondly, *the soul that is quickened makes ineffectual attempts to rid itself of the stain of guilt;* thirdly, to deter His people from self-righteousness *it pleases God to plunge deeper into the mire those who attempt to cleanse themselves;* the fourth point is, that *only by severe training are men led to look alone to God for salvation,*—it needs omnipotence to teach us that salvation is of the Lord.

I. At the outset, then, we observe that QUICKENED SOULS ARE CONSCIOUS OF GUILT. They see it; they know it; they feel it; and they blush to find that they are without excuse for it. All men are sinners: to most men, however, sin appears to be a fashion of the times, a necessity of nature, a folly of youth, or an infirmity of age, which a slight apology will suffice to remove. You will scarcely meet with an Englishman who will not acknowledge that he is a sinner. Is it not the General Confession stereotyped in the book of Common Prayer? But it is one thing to call yourself a sinner, and quite another thing to feel it. I have heard of a lady who owned to her minister that she was a great sinner. He questioned her kindly as to which of the ten commandments she had broken. Beginning with the first, he asked her, "Did you ever break this?" to which enquiry she indignantly answered, "No." In like manner he dealt with the second, and right through the whole ten. She professed in detail to have observed each one, and yet pretended to confess that she had broken them all. By such equivocations multitudes of men and women deceive themselves; and it is unhappily the custom of many a preacher to address his congregation as if they were all good people, and every one of them knew the Lord, from the least even to the greatest. This is pleasing to the flesh, and flattering to pride; but it is most pernicious. How many are being deceived by this want of marking a difference where a vital difference exists!

Not till men are quickened by divine grace do they truly know that they are sinners. How is this? Some diseases are so insidious that the sufferers fancy that they are getting better, while in very truth they are hastening to the grave. After such manner does sin deceive the sons of men: they think they are saved when they are still unrenewed. How often have I seen a poor girl, whose pale face, sunken eyes, shadowy hand, and languid step, have clearly betokened that she was on the brink of death, yet she mistook the flush of consumption for the ruddiness of health. Slowly she waned; but within a day of her departure she planned cheerful projects which proved that she looked for life. Consumption is not, however, so deceitful as sin. Where it has full power over the soul, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" If sin were not so deceitful it would not be half so destructive as it is.

How is this, you ask again? Few give themselves the trouble to think about these matters at all. Ours is an age in which men's thoughts are keen upon politics and merchandize, practical science and economic inventions, financial schemes, and Home Rule, and I know not what beside; but sound doctrine and sincere piety are out of vogue. Few people trouble themselves to think about their souls' everlasting welfare. Men die at the same rate as of yore, but the mortality is reckoned by a percentage; and as for the life hereafter it is ignored. Friend, have *you* ever dedicated ten minutes of your time to a consideration of your destiny? Days to your ledger; hours to your amusements; years to your commercial engagements; would it not be wise to reserve some moments for your soul's outlook beyond the grave? You have made your last will and testament for the world that is fading away, but you have laid up no treasure for the world to come. Is this consistent with your usual prudence? I should have good hope for some of you if I could make you sit for one hour alone, and think of nothing but your souls, your God, and the final judgment. Alas! alas! as the horse rusheth to the battle, so men rush to the heated competition of the hour. They cannot be persuaded to consider. Poor mortals! They concern themselves about everything that does not concern them, but they persistently neglect everything that is needful to their eternal well-being.

How is this? we enquire once more. To natural ignorance we may attribute much of the ordinary indifference of men to their own sinfulness. They live in a benighted age. In vain you boast the enlightenment of this nineteenth century: the nineteenth century is not one whit more enlightened as to the depravity of human nature than the first century. Men are as ignorant of the plague of their own hearts to-day as they were when Paul addressed them. I know that almost every man you meet with talks as if he were qualified to set up for a doctor of divinity; but is not this the confidence of ignorance? "Vain man would be wise"—or read it, if you please, "vain man is void of understanding—though man be born like a wild ass's colt." Until God the Holy Ghost takes him in hand no spiritual light enters the man's soul. Preaching is an effective means of instructing the mind, arousing the conscience, and impressing the hearts of the people; and faithful preachers are scattered up and down the country within measurable reach of most of your homes. Why, then, is the doctrine of human sinfulness so little understood, and so seldom accepted as an undeniable fact? Many persons seem startled, and try to think that they misunderstand us when we say plainly that in the very best man in the world there is no virtue or grace that can be pleasing to God, unless he has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. Let me put the truth before you as plainly as I can by speaking of your body in order to describe your soul. You probably imagine that your physical constitution is sound and healthy. I grant you all you ask on that score; yet you are but flesh and blood, like the rest of our mortal race, and therefore you are exposed to every disease which waylays your fellow creatures. Even so, your deceitful heart is capable of as desperate crimes as the vilest of sinners ever committed. The evil propensity lurks within, it needs only the contagion of society, or the temptation of Satan to bring it out. Does not this alarm you? It ought to do so.

Hardly a glimmer of the humbling truth of our natural depravity dawns on the dull apprehension of the worldly-wise, though souls taught from above know it and are appalled by it. In divers ways the discovery comes to those whom the Lord ordains to save. Sometimes a preacher sent of God lets in the dreadful light. Many men, like the false prophet Mokanna, hide their deformity. You may remember the story. Mokanna wore a silver veil upon his

forehead: should he ever remove it the brightness of his countenance would blind the astonished world. In truth a foul disease had cankered his brow. God's faithful servants are sent to tear off these veils, and expose men to themselves. This duty demands courage. Men veil black villainy with self-flattery! Like Jezebel, they paint their eyebrows, and tire their heads, till they think themselves beautiful. It is ours, like Jehu, to cry, "Throw her down." What have they to do with peace who are the servants of sin? How dare they pretend to comeliness whose hearts are not right with God?

How comes it to pass, then, that the best of saints on earth are prone to account themselves the chief of sinners? Their sincerity is unquestionable. This discovery is due to the Holy Spirit. He it is who convinces men of sin. By His mysterious but most blessed agency on the hearts of men, a sense of utter ruin is wrought in the chosen, and this prepares them to accept the full redemption provided by the sacrifice of the Redeemer. We cannot explain to you the mystery of the Spirit's operation. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." But this we do know—the Holy Spirit withers all merely human hope and righteousness, and thus makes room for trust in the work of our Lord Jesus. Man by nature is blindly proud, and proudly blind. The moment the Spirit of God comes into a man, the scales fall from his eyes, and he sees himself in quite a different light. To each saved soul it seems a strange miracle. I have heard the story from simple lips full many a time. The new self talks of the old self with a kind of vacant wonderment. Yesterday our friend was on good terms with himself as a virtuous citizen, an honest trader, a sound churchman; in moral worth all that his neighbours could wish. To-day he is vile in his own sight: his hands are filthy, his heart is foul, his thoughts are loathsome. He perceives that he has been walking in a vain show, and therefore he writes himself down a hypocrite. No name too base by which to surname himself.

Have I found you out, my friend? Wandering among the motley throng, I am in quest of a soul that seeks the mercy of the Lord. Am I not upon your track?

Mayhap I am at this moment addressing a person who has been the subject of a mysterious gloom for which he sees no reason whatever. I am right happy to have found him, for I trust I have met with a recruit for the army of truth. But why, you may enquire, do I make such a remark? I will tell you in a moment. There is a vital connection between soul-distress and sound doctrine. Sovereign grace is dear to those who have groaned deeply because they see what grievous sinners they are. Witness Joseph Hart and John Newton, whose hymns you have often sung, or David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, whose biographies many of you have read. You seldom hear much of God's everlasting covenant in these modern times, for few men feel that thorough conviction of sin which comes directly from the teaching of the Holy Spirit. In the economy of redemption the effectual operation of the Spirit in enlightening the heart concerning its own sinfulness is sure evidence of the Father's personal love to His chosen people, and of the special atonement that the Son of God made for their transgressions.

> "Ne'er had ye felt the guilt of sin,
> Or sweets of pardoning love,
> Unless your worthless names had been
> Enrolled to life above."

You may walk through a dark cellar without discerning by the eye that anything noisome is there concealed. Let the shutters be thrown open! Bid the light of day stream in! You soon perceive frogs upon the cold clammy pavement, filthy cobwebs hanging on the walls in long festoons, foul vermin creeping about everywhere. Startled, alarmed, horrified, who would not wish to flee away, and find a healthier atmosphere? The rays of the sun are, however, but a faint image of that light divine shed by the Holy Spirit, which penetrates the thickest shades of human folly and infatuation, and exposes the treachery of the inmost heart. Then the soul cries out in agony, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" When brought to feel this, we think our doom is sealed, and everlasting destruction is close upon us. But it is not so. *This is the way of hope.* Through death to life every saved soul must pass. Ask us not to paint the sensations; nor blame us if we usually describe that experience which is most distinct. Sharp conviction, fainting heart, struggling hope, fear that haunts, terror that appals,—an awful fight of fiercely strange emotions! This is the extreme measure of the life-change. In milder form, with one decisive pang the true heart is born again. The Slough of Despond lies across every pilgrim's pathway. The years or hours it takes to wade through it must be left an open question. Sudden death is an occasional fact, but more frequently the saints are peacefully welcomed to the realms above; so in the Church on earth, sudden conversions happen, but as a rule men pass gradually into the kingdom of God. Between the sensual and the spiritual there is a great gulf, and it must be passed. Of the wind or weather in which you make the passage it is not for me to speak: the voyage may be long or short; but in some sort the gulf must be traversed. Conviction of sin is of the first importance: it cannot be dispensed with.

You will say, "Why?" Well, we might suggest many reasons. It will make mercy the more precious; it will excite horror of sin in the future—burnt children dread the fire; it will teach you patience, for no future trial will be so severe as this; and it will tend to keep you persevering in holiness. But be the reasons what they may, be you sure of this, that no soul is saved without being made conscious of its own sinfulness.

II. We pass on to notice that it often happens that AWAKENED SOULS USE MANY INEFFECTUAL MEANS TO OBTAIN CLEANSING. Job describes himself as washing in snow water, and making his hands never so clean. His expressions remind me of my own labour in vain. By how many experiments I tried to purify my own soul! Like all my fellows, I was always foiled in every attempt. See a squirrel in a cage; the poor thing is working away, trying to mount, yet he never rises one inch higher. In like case is the sinner who seeks to save himself by his own good works, or by any other means: he toils without result. It is astonishing what pains men will take in this useless drudgery. They prevent the dawn of day in their anxiety to attend matins or observe mass; they are austere in their fastings; they say prayers without stint and do penance to

the full. We should be sorry to impugn their sincerity. With what exemplary zeal many in the Anglican Church go about to establish their own righteousness! They practise ceremonies, with a claim to catholicity which no Catholic will allow. Untiring is their diligence in one department or another of amateur office; they hope for a reward for doing what God never commanded. Without a Scriptural proof of being right in anything, they would fain be righteous overmuch in everything. The labour of the foolish in spinning a righteousness of their own, that is neither accredited by the divine law nor by the holy gospel, is almost incredible: they would rather give their bodies to be burned and their goods to feed the poor, than submit to salvation by grace, though it is the only possible salvation.

In seeking to obtain absolution of their sins, to establish a righteousness of their own, and to secure peace of mind, men tax their ingenuity to the utmost. Job talks of washing himself *with snow water*. The imagery is, no doubt, meant to be instructive. Why is snow water selected? The reason probably was, first, because *it was hard to get*. Far easier, generally, to procure water from the running brooks than from melted snow. Men set a high value on that which is difficult to procure. Whence comes it that the great majority of the so-called Christian world prefer worship conducted with gorgeous ritual and stately ceremonial? Is it not the rarity of the thing which creates a sense of value? Enter a Popish cathedral, and try, if you can, to understand the services. What are all these persons doing dressed in red and white, or those other persons in more sombre colour? Manipulations, genuflexions, prostrations, waving of censers, and elevating of hosts—an array of symbolism which it took ages to conglomerate. What is the value of it all, unless it lies in its complications and expenses? Our Protestant friends have their milder predelictions. Organs and orchestras serve them for snow water. In measured accents let me speak of music. For psalms and spiritual songs you all know I have an ardent passion. My spirit wings its way to the very portals of heaven in the words and tunes of our hymns. But for your instrumental melodies I have no mind, when you substitute mere sound for heartfelt prayer and praise. The obvious simplicity of the gospel is the only outward voucher I know of for its inward sincerity. Praise is none the better because of the difficulty of the music; say, rather that the more simple and congregational it is the better by far. Forms of worship which are expensive and difficult are greatly affected by many, as snow water was thought in Job's day to be a bath for kings; but, after all, it is an idle fashion, likely to mislead.

Besides, *snow water enjoyed a reputation for purity*. If you would have a natural filtered water gather the newly-fallen snow and melt it. The figure represents the religiousness which is of the most rigid kind—the cream of the cream. Specimens yet remain among us of piety more than possible to men, religiousness above the range of mortals; which piety is, however, not of God's grace, and consequently is a vain show. Though we should use the purest ceremonies, multiply the best of good works, and add thereto the costliest of gifts, yet we should be unable to make ourselves clean before God. You may wash yourself till *you* deny the existence of a spot, and yet you may be unclean. You may make rigid rules, and find much content in keeping them, and yet remain in nature's filthiness. With all your shrewdness you have but practised a human device, and in refusing to trust in the Lord Jesus you have failed to observe a divine ordinance; and therefore you will fail.

Once again, this snow is probably extolled because *it descends from the clouds of heaven*, instead of bubbling up from the clods of earth. Religiousness which can colour itself with an appearance of the supernatural is very taking with many. Some folks are fond of apostolic succession; it professes to come from heaven. No doubt the notion originated in cloudland. Others are fascinated by Popery. His holiness the Pope is accounted to be a great cistern, full of grace, which is distilled in streams, and runs through capacious pipes called cardinals, and then through smaller tubes, styled bishops. At length by the still smaller pipes of the priests it comes to the people. No pretext was ever more paltry than this, and yet many are deceived by it. There is no peace in it for thoughtful minds. For such your snow water has no solace, because they see no connection between outward acts and the purifying of the heart.

> "Not all the outward forms on earth,
> Nor rites that God has given,
> Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
> Can raise a soul to heaven."

If I "*make my hands never so clean*," is an expression peculiarly racy in the original. The Hebrew word has an allusion to soap or nitre. Such was the ordinary and obvious method any one would take to whiten his hands when they were grimy. Tradition tells that certain stains of blood cleave to the floor. The idea is that human blood, shed in murder, can never be scrubbed or scraped off the boards. Thus is it most certainly with the dye of sin. The blood of souls is in thy skirts, is the terrible language of Jeremiah (ch. ii. 34). When ye think that baptism can begin, that confirmation can further, and that other sacraments can complete your purification, ye are mere dupes of your own folly. "Though I wash myself in snow water, and make myself never so clean; yet shalt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." There it stands, it is the testimony of one man, but yet it is true; the Almighty attests it, and all human experience affirms it. These worthless experiments to cleanse yourselves would be ended once for all if you would have regard to the great truth of the gospel: "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." God alone can remove sin, and He does so by the blood of Jesus.

III. BUT AS SURE AS EVER QUICKENED SOULS TRY TO GET PURITY IN THE WRONG WAY, GOD WILL THRUST THEM DOWN INTO THE DITCH. This is a terrible predicament. I find, on looking at the passage closely, that it means "head over ears in the ditch." It is not merely some filthy puddle in which a man treads till he is splashed all over, it is a slough of despond into which he sinks. His eyes, his ears, and his mouth, are filled with pollution; and his very clothes are so foul that he utterly abhors himself. Old Master Caryl, a rare expositor of the Book of Job, says that the original can only be equalled in English by the expression—we would not touch such an one with a pair of tongs.

Often it happens with those who try to get better by their own good works, that their conscience is awakened by the effort, and they are more conscious

of sin than ever. If a chosen man strives to save himself from his sins by his own righteousness the Lord permits him to see his own heart and he ceases from all glorying. The word here rendered " ditch " is elsewhere translated " corruption." So in the sixteenth Psalm: " Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." Language cannot paint abasement, reproach, or ignominy in stronger terms. " THOU shalt plunge me in the ditch." Is it not as though God Himself would undertake the business of causing His people to know that by their vain ablutions they were making themselves yet more vile in His eyes? We read, in the second chapter of Jeremiah, of God's remonstrance with Judah: " Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God. How canst thou say, I am not polluted? "

May we not regard this as the discipline of our Heavenly Father's love, albeit when passing through the trial we do not perceive it to be so? Thus, in the apocalyptic epistle to the church at Laodicea, expostulation more severe or more tender it would be hard to imagine—" Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Mark the gentle words, " I counsel thee," addressed to a people whose lukewarmness excited nausea! Then follows a sentence of encouragement so sweet and enchanting that it almost sounds like an apology for the fierceness of the former censure. " As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." A revelation of wretched sinfulness ends in a declaration of love and a visit of grace; for the Lord goes on to say, " Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Anyhow, the Lord will end the conceit which is the source of the lukewarmness: He cannot permit His chosen to remain in self-righteous pride; for *that* His soul hateth.

Perhaps, my friend, the experience I am trying to describe will come to you through the preaching of the Word. This sermon may dishearten and distract you. Your hope was thriving like a plant. This sermon shrivels every leaf; and though, at the scent of water, the branch of self-righteousness will bud again, the next sermon you hear may wither even the stem of your confidence. If another sermon soon afterwards cuts it down to the very root, the ministry will be profitable to you; for the root of pride must be cut up. Believe me, this is mild treatment: I trust you may not be left to severer methods.

Frequently our great Lord leaves a poor wayward soul to eat the fruits of its own ways, and this is the severest form of plunging in the ditch. While striving after righteousness in a wrong way, the man stumbles into the very sin against which he struggled. The young man, of whom I am now thinking, resolved, by the help of God, that he would be different henceforth from what he ever had been. His vows kept pace with his devotions. He started them at early morn—

> " And felt, good, easy man, full surely
> His goodness was a-ripening."

To the shop he went, as was his wont; but his thoughts were no longer set on earthly things: he stood, as he supposed, on heavenly ground. Because he had taken snow-water and had washed his hands, he began to think that he was singularly clean. Towards evening a temptation suddenly crossed his path. At first he resisted, but it proved a feeble fight. The argument of another young man, that it was policy to yield, availed to break the covenant he had made with his own conscience. So he was led astray to a place of amusement, where the light of God's countenance never shines. The wretchedness of his reflections on the morrow could not easily be told. He felt that his feet were fast in the miry clay, and his garments foully soiled. His empty conceit might not have been dislodged from its secret lurking-place in his depraved nature without some such perilous downfall.

Mayhap, there sits out yonder a good sister who has grown familiar with spiritual straits. Did you ever happen to hear of Mary Huntington, wife of William Huntington, S.S., the famous Calvinistic preacher? When he prayed for her, which he did with much affection, he confessed before God—" O Lord, I beseech Thee, hear me on her behalf. Thou knowest how warmly attached she has ever been to MOSES, and what narrow and vain searches she has made in order to find out *his grave*, which Thou, in infinite wisdom and mercy, hast thought fit to conceal." That prayer, which was published about a century ago, is worth preserving in your memory. For that " Mary," like many worthy housewives of these days, was rather fond of collecting the rags and relics of self. If it had been possible, she would have worn at least an apron of the linsey-woolsey of self-righteousness. The Lord will not have His handmaids thus arrayed: they must be quit of self altogether.

Our lives through various scenes are drawn and vexed with petty provocations. Paltry annoyances are the bane of our peace. Some of you, dear sisters, spend your years and your thoughts in a narrow circle, and I deeply sympathize with you therein. Without a wish to be great, or to enlarge your coast, you intensely desire to be good. To do your duty to the best of your ability, is your aim, and therein you are worthy of all honour. The lot of many of you is to pass much of your time in loneliness; your temptations are therefore peculiar. For many a quiet hour you have been busy with domestic employments, distracted by no acute anxiety, but cheered by much quiet meditation. At such seasons you are apt to get on good terms with yourselves. Presently the shades of evening begin to fall. Evening! of which Cowper sweetly sings:

> " Come, evening, once again, season of peace,
> Return, sweet evening, and continue long! "

You are prepared to welcome home the husband, brother, son, who will look for his repast, and seek his well-earned repose. Possibly, my sisters, this is your season of temptation. His rough word, his needless complaint, his vacant look, when you pine for sympathy puts you about. A sense of injustice stings you. It may be very natural, but all the same it is very fatal to your sense of superior goodness. What more treacherous than one's temper? In a sudden gust of passion, you utter words of anger. How gladly would you recall them! but they are registered. Down into the ditch of despondency you sink. For days to come you feel that you cannot

forgive yourself. Your rich mantle of righteousness after this tumble in the ditch looks mean enough to provoke your own ridicule.

Thus we do, in our different spheres, fly from this to that, and from that to the other. Some hope to cleanse away sin by a supreme effort of self-denial, or of miraculous faith. Men dream of being clean without the blood of Jesus; they even boast of it, and yet their sin remaineth. The eye of the judgment may be deceived till we half think we are clean; but no sooner does the scale grow thin, or the light grow strong, than the conscience perceives its error and learns the lesson that no human endeavour can wash out the accursed spot. Let us not play at purification, nor vainly hope to satisfy conscience with that which renders no satisfaction to God.

Persons of sensitive disposition, and sedentary habits, are prone to seek a righteousness of inward feeling. Let me describe these good folks to you. They aim at a righteousness that renounces every fault, and they cultivate such graces as are naturally lovely, watching from moment to moment their own feelings of joy or grief. Yet these be they who get to know, with the keenest anguish, the plague of their own hearts. How it happens is sufficiently clear. They try to live by their feelings and frames of mind; and what can be more deceitful than these sensations? Treacherous as the sea on which you sail so smoothly on sunny days, but which, at other times, wrecks your barque without mercy, your frames and feelings are not in the least to be depended on. One day you are all aglow, the flush of fervour is on your face; the next day you feel so dead and cold that prayer would freeze upon your lips. Your evidences are dark. You think you have none, and, seized with despondency, you lament that "there is no hope." Ah, me! the sin-sick soul, given to watch its own symptoms, is brought into perilous straits; trying one nostrum after another, sometimes feeling a little better, and anon feeling itself much worse. Oh, that it could turn from feeling to faith; and look steadily out of inward sensation to the work finished once for all by the Lord Jesus!

Poor Job was smitten with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. No doubt he sent for the doctor—though we are not actually told that he did so. It is likely enough that snow water was prescribed to him for a relief. His hands may not have seemed very sightly when he used it; there may, at least, have been some connection between his physician's prescription and his poetry, when he said, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make *my hands* never so clean." Perfection in any one part of conduct would not secure cleanness for the rest. Washed hands would be a small matter if the boils remained over the rest of the body. This is another aspect of the same unsatisfactory expedient that I am wanting to point out to you. You are under bad treatment until you walk by faith in Jesus. Anything short of grace will prove a mere mockery of your malady. Asa, King of Judah, was diseased in his feet. He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. Asa never recovered; but the Lord restored Job to perfect health. The gratuitous advice which the patriarch received in the time of his sore sickness was not worth his gratitude. Of his three friends, he said: "Ye are all physicians of no value." Then comes back the metaphor which I have repeated so often: "Yet shalt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." After all is said and done by the wisest of men the poor sinner is worse off than when they undertook his case. All is vanity till God comes in.

Let us not forget that the man who thus described his own case "was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." Such a case is a puzzle to those who are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Although Job was renowned for righteousness in his generation, a gleam from God's countenance exposed the faultiness of his soul. Does this prove him to have been a hypocrite? By no means. His friends supposed him to be so, though they had no ground whatever for the suspicion: it was their rough way of solving a hard problem. If the patriarch's integrity had not been so firm, if his refinement had not been so tender, if his piety towards God had not been so invariably accompanied by his pity for his brother men; if, in a word, his character had not been so complete, his trial and his deliverance could not have exhibited the extraordinary lesson which has interested and instructed every succeeding generation. He appears before us at first in the vigour of health, in the height of prosperity, and in the charm of good repute. But oh, the vanity of man! At a touch of God's finger, his flesh develops a festering mass of corruption; at a glance of God's eye, which searched him through and through, the total depravity of human nature at its best estate becomes apparent. "He abhors himself in dust and ashes." What next? Utter ruin? Nay, friend, *it is full redemption.*

IV. By such severe training THE AWAKENED ONE IS LED TO LOOK ALONE TO GOD FOR SALVATION, and to find the salvation he looks for. This is my last point, and I have no time left to enlarge upon it. What I want is that the truth may flash across your mind in a moment. There sits the man who is menaced with despair because every effort to extricate himself from the tangled web of his own strange experience has left him worse than before. Did I attempt to comfort him he would repel my kindest expressions. And why? He knows that it is God who condemns him. In a British court of justice, when the judge sums up against the prisoner, small cheer can he get from the honeyed words of his counsel. But hark—"It is God that justifieth." Whom does He justify? The ungodly. He first condemns them in their own consciences; and then He justifies them according to His grace. If I receive the sentence of death in myself it is the earnest of deliverance in my Redeemer. My brother, has light beamed on your soul? I hope I have found you, and that the Lord has visited you with His salvation.

I want you to notice a simple fact which seems to me to have escaped your observation. When the Almighty justified Job He commended him, and pronounced a high encomium on his conduct. Whatever mistakes he made about himself or his circumstances, in one matter he was clear as a bell; *He has spoken right of Me,* saith the Lord (Job xlii. 7.). Eliphaz and his friends transgressed in this respect. Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek it in yourselves, you are all on the wrong track. You begin below with *the whole duty of man,* and try to work upward: you are sure to fail. You should begin up yonder, with *the righteousness of God;* and then you could work downward to righteousness of daily life. God give you knowledge of salvation by grace, to the glory of His own name, and to your own sanctification, for Christ's sake! Amen.

THE GREAT ARBITRATION CASE

" Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both."—Job ix. 33.

THE patriarch Job, when reasoning with the Lord concerning his great affliction, felt himself to be at a disadvantage and declined the controversy, saying, " He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment." Yet feeling that his friends were cruelly mis-stating his case, he still desired to spread it before the Lord, but wished for a mediator, a middleman, to act as umpire and decide the case. In his mournful plight he sighed for an arbitrator who, while dealing justly for God, would at the same time deal kindly with poor flesh and blood, being able to lay his hand upon both. But, dear friends, what Job desired to have, the Lord has provided for us in the person of His own dear Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot say with Job that there is no daysman who can lay his hand upon both, because there is now " one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." In Him let us rejoice, if indeed we have an interest in Him ; and if we have not yet received Him, may almighty grace bring us even now to accept Him as our advocate and friend.

There is an old quarrel between the thrice holy God and His sinful subjects, the sons of Adam. Man has sinned ; he has broken God's law in every part of it, and has wantonly cast off from him the allegiance which was due to his Maker and his King. There is a suit against man, which was formally instituted at Sinai and must be pleaded in the Court of King's Bench, before the Judge of quick and dead. God is the great Plaintiff against His sinful creatures who are the defendants. If that suit be carried into court, it must go against the sinner. There is no hope whatever that at the last tremendous day any sinner will be able to stand in judgment if he shall leave the matter of his debts and obligations towards his God unsettled until that dreadful hour. Sinner, it would be well for thee to " agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way," for if thou be once delivered up to the great Judge of all the earth, there is not the slightest hope that thy suit can be decided otherwise than to thine eternal ruin. " Weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," will be the doom adjudged thee for ever, if thy case as before the living God shall ever come to be tried at the fiery throne of absolute justice. But the infinite grace of God proposes an arbitration, and I trust there are many here who are not anxious to have their suit carried into court, but are willing that the appointed Daysman should stand betwixt them and God, and lay His hand upon both, and propose and carry out a plan of reconciliation. There is hope for thee, thou bankrupt sinner, that thou mayest yet be at peace with God. There is a way by which thy debts may yet be paid ; that way is a blessed arbitration in which Jesus Christ shall stand as the daysman.

Let me begin *by describing the essentials of an arbitrator, or daysman ;* then let me *take you into the arbitrator's court and show you his proceedings ;* and then for a little time, if there be space enough, let us dwell upon *the happy success of our great Daysman.*

I. First of all, let me describe what are THE ESSENTIALS OF AN UMPIRE, AN ARBITRATOR, OR A DAYSMAN.

The first essential is, that *both parties should be agreed to accept him.* Let me come to thee, thou sinner, against whom God has laid His suit, and put the matter to thee. God has accepted Christ Jesus to be His umpire in His dispute. He appointed Him to the office, and chose Him for it before He laid the foundations of the world. He is God's fellow, equal with the Most High, and can put His hand upon the Eternal Father without fear, because He is dearly beloved of that Father's heart. He is " very God of very God," and is in no respect inferior to " God over all, blessed for ever." But He is also a man like thyself, sinner. He once suffered, hungered, thirsted, and knew the meaning of poverty and pain. Nay, He went farther, He was tempted as thou hast been, and farther still, He suffered the pangs of death, as thou poor mortal man wilt one day have to do. Now, what thinkest thou ? God has accepted Him ; canst thou agree with God in this matter, and agree to take Christ to be thy Daysman too ? Does foolish enmity possess thee, or does grace reign and lead thee to accept Emmanuel, God with us, as umpire in this great dispute ? Let me say to thee that thou wilt never find another so near akin to thee, so tender, so sympathetic, with such bowels of compassion towards thee. Love streamed from His eyes in life, and poured from His wounds in death. He is " the express image " of Jehovah's person, and you know that Jehovah's name is " Love." " God is love," and Christ is love. Sinner, has divine grace brought thee to thy senses ? Wilt thou accept Christ now ? Art thou willing that He should take this case into His hands and arbitrate between thee and God ? for if God accepteth Him, and thou accept Him too, then He has one of the first qualifications for being a daysman.

But, in the next place, *both parties must be fully agreed to leave the case entirely in the arbitrator's hands.* If the arbitrator does not possess the power of settling the case, then pleading before him is only making an opportunity for wrangling, without any chance of coming to a peaceful settlement. Now God has committed " all power " into the hands of His Son. Jesus Christ is the plenipotentiary of God, and has been invested with full ambassadorial powers. He comes commissioned by His Father, and He can say in all that He does towards sinners, that His Father's heart is with Him. If the case be settled by Him, the Father is agreed. Now, sinner, does grace move thy heart to do the same ? Wilt thou agree to put thy case into the hands of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man ? Wilt thou abide by His decision ? Wilt thou have it settled according to His judgment, and shall the verdict which He gives stand absolute and fast with thee ? If so, then Christ has another essential of an arbitrator ; but if not, remember, though He may make peace for others, He will never make peace for thee ; for this know, that until the grace of God has made thee willing to trust the case in Jesu's hands, there can be

no peace for thee, and thou art wilfully remaining God's enemy by refusing to accept His dear Son.

Further, let us say, that to make a good arbitrator or umpire, *it is essential that he be a fit person.* If the case were between a king and a beggar, it would not seem exactly right that another king should be the arbitrator, nor another beggar; but if there could be found a person who combined the two, who was both prince and beggar, then such a man could be selected by both. Our Lord Jesus Christ precisely meets the case. There is a very great disparity between the Plaintiff and the defendant, for how great is the gulf which exists between the Eternal God and poor fallen man! How is this to be bridged? Why by none except by one who is God and who at the same time can become man. Now the only being who can do this is Jesus Christ. He can put His hand on thee, stooping down to all thine infirmity and thy sorrow, and He can put His other hand upon the Eternal Majesty, and claim to be co-equal with God and co-eternal with the Father. Dost thou not see, then, His fitness? Surely it were the path of wisdom, sinner, to accept Him at once as the arbitrator in the case. See how well He understands it! I should not do to be an arbitrator in legal cases, because, though I should be anxious to do justice, yet I should know nothing of the law of the case. But Christ knows your case, and the law concerning it, because He has lived among men, and has passed through and suffered the penalties of justice. There cannot surely be a better skilled or more judicious daysman than our blessed Redeemer.

Yet there is one more essential of an umpire, and that is, that *he should be a person desirous to bring the case to a happy settlement.* If you appoint a quarrelsome arbitrator, he may delight to "set dogs by the ears;" but if you elect one who is anxious for the good of both, and wishes to make both friends, then he is just the very man, though, to be sure, he would be a man of a thousand, very precious when found, but very hard to discover. Oh that all lawsuits could be decided by such men. In the great case which is pending between God and the sinner, the Lord Jesus Christ has a sincere anxiety both for His Father's glory and for the sinner's welfare, and that there should be peace between the two contending parties. It is the life and aim of Jesus Christ to make peace. He delighteth not in the death of sinners, and He knows no joy greater than that of receiving prodigals to His bosom, and of bringing lost sheep back again to the fold. You cannot tell how high the Saviour's bosom swells with an intense desire to make to Himself a great name as a peacemaker. Never had warrior such ambition to make war and to win victories therein, as Christ has to end war, and to win thereby the bloodless triumphs of peace. From the heights of heaven He came leaping like a young roe down to the plains of earth. From earth He leaped into the depths of the grave; then up again at a bound He sprang to earth, and up again to heaven; and still He resteth not, but presseth on in His mighty work to ingather sinners, and to reconcile them unto God; making Himself a propitiation for their sins.

Thou seest then, sinner, how the case is. God has evidently chosen the most fitting arbitrator. That arbitrator is willing to undertake the case, and thou mayest well repose all confidence in Him; but if thou shalt live and die without accepting Him as thine arbitrator, then, the case going against thee, thou wilt have none to blame but thyself. When the everlasting damages shall be assessed against thee in thy soul and body for ever, thou shalt have to curse only thine own folly for having been the cause of thy ruin. May I ask you to speak candidly? Has the Holy Ghost so turned the natural bent and current of your will, that you have chosen Him because He has first chosen you? Do you feel that Christ this day is standing before God for you? He is God's anointed; is He your elected? God's choice pitches upon Him, does your choice agree therewith? Remember, where there is no will towards Christ, Christ as yet exercises no saving power. Christ saves no sinner who lives and dies unwilling. He makes unwilling sinners willing before He speaks a word of comfort to them. It is the mark of our election as His people, that we are made willing in the day of God's power. Lay your hope where God has laid your help, namely, on Christ, mighty to save. You cannot have an arbitrator except both sides be agreed. Dost thou say aye, aye, with all my soul I choose Him? Then let us proceed.

II. And now I shall want, by your leave, to TAKE YOU INTO THE COURT WHERE THE TRIAL IS GOING ON, AND SHOW YOU THE LEGAL PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE GREAT DAYSMAN.

"The man, Christ Jesus," who is "God over all, blessed for ever," opens His court *by laying down the principles upon which He intends to deliver judgment,* and those principles I will now try to explain and expound. They are two-fold—first, *strict justice;* and secondly, *fervent love.*

The arbitrator has determined that, let the case go as it may, *there shall be full justice done,* justice to the very extreme, whether it be for or against the defendant. He intends to take the law in its sternest and severest aspect, and to judge according to its strictest letter. He will not be guilty of partiality on either side. If the law says that the sinner shall die, the arbitrator declares that He will judge that the sinner shall die; and if, on the other hand, the defendant can plead and prove that he is innocent, He intends to adjudge to him the award of innocence, namely ETERNAL LIFE. If the sinner can prove that he has fairly won it, he shall have his due. Either way, whether it be in favour of the plaintiff or of the defendant, the condition of judgment is to be strict justice.

But the arbitrator also says that He will judge according to the second rule, that of *fervent love.* He loves His Father, and therefore He will decide on nothing that may attaint His honour or disgrace His crown. He so loves God, the Eternal One, that He will suffer heaven and earth to pass away sooner than there shall be one blot upon the character of the Most High. On the other hand, He so loves the poor defendant, man, that He will be willing to do anything rather than inflict penalty upon him unless justice shall absolutely require it. He loves man with so large a love that nothing will delight Him more than to decide in His favour, and He will be but too glad if He can be the means of happily establishing peace between the two. How these principles are to meet, will be seen by-and-by. At present He lays them down very positively. "He that ruleth among men must be just." An arbitrator must be just; or else he is not fit to hold the scales in any suit. On the other hand, He must be tender; for His name, as God, is love; and His nature as man is gentleness and mercy. Both parties should

distinctly consent to these principles. How can they do otherwise? Do they not commend themselves to all of you? Let justice and love unite if they can.

Having thus laid down the principles of judgment, the Arbitrator *next calls upon the Plaintiff to state His case.* Let us listen while the great Creator speaks: may God give me grace now reverently to state it in His name, as one poor sinner stating God's case against us all. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward." The Eternal God charges us, and let me confess at once most justly and most truly charges us, with having broken all His commandments—some of them in act, some of them in word, all of them in heart, and thought, and imagination. He charges upon us, that against light and knowledge we have chosen the evil and forsaken the good; that knowing what we were doing we have turned aside from His most righteous law and have gone astray like lost sheep, following the imaginations and devices of our own hearts. The great Plaintiff claims that inasmuch as we are His creatures we ought to have obeyed Him, that inasmuch as we owe our very lives to His daily care we ought to have rendered Him service instead of disobedience, and to have been His loyal subjects instead of turning traitors to His throne. All this, calmly and dispassionately, according to the great Book of the law, is laid to our charge before the Daysman. No exaggeration of sin is brought against us. It is simply declared of us that the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint; that there is none that doeth good, no, not one; that we have all gone out of the way, and altogether become unprofitable. This is God's case. He says, "I made this man; curiously was he wrought in the lowest parts of the earth; and all his members bear traces of My singular handiwork. I made him for My honour, and he has not honoured Me. I created him for My service, and he has not served Me. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years I have kept the breath in his nostrils; the bread he has eaten has been the daily portion of My bounty; his garments are the livery of My charity; and all this while he has neither thought of Me, his Creator and Preserver, nor done anything in My service. He has served his family, his wife and children, but his Maker he has despised. He has served his country, his neighbours, the borough in which he dwells; but I who made him, I have had nothing from him. He has been an unprofitable servant unto Me." I think I may put the plaintiff's case into your hands. Which of you would keep a horse, and that horse yield you no obedience? What excuse is it that though I might not use him he would carry another? Nay, the case is worse than this. Not only has man done nothing, but worse than nothing. Which of you would keep a dog, which, instead of fawning upon you, would bark at you—fly at you, and tear you in his rage? Some of us have done this to God; we have perhaps cursed Him to His face; we have broken His sabbaths, laughed at His gospel, and persecuted His saints. You would have said of such a dog, let it die. Wherefore should I harbour in my house a dog that treats me thus? Yet, hear O heavens; and give ear, O earth; God has borne with your ill manners, and He still cries "forbear." He puts the lifted thunder back into the arsenal of His dread artillery. I wish I could state the case as I ought. My lips are but clay; and these words should be like fire in the sinner's soul. When I meditated upon this subject alone, I felt much sympathy with God, that He should have been so ill treated; and whereas some men speak of the flames of hell as too great a punishment for sin, it seems ten thousand marvels that we should not have been thrust down there long ago.

The Plaintiff's case having thus been stated *the defendant is called upon by the Daysman for his*; and I think I hear him as he begins. First of all the trembling defendant sinner pleads—"*I confess to the indictment, but I say I could not help it. I have sinned, it is true, but my nature was such that I could not well do otherwise; I must lay all the blame of it to my own heart; my heart was deceitful and my nature was evil.*" The Daysman at once rules that this is no excuse whatever but an aggravation, for inasmuch as it is conceded that the man's heart itself is enmity against God, this is an admission of yet greater malice and blacker rebellion. It was only alleged against the offender in the first place that he had outwardly offended; but he acknowledges that he does it inwardly, and confesses that his very heart is traitorous against God, and is fully set upon working the King's damage and dishonour. It is determined, therefore, by the Daysman that this excuse will not stand, and He gives a case in point:—a thief is brought up for stealing, and he pleads that his heart was thievish, that he felt a constant inclination to steal, and that therefore he could not help running off with any goods within his reach. The judge very properly answers, "Then I shall give you twice as much penalty as any other man who only fell into the fault by surprise, for according to your own confession, you are a thief through and through; what you have said is not an excuse, but an aggravation."

Then the defendant pleads in the next place that albeit he acknowledges the facts alleged against him, yet *he is no worse than other offenders*, and that there are many in the world who have sinned more grievously than he has done. He says he has been envious, and angry, and worldly, and covetous, and has forgotten God; but then he never was an adulterer, or a thief, or a drunkard, or a blasphemer, and he pleads that his lesser crimes may well be winked at. But the great Daysman at once turns to the Statute Book, and says that as He is about to give His decision by law that plea is not at all tenable, for the law book has it—"Cursed is every man that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." The offence of one sinner doth not excuse the offence of another; and the arbitrator declares that He cannot mix up other cases with the case now in hand; that the present offender has on his own confession broken the law, and that as the law book stands that is the only question to be decided for "the soul that sinneth it shall die," and if the defendent has no better plea to offer, judgment must go against him.

The sinner urges further, that though he has offended, and offended very greatly and grievously, yet *he has done a great many good things.* It is true

he did not love God but he always went to chapel. It is true he did not pray, but still he belonged to a singing-class. It is quite correct that he did not love his neighbour as himself, but he always liked to relieve the poor. But the Daysman, looking the sinner full in the face, tells him that this plea also is bad, for the alleged commission of some acts of loyalty will not make compensation for avowed acts of treason. "Those things," saith He, "ye ought to have done, but not to have left the others undone"; and He tells the sinner, with all kindness and gentleness, that straining at a gnat does not exonerate him for having swallowed a camel; and that having tithed mint, and anise, and cummin, is no justification for having devoured a widow's house. To have forgotten God is in itself a great enormity; to have lived without serving Him is a crime of omission so great, that whatever the sinner may have done on the *contra*, stands for nothing at all, since he has even then in that case done only what he ought to have done. You see at once the justice of this decision. If any of you were to say to your grocer, or tailor, when they send in their bills, "Well, now, you ought not to ask for payment of that account, because I did pay you another bill—you ought not to ask me to pay for that suit of clothes, because I did pay you for another suit;" I think the answer would be, "But in paying for what you had before, you only did what you ought to do; but I still have a demand upon you for this." So all the good deeds you have ever done are only debts discharged which were most fully due, (supposing them to be good deeds, which is very questionable) and they leave the great debt still untouched.

The defendant has no end of pleas, for the sinner has a thousand excuses; and finding that nothing else will do, he begins to appeal to the mercy of the Plaintiff, and says *that for the future he will do better.* He confesses that he is in debt, but he will run up no more bills at that shop. He acknowledges that he has offended, but he vows he will not do so again. He is quite sure that the future shall be as free from fault as angels are from sin. Though it is true that he just now said his heart was bad, still he feels inclined to think that it is not so very bad after all; he is conceited enough to think that he can in the future keep himself from committing sin; thereby, you see, admitting the worthlessness of his former plea on which he relied so much "Now," he says, "if for life I become a teetotaller, then surely I may be excused for having been a drunkard; suppose now that I am always honest and steady, and never again say one ill word, will not that exonerate me from all my wrong-doings, and for having blasphemed God?" But the Daysman rules, still with kindness and gentleness, that the greatest imaginable virtue in the future will be no recompense for the sin of the past; for He finds in the lawbook no promise whatever made to that effect: but the statute runs in these words, "He will by no means spare the guilty"; "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

You would think that the defendant would now be fairly beaten, but he is not: he asks leave to step across the way *to bring in a friend of his.* He is allowed to do so, and comes back with a gentleman dressed in such a queer style, that, if you had not sometimes seen the like in certain Puseyite Churches, you would suppose him to have arrayed himself for the mere purpose of amusing children at a show, where a merry-andrew is the presiding genius. The defendant seems to imagine that if the case be left to this gentleman in the white shirt and ribbons, he will settle it with ease. He has with him a little bottle of water, by which he can turn hearts of stone into flesh, making heirs of wrath into "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven." He has a certain portion of mystical bread, and magical wine, the reception with which he can work wonderful transformation, producing flesh and blood therefrom at his reverence's will and pleasure. In fact, this gentleman trades and gets his living by the prosecution of magic. He has occult influences streaming from his fingers, which influences he derived originally from a gentleman in lawn; and he now pretends to have ability derived from the apostles, most probably from Judas, by marvellous manipulations—how I cannot tell you, but by a kind of sleight of hand—to settle the case. But the Daysman, with a frown, hurls a thunderbolt from His hand against the impudent imposter, and bids him take himself away, and not again deceive poor sinners with his vain pretensions. He warns the defendant that the priest is an arrant knave, that whatever professions he may make of being a "successor of the apostles," he knows nothing about apostolical doctrine, or else he would not have intruded his sinful, silly self, between men's souls and God. He bids him advise the man to dress himself like a person in his right mind, who was about honest work, and not as a necromancer or priest of Baal, and give himself to preaching the gospel, instead of propagating the superstitious inventions of Rome.

What is the poor defendant to do now? He is fairly beaten this time. He falls down on his knees, and with many tears and lamentations he cries, "I see how the case stands; *I have nothing to plead, but I appeal to the mercy of the Plaintiff;* I confess that I have broken His commandments; I acknowledge that I deserve His wrath; but I have heard that He is merciful, and I plead for free and full forgiveness."

And now comes another scene. The Plaintiff seeing the sinner on his knees, with his eyes full of tears, makes this reply, "I am willing at all times to deal kindly and according to loving-kindness with all My creatures; but will the Arbitrator for a moment suggest that I should damage and ruin My own perfections of truth and holiness; that I should belie My own word; that I should imperil My own throne; that I should make the purity of immaculate justice to be suspected, and should bring down the glory of My unsullied holiness, because this creature has offended Me, and now craves for mercy? I cannot, I will not spare the guilty; *he has offended, and he must die!* 'As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.' Still, this 'would rather' must not be supreme. I am gracious and would spare the sinner, but I am just, and must not unsay My own words. I swore with an oath, 'The soul that sinneth shall die.' I have laid it down as a matter of firm decree, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' This sinner is righteously cursed, and he must inevitably die; and yet I love him. How can I give thee up, Ephraim? how can I make thee as Admah? How can I set thee as Zeboim? And yet, how can I put thee among the children? Would it not be a

worse calamity that I should be unjust than that earth should lose its inhabitants? Better all men perish, than that the universe should lose the justice of God as its stay and shield." The arbitrator bows and says, "Even so; justice demands that the offender should die, and I would not have Thee unjust."

What more does the Arbitrator say? He sits still, and the case is in suspense. There stands the just and holy God, willing to forgive if it can be done without injury to the immutable principles of right. There sits the Arbitrator, looking with eyes of love upon the poor, weeping, trembling sinner, and anxious to devise a plan to save him, but conscious that that plan must not infringe upon divine justice; for it were a worse cruelty to injure divine perfections than it were to destroy the whole human race. The Arbitrator, therefore, after pausing awhile, puts it thus: "I am anxious that these two should be brought together; I love them both: I cannot, on the one hand, recommend that My Father should stain His honour; I cannot, on the other hand, endure that this sinner should be cast eternally into hell; I will decide the case, and it shall be thus: *I* will pay My Father's justice all it craves; I pledge Myself that in the fulness of time *I will suffer in My own proper person all that the weeping, trembling sinner ought to have suffered.* My Father, wilt Thou stand to this?" The eternal God accepts the awful sacrifice! What say you, sinner, what say you? Why, methinks you cannot have two opinions. If you are sane—and may God make you sane—you will melt with wonder. You will say, "I could not have thought this! I never called in a daysman with an expectation of this! *I* have sinned, and *He* declares that *He* will suffer; *I* am guilty, and *He* says that *He* will be punished for me!"

Yes, sinner, and He did more than say it, for when the fulness of time came—you know the story. The officers of justice served Him with the writ, and He was taken from His knees in the garden of Gethsemane away to the court, and there He was tried and condemned; and you know how His back was scourged till the white bones stood like islands of ivory in the midst of a crimson sea of gore; you know how His head was crowned with thorns, and His cheeks were given to those who plucked off the hair! Can you not see Him hounded through the streets of Jerusalem, with the spittle of the brutal soldiery still upon His unwashed face, and His wounds all unstanched and bleeding? Can you not see Him as they hurl Him down and fasten Him to the accursed tree?—then they lift the cross and dash it down into its socket in the earth, dislocating every bone, tearing every nerve and sinew, filling His soul as full of agony as this earth is full of sin, or the depths of the ocean filled with its floods? You do not know, however, what He suffered within. Hell held carnival within His heart. Every arrow of the infernal pit was discharged at Him, and heaven itself forsook Him. The thunderbolts of vengeance fell upon Him, and His Father hid His face from Him till He cried in His agony, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And so He suffered on, and on, and on, till "It is finished" closed the scene.

Here, then, is the arbitration. Christ Himself suffers; and now I have to put the query, "Hast thou accepted Christ?" O dear friend, if thou hast, I know that God the Holy Ghost has made thee accept Him; but if thou hast not, what shall I call thee? I will not upbraid thee, but my heart would weep over thee. How canst thou be so mad as to forego a compromise so blessed, an arbitration so divine! Oh! kiss the feet of the Daysman; love Him all thy life, that He has decided the case so blessedly.

III. Let us now look at THE DAYSMAN'S SUCCESS.

For every soul who has received Christ, Christ has made a full atonement which God the Father has accepted; and His success in this matter is to be rejoiced in, first of all, because *the suit has been settled conclusively.* We have known cases go to arbitration, and yet the parties have quarrelled afterwards; they have said that the arbitrator did not rule justly, or something of the kind, and so the whole point has been raised again. But O beloved, the case between a saved soul and God is settled once and for ever. There is no more conscience of sin left in the believer; and as for God's Book, there is not a sin recorded there against any soul that has received Christ. I know some of our Arminian brethren rather think that the case is not settled; or they suppose that the case is settled for a time, but that it will one day come up again. Beloved, I thank God that they are mistaken. Christ has not cast His people's sins into the shallows, where they may be washed up again, but He has cast them into the depths of the sea, where they are drowned for ever. Our Scape-goat has not carried our sins to the borders of the land, where they may be found again, but He has taken them away into the wilderness where, if they be searched for, they shall not be found. The case is so settled that in eternity you shall never hear of it again except as a case which was gloriously decided.

Again, the case has been settled *on the best principles*, because, you see, neither party can possibly quarrel with the decision. The sinner cannot, for it is all mercy to him: even eternal justice cannot, for it has had its due. If there had been any mitigation of the penalty, we might yet fear that perhaps the suit might come up again; but now that everything has been paid, that cannot be. If my creditor takes from me, by a settlement in the Court of Insolvency ten shillings in the pound I know he will not disturb me yet; but I cannot feel quite at ease about the other ten shillings; and if I am ever able, I should like to pay him. But, you see, Christ has not paid ten shillings in the pound, but He has paid every farthing.

> "Justice now demands no more,
> He has paid the dreadful score."

For all the sins of all His people He has made such a full and satisfactory atonement, that divine justice were not divine justice at all if it should ask to be paid twice for the same offence. Christ has suffered the law's fullest and severest penalty, and there is now no fear whatever that the case can ever be revived, by writ of error, or removal into another court, because it has been settled on the eternal and immutable principles of justice.

Again, the case has been so settled, *that both parties are well content.* You never hear a saved soul murmur at the substitution of the Lord Jesus. If ever I get to see His face, I'll fall down before Him and kiss the dust beneath His feet. Oh! if ever I see the Saviour who has thus delivered me from ruin; if I have a crown I will cast it at His feet, and never, never wear it; it must, it shall be His. I feel like

the good woman who said, that if Christ ever saved her, He should never hear the last of it; and I am sure He never shall, for I will praise Him as long as immortality endures, for what He has done for me. I am sure that every saved sinner feels the same. And Jehovah, on the other side is perfectly content. He is satisfied with His dear Son. "Well done!" He saith to Him. He has received Him to the throne of glory, and made Him to sit at His right hand, because He is perfectly content with the great work which He has accomplished.

But, what is more and more wonderful still, *both parties have gained in the suit.* Did you ever hear of such a law-suit as this before? No, never in the courts of man. The old story of the two oyster-shells, you know, awarded to the plaintiff and defendant, while the oyster is eaten in court, is generally the result; but it is not so in this case, for both the Plaintiff and the defendant have won by the arbitration. What has God gained? Why, glory to Himself, and such glory as all creation could not give Him, such glory as the ruin of sinners, though so well-deserved, could not give Him. Hark how

> "Heaven's eternal arches ring
> With shouts of sovereign grace!"

Angels, too, as well as those who have been redeemed, strike their harps, which they have tuned afresh to a nobler strain, as they sing, "Worthy is the Lamb, and blessed is the Eternal God!" And, as for us, the poor defendants, why, what have we not gained? We were men before; now we are something more than Adam was. We were "a little lower than the angels" before, but now we are "lifted up far above all principalities and powers." We were God's subjects once, but this arbitration has made us His sons. We were at our very best only the possessors of a paradise on earth, but now we are joint-heirs with Christ of a paradise above the skies. Both sides have won, and both sides must therefore be blessedly content with their glorious Daysman.

And, to conclude, through this Daysman *both parties have come to be united in the strongest, closest, dearest, and fondest bond of union.* This law-suit has ended in such a way that the Plaintiff and the defendant are friends for life, nay, friends through death, and friends in eternity. How near God is to a pardoned sinner,

> "So near, so very near to God,
> Nearer we cannot be;
> For in the person of His Son,
> We are as near as He."

What a wonderful thing is that union between God and the sinner! We have all been thinking a great deal lately about the Atlantic Cable. It is a very interesting attempt to join two worlds together. That poor cable, you know, has had to be sunk into the depths of the sea, in the hope of establishing a union between the two worlds, and now we are disappointed again. But oh! what an infinitely greater wonder *has been* accomplished. Christ Jesus saw the two worlds divided, and the great Atlantic of human guilt rolled between. He sank down deep into the woes of man till all God's waves and billows had gone over Him, that He might be, as it were, the great telegraphic communication between God and the apostate race, between the Most Holy One and poor sinners. Let me say to you, sinner, there was no failure in the laying down of that blessed cable. It went down deep; the end was well secured, and it went down deep into the depths of our sin, and shame, and woe; and on the other side it has gone right up to the eternal throne, and is fastened there eternally fast, by God Himself. You may work that telegraph to-day, and you may easily understand the art of working it too. A sigh will work it; a tear will work it. Say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and along the wire the message will flash, and will reach God before it comes from you. It is swifter far than earthly telegraphs; aye, and there will come an answer back much sooner than you ever dream of, for it is promised—"Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear." Who ever heard of such a communication as this between man and man; but it really does exist between sinners and God, since Christ has opened up a way from the depths of our sin to the heights of His glory.

This is for you who are at a distance from Him, but He has done more for us who are saved, for He has taken us right across the Atlantic of our sin and set us down on the other side; He has taken us out of our sinful state, and put us into the Father's bosom, and there we shall dwell for ever in the heart of God as His own dear children.

I would to God that some might now be led to look to the Saviour, that some would come with weeping and with tears to Him, and say,

> "Jesus lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom fly."

Take my case, and arbitrate for me; I accept Thine atonement; I trust in Thy precious blood; only receive me and I will rejoice in Thee for ever with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

May the Lord bless you evermore. Amen.

THE SWEET USES OF ADVERSITY

"Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me."—Job x. 2.

AND will God contend with man? If God be angry, can He not take away the breath of his nostrils, and lay him low in the dust of earth? If the heart of the Almighty be moved unto hot displeasure, can He not speak in His anger, and will not the soul of man sink into the lowest hell? Will God contend—will He set Himself in battle array against His creature? and such a creature?—the creature of an hour—a thing that is not, that is here to-day and gone to-morrow? Will the Almighty contend with the nothingness of man? Will the everlasting God take up the weapons of war, and go out to fight against the insect of a day? Well might we cry out to Him, "After whom is my Lord the

King gone forth? After a dead dog: after a flea?" Wilt Thou hunt the partridge on the mountains with an army, and wilt Thou go forth against a gnat with shield and spear? Shall the everlasting God who fainteth not, neither is weary, at whose reproof the pillars of heaven's starry roof tremble and start—will He become combatant with a creature? Yet our text saith so. It speaks of God's contending with man. Ah, surely, my brethren, it needs but little logic to understand that this is not a contention of anger, but a contention of love. It needs, methinks, but a short sight for us to discover that, if God contendeth with man, it must be a contention of mercy. There must be a design of love in this. If He were angry He would not condescend to reason with His creature, and to have a strife of words with him; much less would He put on His buckler, and lay hold on His sword, to stand up in battle and contend with such a creature as man. You will all perceive at once that there must be love even in this apparently angry word; that this *contention* must, after all, have something to do with *contentment*, and that this battle must be, after all, but a disguised mercy, but another shape of an embrace from the God of love. Carry this consoling reflection in your thoughts while I am preaching to you; and if any of you are saying to-day, "Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me," the very fact of God contending with you at all, the fact that He has not consumed you, that He has not smitten you to the lowest hell, may thus, at the very outset, afford consolation and hope.

Now, I propose to address myself to the two classes of persons who are making use of this question. First, I shall speak to *the tried saint;* and then I shall speak to *the seeking sinner*, who has been seeking peace and pardon through Christ, but who has not as yet found it, but, on the contrary, has been buffetted by the law, and driven away from the mercy-seat in despair.

I. First, then, to THE CHILD OF GOD. I have—I know I have—in this great assembly, some who have come to Job's position. They are saying, "My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me." Sometimes to question God is wicked. As the men of Bethshemesh were smitten with death when they dared to lift up the lid of the ark and look into its sacred mysteries, so is it often death to our faith to question God. It often happens that the sorest plagues come upon us on account of an impudent curiosity which longs to pry between the folded leaves of God's great council-book, and find out the reason for His mysterious providences. But, methinks *this* is a question that may be asked. Inquiring here will not be merely curious: for there will be a practical effect following therefrom. Tried saint! follow me while I seek to look into this mystery and answer your question, and I pray you, select that one of several answers which I shall propound, which shall, to your judgment, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, seem to be the right one. You have been tried by trouble after trouble: business runs cross against you; sickness is never out of your house; while in your own person you are the continual subject of a sad depression of spirit. It seems as if God were contending with you, and you are asking, "Why is this? 'Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me.'"

1. My first answer on God's part, my brother, is this—it may be that God is contending with thee that He may show His own power in upholding thee. God delighteth in His saints; and when a man delights in his child, if it be a child noted for its brightness of intellect, he delights to see it put through hard questions, because he knows that it will be able to answer them all. So God glories in His children. He loves to hear them tried, that the whole world may see that there is none like them on the face of the earth, and even Satan may be compelled before he can find an accusation against them, to resort to his inexhaustible fund of lies. Sometimes God on purpose puts His children in the midst of this world's trials. On the right, left, before, behind, they are surrounded. Within and without the battle rages. But there stands the child of God, calm amidst the bewildering cry, confident of victory. And then the Lord pointeth joyously to His saint, and He saith, "See, Satan, he is more than a match for thee. Weak though he is, yet through My power, he all things can perform." And sometimes God permits Satan himself to come against one of His children; and the black fiend of hell in dragon's wings, meets a poor Christian just when he is faint and weary from stumblings in the valley of humiliation. The fight is long and terrible, and, well it may be, for it is a *worm* combating with *the dragon*. But see what that worm can do. It is trodden under foot, and yet it destroys the heel that treads upon it. When the Christian is cast down he utters a cry, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, for though I fall yet shall I rise again." And so God pointeth to His child and saith, "See there! see what I can do: I can make flesh and blood more mighty than the most cunning spirit; I can make poor feeble foolish man, more than a match for all the craft and might of Satan." And what will you say to this third proof that God puts us through? Sometimes God doth as it were *Himself* enter into the lists; oh, let us wonder to tell it. God to prove the strength of faith, sometimes Himself makes war on faith. Think not that this is a stretch of the imagination. It is plain simple fact. Have ye never heard of the brook Jabbok, and of that angel-clothed God who fought with Jacob there, and permitted Jacob to prevail? What was this for? It was this: thus had God determined, "I will strengthen the creature so much, that I will permit it to overcome its Creator." Oh, what noble work is this, that while God is casting down His child with one hand, He should be holding him up with the other: letting a measure of omnipotence fall on him to crush him, while the like omnipotence supports him under the tremendous load. The Lord shows the world—"See what faith can do!" Well does Hart sing of faith—

> "It treads on the world and on hell;
> It vanquishes death and despair;
> And, O! let us wonder to tell,
> It overcomes heaven by prayer."

This is why God contends with thee: to glorify Himself, by showing to angels, to men, to devils, how He can put such strength into poor puny man, that he can contend with his Maker, and become a prevailing prince like Israel, who as a prince had power with God, and prevailed. This, then, may be the first reason.

2. Let me give you a second answer. Perhaps, O tried soul! the Lord is doing this to develop thy

graces. There are some of thy graces that would never be discovered if it were not for thy trials. Dost thou not know that thy faith never looks so grand in summer weather, as it does in winter? Hast thou not heard that love is too often like a glow-worm, that showeth but little light except it be in the midst of surrounding darkness? And dost thou not know that hope itself is like a star—not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, and only to be discovered in the night of adversity? Dost thou not understand that afflictions are often the black foils in which God doth set the jewels of His children's graces, to make them shine the better. It was but a little while ago that on thy knees thou wast saying, "Lord, I fear I have no faith: let me know that I have faith." But dost thou know thou wast praying for trials, for thou canst not know that thou hast faith, until thy faith be exercised. Our trials, so to speak, are like wayfarers in a wood. When there is no intruder in the silent glades of the forest, the hare and the partridge lie; and there they rest, and no eye sees them. But when the intruding footstep is heard, then you see them start and run along the green lane, and you hear the whirr of the pheasant as it seeks to hide itself. Now, our trials are intruders upon our heart's rest; our graces start up and we discover them. They had lain in their lair, they had slept in their forms, they had rested in their nests, unless these intruding trials had startled them from their places. I remember a simple rural metaphor used by a departed divine. He says he was never very skilful at birds' nesting in the summer time, but he could always find birds' nests in the winter. Now, it often happens that when a man has but little grace, you can scarcely see it when the leaves of his prosperity are on him; but let the winter's blast come and sweep away his withered leaves, and then you discover his graces. Depend upon it, God often sends us trials that our graces may be discovered, and that we may be certified of their existence. Besides, it is not merely discovery, it is real growth that is the result of these trials. There is a little plant, small and stunted, growing under the shade of a broad spreading oak; and this little plant values the shade which covers it, and greatly does it esteem the quiet rest which its noble friend affords. But a blessing is designed for this little plant. Once upon a time there comes along the woodman, and with his sharp axe he fells the oak. The plant weeps, and cries, "My shelter is departed: every rough wind will blow upon me, and every storm will seek to uproot me." "No, no," saith the angel of that flower, "now will the sun get at thee; now will the shower fall on thee in more copious abundance than before; now thy stunted form shall spring up into loveliness, and thy flower, which could never have expanded itself to perfection, shall now laugh in the sunshine, and men shall say, 'How greatly hath that plant increased! how glorious hath become its beauty through the removal of that which was its shade and its delight!'" See you not, then, that God may take away your comforts and your privileges to make you the better Christians? Why, the Lord always trains His soldiers, not by letting them lie on feather beds, but by turning them out and using them to forced marches and hard service. He makes them ford through streams, and swim through rivers, and climb mountains, and walk many a long march with heavy knapsacks of sorrow on their backs. This is the way in which He makes soldiers—not by dressing them up in fine uniforms, to swagger at the barrack gates, and to be fine gentlemen in the eyes of the loungers in the park. God knows that soldiers are only to be made in battle: they are not to be grown in peaceful times. We may grow the stuff of which soldiers are made, but warriors are really educated by the smell of powder, in the midst of whizzing bullets, and roaring cannonades—not in soft and peaceful times. Well, Christian, may not this account for it all? Is not thy Lord bringing out thy graces and making them grow? This is the reason why He is contending with you.

3. Another reason may be found in this. It may be the Lord contends with thee because thou hast some secret sin which is doing thee sore damage. Dost thou remember the story of Moses? Never a man better beloved than he of the Lord his God, for he was faithful in all his house as a servant. But dost thou remember how the Lord met him on the way as he was going to Egypt, and strove with him? And why? Because he had in his house an uncircumcised child. This child was, so long as it had not God's seal upon it, a sin in Moses; therefore God strove with him till the thing was done. Now, too often we have some uncircumcised thing in our house, some joy that is evil, some amusement that is sinful, some pursuit that is not agreeable to His will. And the Lord meets us often as He did Moses, of whom it is written—"The Lord met him by the way in the inn, and sought to kill him."—Exodus iv. 24. Now search and look, for if the consolations of God be small with thee, there is some secret sin within. Put it away, lest God smite thee still more sorely, and vex thee in His hot displeasure. Trials often discover sins—sins we should never have found out if it had not been for them. We know that the houses in Russia are very greatly infested with rats and mice. Perhaps a stranger would scarcely notice them at first, but the time when you discover them is when the house is on fire; then they pour out in multitudes. And so doth God sometimes burn up our comforts to make our hidden sins run out; and then He enables us to knock them on the head and get rid of them. That may be the reason of your trial, to put an end to some long-fostered sin. It may be, too, that in this way God would prevent some future sin, some sin hidden from thine own eyes into which thou wouldst soon fall if it were not for His troubling thee by His providence. There was a fair ship which belonged to the great Master of the seas; It was about to sail from the port of grace to the haven of glory. Ere it left the shore the great Master said, "Mariners, be brave! Captain, be thou bold! for not a hair of your head shall perish; I will bring you safely to your desired haven. The angel of the winds is commissioned to take care of you on your way." The ship sailed right merrily with its streamers flying in the air. It floated along at a swift rate with a fair wind for many a day. But once upon a time there came a hurricane which drove them from the course, strained their mast until it bent as if it must snap in twain. The sail was gone to ribbons; the sailors were alarmed and the captain himself trembled. They had lost their course. "They were out of the right track," they said; and they mourned exceedingly. When the day dawned the waves were quiet, and the angel of the winds appeared; and they spake unto him, and said, "O angel, wast thou not bidden to take charge of us, and preserve us on our journey?" He answered, "It was even so, and

I have done it. You were steering on right confidently, and you knew not that a little ahead of your vessel lay a quicksand upon which she would be wrecked and swallowed up quick. I saw that there was no way for your escape but to drive you from your course. See, I have done as it was commanded me: go on your way." Ah, this is a parable of our Lord's dealings with us. He often drives us from our smooth course which we thought was the right track to heaven. But there is a secret reason for it; there is a quicksand ahead that is not marked on the chart. We know nothing about it; but God seeth it, and He will not permit this fair vessel, which He has Himself insured, to be stranded anywhere; He will bring it safely to its desired haven.

4. I have now another reason to give, but it is one which some of you will not understand; some however will. Beloved, ye remember that it is written, that we "must bear the image of the heavenly," namely, the image of Christ. As He was in this world even so must we be. We must have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, that we may be conformable unto His death. Hast thou never thought that none can be like the Man of Sorrows unless they have sorrows too? How can you be like unto Him, who sweat as it were great drops of blood, if you do not sometimes cry, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Think not, O well beloved, that thou canst be like the thorn-crowned Head, and yet never feel the thorn. Canst thou be like thy dying Lord, and yet be uncrucified? Must thy hand be without a nail, and thy foot without a wound? Canst thou be like Him, unless like Him thou art compelled to say, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" God is chiselling you—you are but a rough block—He is making you into the image of Christ; and that sharp chisel is taking away much which prevents your being like Him. Must He who is our Head be marred in His visage by reason of grief, and must we for ever rejoice and sing? It cannot be.

> "The heirs of salvation, I know from His word,
> Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."

Sweet is the affliction which gives us fellowship with Christ. Blessed is the plough that ploughs deep furrows, if the furrows be like His. Blessed is the mouth that spits upon us, if the spittle be from the same cause as that which defiled His face. Blessed are the nails and thorns, and vinegar and spear, if they but make us somewhat like to Him, in whose glory we shall be partakers when we shall see Him as He is. This is a matter which all cannot understand, for it is a path which no unhallowed foot hath trodden, and no careless eye hath so much as seen it. But the true believer can rejoice therein, for he has had fellowship with Christ in His sufferings.

5. To the child of God I shall give only one more reason. The Lord, it may be, contendeth with thee, my brother, to humble thee. We are all too proud; the humblest of us do but approach to the door of true humility. We are too proud: for pride, I suppose, runs in our very veins, and is not to be gotten out of us any more than the marrow from our bones. We shall have many blows before we are brought down to the right mark; and it is because we are so continually getting up that God is so continually putting us down again. Besides, don't you feel, in looking back on your past troubles, that you have after all been best when you have had troubles? I can truly say, there is a mournfulness in joy, and there is a sweet joy in sorrow. I do not know how it is, but that bitter wine of sorrow, when you once get it down gives such a warmth to the inner man as even the wine of Lebanon can scarce afford. It acts with such a tonic influence upon the whole system, that the very veins begin to thrill as the blood leaps therein. Strange influence! I am no physician, but yet I know that my sweet cup often leaves bitterness on the palate, and my bitter cup always leaves a sweet flavour in the mouth. There is a sweet joy in sorrow I cannot understand. There is music in this harp with its strings all unstrung and broken. There are a few notes I hear from this mournful lute that I never get from the loud-sounding trumpet. Softness and melody we get from the wail of sorrow, which we never get from the song of joy. Must we not account for this by the fact that in our troubles we live nearer to God? Our joy is like the wave as it dashes upon the shore—it throws us on the earth. But our sorrows are like that receding wave which sucks us back again into the great depth of Godhead. We should have been stranded and left high and dry upon the shore if it had not been for that receding wave, that ebbing of our prosperity, which carried us back to our Father and to our God again. Blessed affliction! it has brought us to the mercy seat; given life to prayer; enkindled love, strengthened faith; brought Christ into the furnace with us, and then brought us out of the furnace to live with Christ more joyously than before.

Surely, I cannot answer this question better. If I have not hit upon the right reason, search and look my dearly beloved; for the reason is not far off if ye but look for it—the reason why He contendeth with you.

II. I have thus done with the saints; I shall now turn myself to address THE SEEKING SINNER, who is wondering that he has found no peace and comfort. By the way—running a little apart from the subject—I heard a brother saying the other evening in describing his experience, that before he was converted he was never sick, never had an affliction at all, but from the very hour when he became converted, he found that trials and troubles came upon him very thick. I have been thinking of that ever since, and I think I have found a reason for it. When we are converted, it is the time of the singing of birds; but do you know the time of the singing of birds is the time of the pruning of vines, and as sure as the time of the singing of birds is come the time of the pruning of vines is come also. God begins to try us as soon as He begins to make our soul sing. This is not running away from the subject. I thought it was. It has just brought me to address the sinner. You have come here this morning saying to yourself, "Sir, not long ago I was awakened to a sense of my lost estate. As I was directed I went home and sought mercy in prayer. From that day till now I have never ceased to pray. But, alas! I get no comfort, sir; I grow worse than ever I was before—I mean I grow more desponding, more sad. If you had asked me before conviction, sir, whether the path to heaven was easy, I should have said 'yes.' But now it seems to me to be strewn with flints. That I would not mind; but, alas! methinks the gate is shut which lies at the end of the road; for I have knocked, and it has never opened; I have asked, and I have not received; I have sought, and

I have not found. In fact, instead of getting peace I receive terror. God is contending with me. Can you tell me, sir, why it is?" I will try to answer the question, God helping me.

1. My first answer shall be this. Perhaps, my dear hearer, God is contending with you for awhile, because as yet you are not thoroughly awakened. Remember, Christ will not heal your wound till He has probed it to its very core. Christ is no unqualified physician, no foolish surgeon, who would close up a wound with proud flesh in it; but He will take the lancet, and cut, and cut, and cut again crossways, and He will lay the sore open, expose it, look into it, make it smart; and then after that, He will close up its mouth and make it whole. Perhaps thou hast not as yet known thine own vileness, thine own lost state. Now, Christ will have thee know thy poverty before He will make thee rich. His Holy Spirit will convince thee of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. He will strip thee, and though the pulling off of thy own righteousness be like flaying thee and tearing off the skin from thy breast, yet He will do it; for He will not clothe thee with the robe of His own righteousness till every rag of thy own self-sufficiency is pulled away. This is why God is contending with thee. Thou hast been on thy knees. Go lower, man—go lower; fall flat on thy face. Thou hast said, "Lord, I am nothing." Go lower, man; say, "Lord, I am less than nothing and the very chief of sinners." Thou hast felt somewhat; go ask that thou mayest feel more; may be yet more fully convinced of sin—may learn to hate it with a more perfect hatred, and to bewail thy lost estate with a wailing like that of Ramah, when Rachel wept for her children and would not be comforted because they were not. Seek to know the bottom of your case. Make it a matter of conscience to look thy sins in the face, and let hell also blaze before thee: realise the fact that thou deservest to be lost for ever. Sit down often and take counsel with the Lord thy God, whom thou hast grievously offended. Think of thy privileges, and how thou hast despised them; recollect the invitations thou hast heard, and how often thou hast rejected them; get a proper sense of sin, and it may be that God will cease to contend with thee, because the good is all obtained which He sought to give thee by this long and painful contention.

2. Another answer I will give you is this: perhaps God contends with thee in order to try thy earnestness. There are many Mr. Pliables, who set out on the road to heaven for a little time, and the first boggy piece of road they come to, they creep out on that side which is nearest to their own house, and go back again. Now, God meets every pilgrim on the road to heaven and contends with him. If you can hold your own, and say, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him"; if you can dare to do it, and be importunate with God, and say, "Though He never hear me, if I perish I will pray, and perish only there"; then you have got the mastery and you shall succeed. God's Spirit is teaching you how to wrestle and agonize in prayer. I have seen a man, when he has become solemnly in earnest about his soul, pray as though he was a very Samson, with the two gates of mercy in his hand, rocking them to and fro as though he would sooner pull them up—gates, and bar, and all—than he would go away without obtaining a blessing. God loves to see a man mighty in prayer, intent upon getting the blessing, resolved that he will have Christ, or he will perish seeking Him. Now, be in earnest. Cry aloud! spare not! Rise in the night-watches! pour out your heart like water before the Lord, for He will answer thee when He hath heard the voice of thy crying; He will hearken to thy supplication and give thee the desire of thy heart.

3. Yet, again, another matter. May it not be, my dear hearers, that the reason why God contends with you and does not give you peace is, because you are harbouring some one sin? Now, I will not say what it is; I have known a man solemnly under conviction of sin, but the company which he kept on market-day was of such a caste, that until he was separated entirely from his companions, it was not possible he should have peace. I do not know what your peculiar besetting sin may be. It may be a love for frivolity; it may be the desire to associate with those who amuse you; it may be worse. But remember, Christ and thy soul will never be *one* till thou and thy sins are *two*. Thy desires and longings must make a clean sweep of the devil and all his crew, or else Christ will not come and dwell with thee. "Well," says one, "but I cannot be perfect." No, but you cannot find peace till you desire to be. Wherever you harbour a sin, there you harbour misery. One sin wilfully indulged in, and not forsaken by true repentance, will destroy the soul. Sins given up are like goods cast out at sea by the mariners in days of storm; they lighten the ship, and the ship will never float till you have thrown all your sins overboard. There is no hope whatever for you till you can truly say,

> "Whate'er consists not with Thy love,
> O help me to resign."

> "The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from its throne,
> And worship only Thee."

4. Then drawing near to a conclusion let me have your most solemn attention while I give one more hint as to the reason why you have not yet found peace. My dear hearers, perhaps it is because you do not thoroughly understand the plan of salvation. I do feel that all ministers,—and here perhaps, I am as great a sinner as any other, and I condemn myself while I chastise others—we all of us do in some way or other, I fear, help to dim the lustre of God's grace, as manifested in the cross of Christ. Often am I afraid lest I should prefer Calvinism to Calvary, lest I should put the sinner's sense of need like a quickset hedge round the cross, and keep the poor sinner from getting as near as he would to the bleeding Lamb of God. Ah, my dear hearers, remember if you would be saved, your salvation comes wholly and entirely from Jesus Christ, the dying Son of God. View Him yonder, sinner, sweating in the garden! See the red drops of blood as they fall from that dear face! Oh, see Him sinner, see Him in Pilate's hall. View the streams of gore as they gush from those lacerated shoulders. See Him, sinner, see Him on His cross! View that head still marked with the wounds with which the thorns pierced His temples! Oh, view that face emaciated and marred! See the spittle still hanging there—the spittle of cruel mockers! See the eyes floating in tears with languid pity! Look, too, at those hands, and view them as they stream like founts of blood! Oh, stand and listen

while He cries, "*Lama Sabacthani!*" Sinner, thy life is in Him that died; thy healing is in yonder wounds; thy salvation is in His destruction. "Oh," says one, "but I cannot believe." Ah, brother, that was once my mournful cry. But I will tell you how I came to believe. Once upon a time, I was trying to make myself believe, and a voice whispered, "Vain man, vain man, if thou wouldst believe, come and see!" Then the Holy Spirit led me by the hand to a solitary place. And while I stood there, suddenly there appeared before me One upon His cross. I looked up, I had then no faith. I saw His eyes suffused with tears, and the blood still flowing; I saw His enemies about Him hunting Him to His grave; I marked His miseries unutterable; I heard the groaning which cannot be described; and as I looked up, He opened His eyes and said to me, "The Son of man is come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost." I clapped my hands, and I said, "Jesus, I do believe, I must believe what Thou hast said. I could not believe before, but the sight of Thee has breathed faith into my soul. I dare not doubt—it were treason, it were high treason to doubt Thy power to save." Dissolved by His agonies, I fell on the ground, and embraced His feet, and when I fell, my sin fell also! And I rejoiced in love divine, that blots out sin and saves from death.

Oh my friend, you will never get faith by trying to make yourself have it. Faith is the gift of Christ; go and find it in His veins. There is a secret spot where faith is treasured up; it is in the heart of Christ; go and catch it sinner as it flows therefrom. Go to your chamber, and sit down and picture Christ in holy vision, dying on the tree, and as your eye sees, your heart shall melt, your soul shall believe, and you shall rise from your knees and cry, "I know whom I may believe, and I am persuaded He is able to save that which I have committed to Him until that day."

And now, may the love of Christ Jesus, and the grace of His Father, and the fellowship of His Spirit, be with you for ever and ever. Amen and Amen.

EVERYWHERE AND YET FORGOTTEN

"Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."—Job xii. 9, 10.

THESE verses occur in Job's answer to Zophar the Naamathite. Job had his failings, but certainly he appears less faulty in this dialogue than those three men who sought to reprove him and convict him of error. Zophar the Naamathite had the very highest opinion of his own personal wisdom. He addressed Job as though he had been an inferior and in the eleventh chapter he used language which though extremely beautiful, must have been very grating upon the ear of such a sufferer as Job; for it is a lecture full of high-flown language, abounding in poetry and noble images, but containing little solid sense, and less sympathy. Job being exceedingly irritated both with the style and with the matter of Zophar's speech, begins at once to pluck off his plumes and to pull to pieces his fine language. In biting irony Job cries from his dunghill:—"No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you; yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" Ye have put into flowery language things which an ordinary observer might discover. Ye have pointed to the heaven above, and to the depth beneath, to prove a truth which the creeping insect of the earth could tell you, and which the fishes of the sea might proclaim. "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?"

There is much temper here, but there is very much also of good common-sense. I would we had another Job, to chastise the high-sounding language of modern theologians. There are starting up in our midst men, who if they are not heretics in doctrine, are aliens in speech. They are men described by the old preachers, who say, "Mark!" and there is nothing to mark, and who shout, "Observe!" and there is nothing to observe, except the want of everything that is worth observing. We know ministers who cannot speak in the common language of mankind, but must needs adopt the jargon of Carlyle, who sets language on its head, and puts the last word first. These men must needs make the English language a slave to the German—the glorious grand old Saxon must truckle to their heresies and conceal the depths of their falsehoods. I pray God the time may come when some man may unmask them, when all these wind-bags may be rent, and all these bladders may be pricked; when if teachers have anything to tell us they will deliver themselves so that all can understand. If they cannot use plain language let their tongues go to school till they have learned it. There is something so enticing and yet so flimsy in the modern theological school, that I feel constrained to warn you constantly against it. Its mystery is absurdity, and its depth is pompous ignorance. There is no theology in it; it is a futile device to conceal the want of theological knowledge. A man with an education that may be complete in every department except that in which he should excel, stands up and would teach Christians that all they have learned at the feet of Paul has been a mistake; that a new theology has been discovered; that the old phrases which we have used are out of date, the old creeds broken up. Well, what shall we do to this wiseacre and his fellow sages? Serve them, wherever you meet them or their disciples, as Job did Zophar: laugh at them, dash their language to pieces, and remind them that the best things they tell us are only what the fishes of the sea, or the fowls of the air, knew before them, and that their grandest discoveries are but platitudes which every child has known before, or else they are heresies that ought to be scouted from the earth.

The doctrine upon which Job spoke was this: he wished to show that the fact of the presence of God in all things was so clearly discernible, that men need not borrow the eagle's wing to mount to heaven, nor need they enter into the bowels of the leviathan to find a chariot wherein to enter the depths of the sea. "No," said he, "no; the present Deity the beasts proclaim." The actual existence and the constant working of the Eternal God is sung by the very fowls of heaven, and the mute fishes of the sea leap up, and in their joyous leapings seem to say, "The sea is His, and He made it." This doctrine I wish to bring out this morning; or, rather, thus would I speak of it. First, *the present hand of God everywhere in the universe;* secondly, *our present and complete dependence upon that hand of God;* and then let us *learn some useful lessons from the whole subject of Divine providence.*

I. The first doctrine is THE PRESENT HAND OF GOD.

1. That there is a God you need not that I should prove: that God is here, and there, and everywhere, you also firmly believe. But, alas! it is one thing to believe this truth, and quite another thing to hold it in perpetual remembrance. We may write it down far more easily upon the tables of our creed than upon the tablets of our memory. In fact, *this is one of the doctrines which all men are constantly forgetting;* and even the righteous may often check themselves because they begin to degenerate into the fools who say in their hearts "There is no God here." Strange is it that the name of the Lord should be written everywhere so clearly that even the blind might see it; and yet man is so doubly dark that he does not observe his God even where God is most manifest and visible. Methinks my brethren, this forgetfulness of God is growing upon this perverse generation. Time was, in the old puritanic days, when every shower of rain was seen to come from heaven, when every ray of sunshine was blessed, and God was thanked for having given fair weather to ingather the fruits of the harvest. Then, men talked of God as doing everything. But in our days where is our God? We have the laws of matter. Alas! alas! that names with little meaning should have destroyed our memory of the Eternal One. We talk now of phenomena, and of the chain of events, as if all things happened by machinery; as if the world were a huge clock which had been wound up in eternity, and continued to work without a present God. Nay, not only our philosophers, but even our poets rant in the same way. They sing of the works of Nature. But who is that fair goddess, Nature? Is she a heathen deity, or what? Do we not act as if we were ashamed of our God, or as if His name had become obsolete? Go abroad wherever you may, you hear but little said concerning Him who made the heavens, and who formed the earth and the sea; but everything is nature, and the laws of motion and of matter. And do not Christians often use words which would lead you to suppose that they believed in the old goddess, Luck, or rested in that equally false deity, Fortune, or trembled before the demon of Misfortune? Oh for the day when God shall be seen, and little else beside! Better, my brethren, that philosophical discoveries were lost, than that God should be concealed behind them. Better that our poets had ceased to write, and that all their flaming words were buried with their ashes, than that they should serve as a cloud before the face of the Eternal Creator. We must go back again to the remembrance of our God, and especially must the true believer make the worldling feel that the Christian has a God with him, a God about him, and a God within him, one who is his constant companion and his friend. So act, my brethren, that men may be compelled to say of you, "That man has a God whom he observes in all the events of his family, ascribing to His divine hand every sickness that falls upon his child, and every loss that occurs to him in his business." My brethren, it is a doleful truth that there is nothing more easy to forget than the grand doctrine that God is everywhere at work in the midst of us all.

2. Now, let me proceed to say, that though this is a truth so frequently forgotten, it is *a fact of universal force.* God worketh ever and everywhere. There is no *place* where God is not. You may traverse the silent valleys where the rocks enclose you on either side, till you can see but a strip of the blue sky; you may be the only traveller that has passed through that glen; the bird may start up affrighted, and the moss may tremble beneath the first tread of man; but God was there of old, upholding yon rocky barriers, filling the flowercups with their perfume, and refreshing the lonely pines with the breath of His mouth. Or, descend if you will into the lowest depths of the sea, where undisturbed the water sleeps, and the very sand is motionless in eternal quiet, but the footsteps of the Lord are there; reigning within the silent palace of the sea. You may borrow the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, but God is there. Mount to the highest heaven or dive into the deepest hell, and God is in both: hymned in everlasting song, or howled in eternal tortures. Everywhere, and in every place, God dwells and is manifestly at work.

And not merely, my friends, in every place, but in every *time* the Lord is present. From the beginning of the year even to the end thereof, there is God. His eyes never sleep, His hand never rests. In the silent watches of midnight when the city sleeps, God is the watchman; and when the sun wakes up and draws aside the curtains of the night the Lord is abroad before him, on the waters and on the snow-white summits of the mountains; and when again high noon is gained, and all the world is busy with its toil and God forgotten, He is there amid the throng of men as well as in the desert's wilds. Every place feels *His* footstep, and every time trembles at His presence. From everlasting to everlasting, O God, Thou art sensibly felt in every passing moment. The pulsings of the eternal sea of time are caused by Thee, and there never is an instant when Thou hast fled and left us to ourselves.

And as in every place and every time, so in every *event* there is God Is the earth shaken by inward convulsions? It is God that heaves the mountains to and fro. Or, do the valleys laugh in the sunshine, and do the rejoicing husbandmen carry home their harvests? God is there right manifest in the lavish bounty of His hand. The greatest political disasters are predestinated, guided, and over-ruled by God. When an Attila scourges the earth and reddens her soil with blood, his steps are ordered, arranged and fore-ordained, as much as the flight of the eternal angel who shall blow the trumpet of the gospel and proclaim the year of jubilee. There is no event, however base and vile, however grand and good, which is not within the management of the dread

Supreme. His dominion hath no limit. Even the dark gulf of evil is spanned by the bridge of His wisdom. Journey onward till you seem to go where goodness is not found and grace is all eclipsed; in the thick darkness there He dwells. He makes the clouds His chariot and yokes the whirlwinds to His car. Be of good cheer, beloved, in every event you may behold your God. If invasion should ravage this fair island, if tyrants should set their foot on the neck of your liberties, if the streets should run with blood, God were even there supreme; His people still secure. And if it be so, that God is in every event, permit me to remind you that God is where there is *no event*. When there is a lull upon the waters and all is stagnant, when political affairs are quiet, when in the lesser world of your own house and your own soul there is a dead calm, perhaps the woeful prelude of a tempest, God is there. Great God, Thou standest in the midst of the silent desert, where not even the hum of the bee disturbs the dread solemnity of stillness! Thou art far down in the cleft of the rock where creature could not live! Nay, in the bowels of the solid adamant Thou hast Thy palace, and beneath the surging of the ever-tossing sea Thou hast a tabernacle. In the unknown ravine, the untraversed gorge, the Lord Jehovah hath His dwelling-place. He keeps yon rocks from tottering to their fall. He swells those rivers till they roll along. Let Him but remove His hand, and earth's pillars totter to their fall, creation reels, and the universe expires. As dies the spark struck from the steel, so dies creation if God ceases to be present there. Oh, learn then evermore, that not only in His doings but in His restings, not only in His actings but in His standing still, God is most manifest to you if you will but see Him, if your eyes anointed with heavenly eye-salve are but open to behold your Father and your King. This, I may well say, is a truth which though much forgotten is of universal force

3. Let me proceed a little farther and remind you that this is *a truth worthy of perpetual remembrance*. Do not look at it as a mere speculation. I beseech you do not think of a present God as a fact in which you have no interest. There is scarcely a truth in the compass of revelation which is more instructive, profitable, and consoling to the people of God than this;—a present God in everything. Come, let me show you how worthy a remembrance it is. You have many *mercies*; your God is in them all. Doth not that thought sweeten the bread you eat? Will it not give a relish to the water that you drink? The air you breathe, the clothes that are on your back, God is in each of them. Go to your home, where your best pleasures dwell, your own sweet home, be it never so homely, and when you look on your mercies say, "I see my gracious God here." Cast your eye upon the prattlers that climb your knee, and remember that they are a heritage from the Lord. Look at her who is the partner of your bosom, and see God's love and kindness in so good a gift. Look on all the prosperity that attends your business; look on your growing crops and your verdant fields, and see God in every mercy you receive. I would not have the worldling's wealth, for it is a wealth that came not from his God; at least so far as he is concerned it came not from a father's hand. But oh, to have benefits every one of which smells of the treasury out of which it came; to look on your gold and on your silver, nay on your very pence, and see the impress of your God stamped there more clearly than the image of Cæsar's own self—to sit down to your table and eat and drink, and feel that every meal is a sacrament, that every robe you wear is a vestment sent from heaven, that in all these mercies there is the hand of a covenant, promise-keeping God—why it will make you live a noble life. It was thought by the old heathens to be the grandest thing they could say of a man that he should one day eat at the tables of the gods. My brethren, we eat at these tables every day. At the table of my God I feast, and from His cup I drink. I have nothing which I have not received from Him; the Lord hath given me all that I have.

But if it be very sweet to see God in our mercies, it is most consoling to discern Him in all our *trials*. Say not these are evil times. No times are evil where God is, for His presence scatters all that is ill. Say not that you dwell in an evil place; there is no evil place to the man who dwells with God. Think not that evil circumstances have happened unto you; they seem to be big with evil, but those clouds shall break in blessings on your head. Oh, if you can but look at your troubles as sent from God, it will take the sharpness from them, and turn them from wasps that sting into bees that gather honey. Say now when your family is sick, "The Lord hath placed His hand upon my wife and on my children"; and when your treasure vanishes away, say, "The Lord hath put His hands into my coffers and emptied them"; and when the ship is wrecked, say, "The Lord hath cast my vessel on the rocks"; and when the corn is spoiled and the harvest is not gathered say, "The Lord hath sent the rain from heaven. He hath done it." Join with Job the author of our text, and exclaim, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." Regard not the second causes but the first cause, not the trying creature but the supporting Creator.

If it be pleasant to see God in our trials, I add it is very seasonable to remember Him in our *dangers*. To be at sea when every timber creaks in the ship and when the mast is strained, and then to feel "He holds the waves in the hollow of His hand"; to stand in places where the danger is threatening and terrific, and then to say, "My Father's shield is over me"; to walk through the midst of plague and pestilence, through the valleys that are steaming with miasma and malaria, and to feel that God holds our breath, and that all the arrows that Death ever stored within his quiver can never find a place in our heart until Jehovah bids them. Oh, these things are sweet and pleasant! A man is never in danger when he feels this. At God's command, through Death's dominions and through Hell's domains, a man might march securely trusting in the Voice which cries, "Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God."

A present God! My brethren, I cannot suggest a theme that may make you more full of courage in times of danger and trouble. I think I need not enlarge upon this point further than to add, you will find it exceedingly helpful and consoling if you can, discover God in your *trifles*. Our life is made up of trifles, and if we had a God only for the great things and not for the little things, we should be miserable indeed. If we had a God of the temple and not a God of the tents of Jacob, where were we? But, blessed be our heavenly Father, He that wings an

angel, guides a sparrow; He that rolls a world along, moulds a tear and marks its orbit when it trickles from its source. There is a God in the motion of a grain of dust blown by the summer's wind, as much as in the revolutions of the stupendous planet. There is a God in the sparkling of a fire-fly, as truly as in the flaming comet. Carry home, I beseech you, to your houses the thought that God is *there*, at your table, in your bed-chamber, in your workroom, and at your counter. Recognise the doing and being of God in every little thing. Think for a moment, and you will find that there are many promises of Scripture giving the sweetest consolation in trivial matters. "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands." Why? Lest thou fall from a precipice? Lest thou dash thyself from a pinnacle? No, "*Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*" A little danger, but a great providence to ward us from it. And what saith the Scripture also? Doth it say, "The very days of your life are numbered?" It saith not so, though that were true; but "the very *hairs of your head* are all numbered." And what saith the Scripture, yet again? Doth it say, "The Lord knoweth the eagles, and not an eagle falleth to the ground without your Father?" No; but, "are not two *sparrows* sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." A great God in little things. I am sure it will spare you a world of vexation if you will but remember this, for it is hence our vexations come. We often get into a bad temper about a trifle, when a great trial does not agitate us. We are angry because we have scalded ourselves with a little water or have lost a button from our clothes, and yet the greatest calamity can scarcely disturb us. You smile, because it is true with all of you. Job himself, who said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away," might have grown angry, because of some rough edge in his potsherd. Take care that you see God in little things, that your mind may be always calm and composed, and that you be not foolish enough to suffer a trifle to overcome a saint of God.

II. Now, my dear friends, having thus brought forward the doctrine of a God present everywhere, let me remind you of the second head—OUR ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE UPON A PRESENT GOD AT THIS VERY MOMENT. We are absolutely dependent upon the will and pleasure of God for our life, our comforts, our means to enjoy our comforts, and especially for all spiritual blessings.

First, then, *our life is entirely dependent upon God.* One sees strange sights in journeying, scenes which will never be erased from the memory. It was but a few days ago, just under a tremendous rock, I saw a vast mass of broken stones and earth tossed about in wild confusion and raised in huge hillocks. My driver said to me, "That is the grave of a village." Some years ago, there lived upon that spot a joyful and happy people. They went forth to their daily work, they ate, they drank, as men do to this day. One time they saw a great crack in the mountain that hung overhead; they heard alarming noises; but they had heard such sounds before, and the old men said, "There might be something coming, but they did not know." On a sudden, however, without further notice, the whole side of the hill was in motion, and ere the villager could escape from his hut, the village was buried beneath the fallen rocks. And there it lies; and neither bone of man, nor piece of the habitation of man has ever been discovered in the wreck; so thoroughly was everything crushed and buried, that nothing by the most diligent search could ever be discovered. There are many villages standing in a like position at this day. I passed another spot, where there was a shelving mountain with its layers slanting towards the valley. A town which had been built at the foot had been entirely covered, and a lake filled up by one tremendous slide from the top of the hill. Yet, there stand new houses still, and men venture to live among the graves of their sires. We are apt to say, "How these people ought to look up every morning and say, 'O Lord, spare this village.'" Standing there where they might be crushed in a moment, where the slightest motion of the earth within would bring down the hill upon them, they ought to lift up their hearts tlo the Preserving One, and say, "Oh Thou Keeper of Israel, keep us both day and night." Ah, but my friends, you and I are in the same position. Though no beetling crags overhang our homesteads, though no mountain threatens to leap upon our city, yet are there a thousand gates to death. There are other agencies beside these, which can hurry mortals to their tombs. You are sitting to-day as near to the jaws of death, as those villagers who are dwelling there. Oh that you felt it! One breath choked up, and you are dead. Perhaps your life is a thousand times in danger every moment. As many times as there are ebbings and flowings of the blood, as many times as there are breathings from the lungs, so many times does your life hang in such jeopardy that it only needs your God to will it, and you fall dead in your seat, and are carried out a pale lifeless corpse. There are parts of the mountain passes of the Alps of such danger to the traveller, that when you traverse them in winter, the muleteers muffle the bells of their beasts, lest the faintest sound should bring down an avalanche of snow, and sweep you into the bottomless precipice beneath. *Then*, one would think, the traveller must feel that he is in God's hand. Aye, but you are in the same position now, though you see it not. Open but the eyes of your spirit, and you may see the avalanche overhanging you to-day, and the rock trembling to its fall at this very moment. Only let your soul behold the latent lightnings that God conceals within His hand, and you may soon see that to crush a gnat with your finger is not so easy for you, as for God to take away your life now, or whensoever He pleases.

As it is with our life, my brethren, so is it with the *comforts of life.* What would life be without its comforts! much more, what would it be without its necessaries? And yet how absolutely dependent are we upon God for the bread which is the staff of life! I never felt more truly the dependence of man upon his God than I did last Friday week. At the foot of the Alpine pass of the Splugen, I saw in the distance, the whole road black, as if it had been spread over with heaps of black earth. As we neared it, we discovered it was a mass of locusts in full march,—tens of thousands of myriads of them. As we drew nearer they divided as regularly as if they had been an army, and made room for the carriage. No sooner was it passed than the ranks were filled up again, and they went on in their devouring march. On we went for several miles, and there was nothing to be seen except these creatures, literally covering the ground here and there in thick

layers like a shower of black snow. Then I realised the language of the prophet:—"Before them was like Eden; behind them was a desert." They had eaten up every green blade. There stood the Indian corn with just the dry stems, but every green particle was gone. In the front of their march you saw the vines beginning to ripen, and the fields of grain hastening to perfection. There stood the poor cottager at his door; the wheat that he had planted, and the vines that he had tended, must all be eaten and devoured before his own eyes. The pastures were literally alive with these fiery creatures. When they first entered the field there was green pasture for the cows of the poor cottagers; let them stop there an hour, and you might take up the dust by handfuls, and nothing left besides. "Ah!" said my guide, "it is a sad thing for these poor people: in a month's time those creatures will be as big and as long as my finger, and then they will eat up the trees—the mulberry trees with which the poor men feed their silkworms, and which furnish them with a little wealth; they will devour every green thing until there is nothing left but the bare dry stems." In armies countless as the sands of the sea, and fierce to look upon, well described by the prophet Joel, in his terrible picture of them, as "a great army of the Lord." Ah, I thought within myself, if God can thus sweep this valley and make a waste of it with these little creatures, what a mercy it is that He is a kind and gracious God, or else He might let loose the like on all the people of the earth, and then nothing would stare us in the face but famine, despair, and death. Perhaps you say to me. "Ah! but we do not expect the locusts here; we shall gather our harvest joyously." Speak not too quickly. God has been teaching us during the last two months our absolute and entire dependence upon Him. Let this rain continue but a little longer, let it continue till the appointed weeks of harvest shall come, and where are our people then? You may open your shops, ye citizens of London, and you may imagine that the harvest in the country will little affect you; but famine stares you in the face unless God withdraws the clouds and bids the sun shine down upon us. The days shall come which we have heard our fathers speak of, when the bread was such that it could not be eaten; when it was not hard enough for one to hold in his hand; when you had a crust without, and then within it was a mass of jelly, wheat swimming in water, and not capable of being eaten by any except those pinched by hunger. The like must inevitably come unless God withdraw those clouds. Let the rain continue much longer, and there will scarcely be a harvest, nothing for men to feed upon. Oh, my dear friends, we never know from year to year how dependent, how absolutely dependent we are upon God. Doth not the corn spring out of the land? and doth not every man, from the king to the peasant, live on bread? And if that staff fail, must not all totter to the ground with leanness on our bones and paleness on our face? Ye are for that bread, and for that nourishment, and for all you have, as absolutely dependent upon God as a prisoner in his dungeon is dependent upon his keeper for his daily bread and water. Oh that I could make you feel this, and realise the force of the fact!

Again, I said we were not simply dependent upon God for the comforts, but for *the power to enjoy the comforts*. It is an evil which we have seen under the sun—a man who had wealth, and riches, and plenty, but who had not power to eat thereof. I have seen a man hungry and full of appetite, but no bread to eat; but I have seen a sight perhaps more sad, a man with food of the most luxurious kind, to whom taste seemed denied, to whom every mouthful was a thing of detestation. The Lord has but in His judgment to smite any of us with only nervousness—that nervousness at which the strong may laugh, but which makes the weak tremble, and everything will become dark before you. He has but to affect some portion of your body, and you shall see no brightness in the sun; the very fields shall lose their verdure before you; the most happy event shall only be a source of deeper gloom; you shall look on everything through a dark glass, and see nothing but darkness and despair. He has but to touch you with sickness, and motion may be misery, and even to lie upon a bed may be a repetition of tortures as you toss from side to side. Worse still, the Lord hath but to put His finger on your brain, and you become a raving lunatic, or what may seem better, but more despicable, a drivelling idiot. Oh, how little then hath He to do to overturn your all, to pull down that mighty castle of your joys, and darken the windows of your hope. You are, again, for life, for necessaries, for comforts, as absolutely in the hand of God as the clay upon the wheel is in the hand of the potter. You may rebel, but your rebellion is but the writhing of a worm. You may murmur, but your murmurs cannot affect Him. You may ask your comrades to join in league with you against the Almighty God, but His purpose will stand fast, and you must submit. Bound in the iron chains of destiny, you must go the way He bids you, and you must suffer or you must rejoice at His beck and will. Tremble, O man, tremble before God, for never was creature in the hand of creature, as creature is in the hand of Creator.

Let me briefly remark, that if this be true concerning temporals, how doubly true is it with regard to *spiritual things*. There is no Christian grace which has in it a particle of self-existence. Faith, love, courage, are all sweet flowers, but their roots are in God. There may be streams of gratitude in your heart, but the springs thereof are in Him. Your soul may be devoted and consecrated, but the lock of your devotion will be shorn off, as was the hair of Samson, unless the Eternal God preserves it. If you and I shall endure to the end, if we shall pass through the valley of death with calmness, if we shall stand before the throne of God with confidence, if we shall enter into bliss with joy, all these things must come of God. For let Him lock up the treasury of His grace, or dry up the channel of His love, the noblest Christian that breathes must become the vilest of reprobates, and he who has best served his God must become the most abject minion of hell. Oh, learn that you are absolutely dependent upon God. He can leave you, and where are you? He can help you, and you shall stand securely.

So is it with the sinner; he is in God's hand to save him or to destroy him. He can give him up, like Pharaoh, to hardness of heart, or He can melt his heart and bow his stubborn will. He can throw the reins upon his neck, and say, "Let him alone, Ephraim is given unto idols"; or He can make him willing in the day of His power, create in him a new heart and a right spirit, and save him from the wrath to come. O God, Thou art over all and Thou

art all. Man is nothing before Thee. Thou hast Thy will. Thou doest as Thou pleasest among the angels in heaven, and among the inhabitants of this lower world. "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

III. I come to my third and last point, namely, THE LESSONS FROM THIS SUBJECT. First, a few lessons to the *saint*, and then to the *sinner*.

To the *saint* first. Child of God, see where thou art. Thou, even thou, art completely in the hand of thy God. Thy life, thy death, thy prosperity in this world, thy growth in grace, thy peace, all things rest upon His sovereign will. Nothing can harm thee, unless He bids it. Nothing can cheer thee, unless He commands it. Thou resteth not in thine own hand. Be thy will never so headstrong, be thy mind never so stubborn, either thou must yield cheerfully, or else thou must bend unwillingly. Thou art absolutely and entirely, and in every respect placed at the will and disposal of Him who is thy God. And now, child of God, let me ask thee this question. Art thou grieved because of this? Does this doctrine trouble thee? Let God lay aside His sceptre; say, art thou prepared to wield it! Hadst thou rather have followed thine own will than be at God's disposal? Wouldst thou rather that He should be in everything, and that He should do as He wills, or that it should be left to thee? Oh! I see ye, ye countless armies of God; I see ye bow your knees at once, and cry, "O Lord, we bless Thee that it is not so; we praise Thee that Thou hast left nothing to our disposal, but that Thou everywhere hast sway." This is not the subject of groaning but of mirth and joy to us. We set up our banners with this watch-word, "The Lord reigneth." We go on our journey with this as our constant cordial, "God is here." With this as our shield, we lift up our arm against calamity. With this as our sword, we rush into the thick of the battle against sin. The Lord reigneth—"Let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof." "Great God, if I could have it otherwise I would not. If I could reverse Thy decision and if I could erase the lines of trial and write in the stead thereof the gilded lines of joy, I could not and I would not do it. If the book of my destiny were in my power to-day, I neither would erase a word nor insert a syllable. Be it unto me even as Thou wilt; not my will but Thine be done." It is easy to say this, but oh, how hard to feel it when it comes to the trial hour. When darkness fills the sky, when the coffin lies in the silent chamber, and the precious one is sleeping in the arms of death, when the tide has swept away all we have, when beggary stares us in the face, when slander follows us at the back, still to say, "Jehovah, *Thy* tempests are better than *my* sunshine, and the storm which Thou hast brewed is better to see than the brightest days if I had made them for myself." Take care, child of God, that thou holdest fast and firm this thy confidence, which shall have great recompense of reward.

But mind one other thing, O heir of heaven. Let your conversation be such as becometh this doctrine. Speak of what thou wilt do, and of what will happen, always in respect to the fact, that man proposes, but God disposes. When thou hearest thy enemy vow some deadly thing against thee, smile, because thy enemy is not God. And when thou proposest to thyself something which seems to thee good and pleasant, weep over thy own folly if thou art too confident, for thou art not God. None but God can promise so as to cheer a sensible mind. None but God can threaten so as to alarm a Christian mind. The threatenings and promises of God are true, but neither the threatenings of man nor his promises are worth the words in which they are uttered. Oh, my dear Christian brethren, tried as some of you are in various and in arduous ways, I wish I could burn this truth into your souls. But God the Holy Spirit must do it. I pray you stand to it that there is God in everything, and I am sure as the result of it you will be driven to more constant and earnest prayer. For if there be God in everything, take everything to God. If God has done thee ill, take the ill to God and He will set it right. This very season of the year suggests prayer. Prayer can reverse the winds and stay the clouds, and let the infidel world see it is so. In the days of that eminent Scotch minister, Robert Blair, there had been for a long time a terrible rain, until at the time of harvest the wheat had grown an inch long after it had ripened. The people met together for prayer, and that day it rained more furiously than it had done before. Yet they separated in the firm belief that God had heard their prayer. Mr. Blair said to the assembly that he was sure, though God might seem as if He mocked them, yet He was a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God still. That night the clouds were scattered and driven away, and the harvest was ingathered. Some of the wheat had been spoiled, but most of it was housed in safety. Trust thy God, then. Tempt Him not by murmuring; but prove Him, not as the children of Israel did, but prove Him as Malachi exhorts us, and see if He will not pour out blessings and make the earth rejoice with the harvest. At any rate, be not as they that tremble in the day of calamity. Stand still, ye children of God. Ye wear an armour that no weapon of man can pierce; ye dwell within a city, the bulwarks of which are impregnable. Let no fear invade you. Be strong and of good courage, your God is with you. He is better than all your fears; nay, He shall exceed all your hopes. Set up your banners and shout aloud, and rejoice in Him. God is with you, and the Lord Jehovah reigneth.

In conclusion, my last word is to the *sinner*. You, who have not been converted, and have no part or lot in present salvation, to you I say this much: Man, man, you are in the hand of God. Whether you shall live to reach your home to-day or not, depends absolutely upon His will. Rich though you be, the wealth you possess can take to itself wings and fly away at His will. He can fill your body with pains so terrible that you shall long for death itself to escape from them. He can make visions flit before your eyes, both when you sleep and when you wake, that shall so scare you that you would prefer the company of the devils in hell to solitude. God can make you such a hell to your own self, that you would seek either knife or poison to escape from your own thoughts. And that He can do, and you cannot escape. No wings can bear you above His dominion. No depth can hide you from His sway. But now what is the path of wisdom? Is it wise to curse God, in whose hand your breath is? Is it a rational thing to treat with indifference Him upon whom you depend for time and for eternity? Your own self-interest would dictate a wiser course. Dash not your head against the bosses of His buckler. Be not mad enough to run upon His glittering spear. What does wisdom say to you if you will but listen? It cries, "Be reconciled to God." You cannot resist

Him effectually; throw down your weapons and yield. And what doth the Scripture say to you? It saith, "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart." What saith the Church unto you? It saith, "Christ hath received us: the Bride saith come." What saith Christ unto you? "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake." "Look unto Me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth." "Bow the knee and kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little." O, Spirit of God, speak to the madmen and make them sane. Speak to the men that fight against God, and bid them tremble at Him, and yield, and seek His favour. O sinner, remember what He has said, "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Hear ye, in conclusion, that sweet word of His: "Whosoever will, let him come. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.'

FAITH'S ULTIMATUM

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."—Job xiii. 15.

THIS is one of the supreme sayings of Scripture. It rises, like an alpine summit, clear above all ordinary heights of speech, it pierces the clouds, and glistens in the light of God. If I were required to quote a selection of the sublimest utterances of the human mind, I should mention this among the first: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Methinks I might almost say to the man who thus spoke what our Lord said to Simon Peter when he had declared Him to be the Son of the Highest: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee." Such tenacious holding, such immovable confidence, such unstaggering reliance are not products of mere nature, but rare flowers of rich almighty grace. The text contains a precious jewel of grace, fitly set in the purest gold of choice speech; happy is the man upon whose arm it can be worn as an ensign in the day of battle.

It is well worthy of observation that in these words Job answered both the accusations of Satan and the charges of his friends. Though I do not know that Job was aware that the devil had said, "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not set a hedge about him and all that he hath?" yet he answered that base suggestion in the ablest possible manner, for he did in effect say, "Though God should pull down my hedge, and lay me bare as the wilderness itself, yet will I cling to Him in firmest faith." The arch-fiend has also dared to say that Job had held out under his first trials because they were not sufficiently personal; "skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth Thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." In the brave words before us Job most effectually silences that slander by, in effect, saying, "Though my trial be no longer the slaying of my children, but of myself, yet will I trust in Him." He thus in one sentence replies to the two slanders of Satan; thus unconsciously doth truth overthrow her enemies, defeating the secret malice of falsehood by the simplicity of sincerity. Job's friends also had insinuated that he was a hypocrite. They inquired of him "Who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" They thought themselves quite safe in inferring that Job must have been a deceiver, or he would not have been so specially punished. To this accusation Job's grand declaration of his unstaggering faith was the best answer possible, for none but a sincere soul could thus speak. Will a hypocrite trust in God when He slays him? Will a deceiver cling to God when He is smiting him? Assuredly not. Thus were the three miserable comforters answered if they had been wise enough to see it.

Our text exhibits a child of God under the severest pressure, and shows us the difference between him and a man of the world. A man of the world under the same conditions as Job would have been driven to despair, and in that desperation would have become morosely sullen, or defiantly rebellious! Here you see what in a child of God takes the place of desperation. When others despair he trusts in God. When he has nowhere to look he turns to his heavenly Father; and when for a time, even in looking to God, he meets with no conscious comfort, he waits in the patience of hope, calmly expecting aid, and resolving that even if it does not come he will cling to God with all the energy of his soul. Here all the man's courage comes to the front, not, as in the case of the ungodly, obstinately to rebel, but bravely to confide. The child of God is courageous, for he knows how to trust. His heart says, "Aye Lord, it is bad with me now, and it is growing worse, but should the worst come to the worst, still will I cling to Thee, and never let Thee go." In what better way can the believer reveal his loyalty to his Lord? He evidently follows his Master, not in fair weather only, but in the foulest and roughest ways. He loves his Lord, not only when He smiles upon him, but when He frowns. His love is not purchased by the largesses of his Lord's golden hand, for it is not destroyed by the smitings of His heavy rod. Though my Lord put on His sternest looks, though from fierce looks He should go to cutting words, and though from terrible words He should proceed to cruel blows, which seem to beat the very life out of my soul, yea, though He take down the sword and threaten to execute me therewith, yet is my heart steadfastly set upon one resolve, namely, to bear witness that He is infinitely good and just. I have not a word to say against Him, nor a thought to think against Him, much less would I wander from Him; but still, though He slay me, I would trust in Him.

What is my text but an Old Testament version of the New Testament, "Quis separabit?"—Who shall separate? Job does but anticipate Paul's question. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution,

or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Was not the same Spirit in both Job and Paul? Is He also in us? If so, we are men indeed, and our speech is with power, and to us this declaration is no idle boast, no foolish bravado, though it would be ridiculous, indeed, if there were not a gracious heart behind it to make it good. It is the conquering shout of an all-surrendering faith, which gives up all but God. I want that we may all have its spirit this morning, that whether we suffer Job's trial or not, we may at any rate have Job's close adherence to the Lord, His faithful confidence in the Most High.

There are three things in the text: *a terrible supposition*—"though He slay me"; *a noble resolution*, "yet will I trust in Him"; and, thirdly, *a secret appropriateness*. This last will require a little looking into, but I hope to make it clear that there is a great appropriateness in our trusting while God is slaying us—the two things go well together, though it may not so appear.

I. First, then, here is A TERRIBLE SUPPOSITION—"though He slay me." The Lord is here set forth, as a slayer of His trusting servant. An idea full of terror. *It is a supposition which in some senses cannot be tolerated for a minute*—"Though He slay me." Here I am, His dear child, one whom He has loved from before the foundation of the world, one for whom He laid down His life upon the cross, one of whom He has said, "I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." How can He slay me? If He do so, it can only be in a minor sense: as to my best and truest life, it must be safe, for He is its author and guardian, and cannot be its destroyer. Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Could she suffer a child of hers to die while she had power to keep it alive? Would she lay violent hands upon the child of her love and destroy it? God forbid. Neither will God destroy or suffer to be destroyed, any one of His own dear children. Jesus has solemnly said—"I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." The fairest children of the earth will die, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and all flesh is as decaying grass; but the feeblest child of God will live for ever, for the life of God in every degree of it is immortality. Time will put out the sun, the lamp of the moon will grow dim in ages yet to come, but neither time nor age shall quench a solitary spark of heaven-born grace and light. Though faith be but as a grain of mustard seed, it is essentially a living thing, and it is not conceivable that God Himself should slay that which is quickened with His life. Though it be imperceptible sometimes even to the possessor of it, and though it should raise many painful questions as to whether it be there at all, yet if it be there, God will preserve it even to the end. Come, child of God, you must not suppose that the Lord will slay you for ever. You must not allow suppositions which would dishonour your God. You may suppose what you like if it be innocent, but you must not suppose that which would blaspheme the divine love, or cast a slur upon God's fidelity to His promise. He may cast you aside for awhile, but he cannot cast you away for ever; He may take away your goods, but not your highest good. He may allow a cloud to rest upon your reputation, a blight to fall upon your usefulness, and a storm to sweep away your happiness, but His mercy is not clean gone for ever, He hath not in anger turned away His heart from you. He has chastened you sore, but He has not given you over unto death. No, you must not interpret the supposition of the text as though it said, "Though He leave me to perish, though He cast me into hell," for that can never be. But I make bold to say that even if the devil were to whisper in your ear that the Lord would finally destroy you, it would be a glorious thing, if you could bravely reply, "And if He did I would still trust Him." One old saint once used very daring, and perhaps unjustifiable, language when he said, in ecstasy of love, "If God casts me into hell, I will hold so fast by Him that He shall go there too; I will not let Him go, and hell itself will be no hell to me while He is there." Beloved, say in your soul—Though the Lord should condemn me, I will not rebel, but confess that He is just; though He should refuse to hear my prayers, yet He is an infinitely good and blessed God, and I will praise Him still. But, beloved, it cannot be that God should slay or condemn a believer, and you need not tolerate the supposition. Blessed be His name, He hath not cast away the people whom He did foreknow, neither has one soul that trusted in Him ever been forsaken.

The terrible supposition before us is inclusive of all possible ills. "Though He slay me." He means that if every form of evil up to actual death should come upon him, yet would he trust in God. Though he should lose all that he had in flock or field, in purse or portion, yet would he trust. In Job's case away went the oxen and the asses, away went the sheep, away went the camels, and away went all the servants, and each time as the messenger came breathlessly running in, he said, "I only am left alone to tell thee." At last the worst news of all came, for all his children were taken away at a stroke. All was gone, for his wife was as good as lost also, since she went over to the enemy, and said, "Curse God and die." Well saith Job, "Though my troubles have left me bare of all but life, though nothing remains to me but this dunghill and the broken potsherd with which I scrape my sores, yet will I trust in the Lord." Oh, it was bravely said!

In this resolve, as we have seen, he includes not only losses of property, but all bereavements of friends; and I should like you Christian people to look this in the face. Perhaps the Lord may suddenly take away from you the dearest object of your heart's affection—your husband or your wife; can you trust Him then? The almost idolized children may be removed one by one, and leave sad vacancies within your heart. O fond wife, the beloved of your soul may pass away in the prime of his manhood, the brother may be cut down as the green herb, and the sister fade as a flower. Parents, children, brethren, any and all of these may be put far from you, and you may find yourselves as lone trees, whereas now you are surrounded by a kindred forest. You may be the last of the roses, left alone, scarcely blooming, but bowing your head amid the heavy showers of sorrow which drench you to the soul. Now, believer, if you are in such a deplorable case as that, can you still say, "If the Lord should go even further than this, should his next arrows penetrate my own lacerated heart, even then, as I bleed to death, I will kiss His hand?"

Job included in his supposition all kinds of pain. We can hardly imagine the bodily agony of Job when he was covered with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. None could approach him, the disease was so foul, neither could he endure to be touched. Yet he says, "Though I have all these boils, and even should they grow worse, so that the pains I now endure should become unendurable, and should I suffer the very anguish of death itself, yet still would I put my trust in my God. Neither poverty, loneliness, nor fierce torment shall make me forsake the Lord, nor shall all put together cause me to doubt Him." What a victory of faith is this!

Job at that time also suffered from dishonour, for those who once looked up to him with respect now despised him in their hearts. He says that those whose fathers he would have disdained to have set with the dogs of his flock, opened their mouths against him; and whereas, when he stood in the street, princes were silent in his presence to listen to his wisdom, now among the basest of mankind he had become a song and a byword. As for his mistaken friends, he had grown so weary of them that he said, "Oh that ye would altogether hold your peace, and it would be your wisdom." Poor Job was sorely galled with the scorn poured on him at a time when he deserved both sympathy and honour, but yet his faith cries, "If I am more despised still, and forgotten as a dead man out of mind, yet will I trust in Thee, my God."

Connected with all this, the afflicted patriarch must have felt much depression of spirit. Did he not say, "Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me?" Those of us who are subject to depression of spirit find much that is congenial in the Book of Job, his music is in tune with our own. How bitterly does he wail at times! What wondrous insight has he into the mystery of sorrow! Though his grief has never been thoroughly weighed, nor his calamities laid in the balances together, yet have his woes been considered by thousands of mourners, and have ministered a wealth of consolation to them. Job does not exclude his despondencies from his resolve, nay, he mainly intends them, for these are in a special sense a man's own personal slaying, and he says, "Though He slay *me*,"—though my heart should break with anguish, pierced through with despondency, yet will I put my trust in God. I began by calling the supposition of our text a terrible one, and now I claim that I have shown it to be so, since it includes the coming upon us of all sorts of ills.

Listen yet again. *This supposition goes to the extreme of possibility*, if not beyond it, for it will be hard to find a case in which God has really slain any of His servants. The martyrs were slain for Him, but not by Him. To none of His children, save one, has the Lord been as Abraham was to Isaac when he unsheathed the knife to slay him. If it had been so, could we have been as the lamb beneath the sacrificial knife? The stones which slew Stephen, and the sword which slew James, were in the hands of cruel men, and not in the hands of God; but God Himself is here supposed to slay us. Now, though He has not actually done so, we may enquire whether we could resign ourselves to Him, even if He should take life and all with His own hand? Could we lie on the altar and not struggle? Do we hate even our own life also for love of Him? What say we? Is our love stronger than death? God grant it may be so found.

But *this supposition goes further than matters ever will go*. Why, then, does the Psalmist suppose such a case? I answer because only by such suppositions can he express his faith to the full. Remember that psalm, "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." We are not expecting the earth to move nor the mountains to plunge into the ocean, but in order to express our confidence, we declare that even such a quaking would not affect the foundation of our faith. God Himself meets His people in like manner, by saying, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed." Child of God, you may suppose what never will occur, if you like, and project your soul by that supposition into depths of woe and grief, into which you will never actually come, and yet through divine grace you will resolve, "If it came even to that, still would I trust in Him."

Though the text supposes what will not actually occur, yet *it is a just description of what often does occur as far as our conceptions go*. Have you never known what it is to be in your own conceptions slain by God? My heart has known it often. It is as death itself to feel all your religion melt away like the hoar frost of the morning, when the sun has risen: and all your joys in which you delighted flying away like birds when a man doth clap his hands. Have you never had to begin all over again, at the very alphabet of repentance and childlike faith, and find even that no easy work. Did you never know what it was to get your cup right full of what you thought was holy joy and sweet experience, and then for the Lord to turn it bottom upward and let you see that it was a mixture of self-conceit and sentimentalism, with thick dregs at the bottom of pride and falsehood? Can you say with David, "I have seen an end of all perfection?" Have you never been brought down from imaginary riches to bitter but honest poverty? Have you never thought you were becoming so wonderfully sanctified that you could scarcely lay a split sheet of tissue paper between you and perfection, and then on a sudden the Lord has laid you naked and made you loathe the sight of your inborn corruptions? You have been as a cup which bubbled at the top and frothed over, and the Lord has blown off the froth and made you see the black draught of your inward vileness. God has many ways of thus slaying in His children all that ought to die. Thus he kills the spiritual hypocrisy which is so common in us all. Our life seems at times to run all into puff-balls and bloated fungi of self-glorying, we think that we are something when we are nothing, and then the Lord prunes us back to our real condition. Do you never know what it is to be thus slain? Ah, my brethren, at times our life is a long experience of the power of death Do you not know what it is to say, "Is this prayer? Why, while I prayed my thoughts were perplexed, distracted, and wandering. Is this faith? Why, even on the most, vital points my soul dares scarcely speak with confidence! Is this love?—love to Christ, which even while I exercise it accuses me on account of its lukewarmness and want of self-denying ardour. Can this be spiritual life? Life at which I blush and over which I mourn! Life which scarcely reaches so far as feeling, and when it does, soon subsides into insensibility!" Beloved brethren, I speak from experience, all this is a kind of slaying by which the

Lord hides pride from men and keeps them from the snares of vain confidence. Has He not written, "I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal?" In these times of wounding and killing, which are very common to the experience of some of the children of God, the only thing we can do is still to trust,—"Though He slay me, I will trust in Him." Trust Him though He sift out nine-tenths of thy hopes, burn up all thy experiences, grind thine evidences to powder, crush all thy realised sanctities, and sweep away all thy rests and refuges. Then, indeed, is the best time of all to exercise true faith.

Once more, *the grim supposition of the text, if ever it was realised by anybody it was realised by our Lord Jesus.* Our great covenant Head knows to the full what His members suffer. God did slay Him, and glory be to His blessed name, He trusted God while He was being slain. "It pleased the Father to bruise Him, He hath put Him to grief"; yet from the lips of our dear Lord we hear no expressions of unbelief. Read the twenty-second Psalm, where He says, "Our fathers trusted in Thee, they trusted in Thee and Thou didst deliver them, but I am a worm, and no man." Hear how He pleads with God, and specially listen to His dying words, where, though He says, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" yet a few minutes after He cries, "Into Thy hands I commit My spirit." What! into the hands of a God who had forsaken Him and smitten Him; did He commit Himself into those hands? Yes, into those very hands; and herein we must follow in His steps. Though the Lord cut, hew, hack, tear, and grind us to powder, yet out of the dust, and the tears, and the blood of the conflict we must look up to Him and say, "I trust Thee still." Here is the patience of the saints! Here is the glory of faith! Blessed is the man who thus becomes more than a conqueror. I say it calmly, I would sooner be able to do as Job did, than to be one of yonder seraphim, who have never suffered, and consequently have never clung to a slaying God. I count it the grandest possibility of a created being that it should be able completely to yield itself up into the Creator's hand, and unwaveringly believing in the Creator's love, in hope believing against hope. Oh, royal word of a right royal soul, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

II. Secondly, we have before US A NOBLE RESOLUTION—"yet will I trust in Him." Job meant that he was confident that the Lord was just, and though he did not feel that the sufferings he was then enduring were sent upon him for his sins, yet he never doubted the righteousness of God in so afflicting him. His friends said, "You see, Job, you suffer more than anybody else, therefore you must have been a hypocrite, for God will not lay upon any man more than is just." "No," said Job, "I have been upright before the Lord; and yet, on the other hand, I do not accuse the Lord of injustice, I am sure He does what is right, and I trust Him as much as ever." There were two things to which Job stuck very firmly—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him, but I will maintain my own ways before Him"—that is, I will not admit that I have been a hypocrite, for I have been sincerely obedient to Him; nor will I be driven to the other conclusion, that God is unjust in afflicting me. Job did not understand the Lord's reasons, but he continued to confide in His goodness. He set no terms or limits to the Lord's action, but left all to His absolute will, and was sure that whatever He might do it must be right. Should death prevent all apparent possibility of making up to him all his losses and woes, his faith o'erleaped the sepulchre, and saw justice and mercy alive in the realms beyond, making all things right in the end. Oh, it was grand thus to champion almighty goodness in the teeth of death itself.

Now, dear brethren, you and I, if we are resting upon God may say, "Whatever happens, though I may not be able to understand God's dispensations to me any more than Job understood God's dispensations towards him, yet I am quite sure of this, that He will help me in my trouble, and I will, therefore, cast myself upon Him, believing that as my days my strength shall be; or if He does not aid me in my trouble with manifest help I will still trust that He will bring me out of it, that if He seems to forsake for a while, yet it shall be said of me as of Gad, "a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last."

If I should neither receive present help nor immediate deliverance, yet I am persuaded that my good is designed by my long trial, and that God is making the worst things work out my everlasting benefit and His own glory; therefore will I submit to His will, and expect in the end to see the loving-kindness of the Lord. Yea, and if I should have neither present help nor deliverance, nor see any immediate good come of my affliction, yet will I repose myself upon God, for in some mysterious way or other I shall yet know that His providence was right and good; for He cannot err, His dealings must be wise; He cannot be unkind, His actions must be tender. Though the sharp edge of death itself invade me, I will hold to this belief, that Thou, O Lord, doest all things right. If down to the sepulchre my steps must go, and through the gloomy valley's darkest shade my pilgrimage must wend, yet will I fear no evil, for Thy rod and staff shall be my confidence, and I will be sure that He who bids me die will bid me live again; up from the grave my body shall yet rise, and in my flesh shall I see God. As for my spirit, though it pass through the death shade, it shall come forth into a brighter light, and in the eternity of glory it shall receive abundant recompense for the sorrows of the present time. This is the faith for us to hold at all times—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Why, think you, was Job able to speak thus positively about his trusting God? Was it not because he knew God? "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." If you would believe God you must know Him. Those who are strangers to Him cannot trust Him. O, beloved, only think what God is! Sometimes when I am contemplating His being and character I feel as if I could leap for joy, and when I touch upon the theme in the pulpit I feel as if I could talk on for ever in His praise, and use the grandest, sweetest, richest words in human language to tell what a blessed God my God is. What! the Lord do wrong to any of us? Impossible! The Lord be unkind to us? The supposition cannot be endured for a single moment. After once knowing Him we feel that all the goodness and kindness of fathers, mothers, brethren, husbands, wives, all put together, is only like one single drop of sweetness compared with that ocean full of honey which is to be found in His infinite love. Besides, we have not only His attributes to trust to, but His past actions to us. Did my Lord forgive me all my sin? and after that will He ever be unkind to me? Did He lay down His life for me upon the accursed tree, and can I

dream that He will desert me? Have I looked into the wounds of my dying Saviour, and shall I ever murmur if He should multiply pains and sufferings and losses and crosses to me? God forbid. Such love as His forbids all fear. Did you ever lean on the Bridegroom's arm? Have you ever sung like the bride in the canticle, "His left hand is under my head, and His right arm doth embrace me?" Did He ever stay you with flagons and comfort you with apples while your soul was sick with too much delight; and after all that will you indulge hard thoughts of Him? Oh no, till the day break and the shadows flee away, we cannot think hardly of Him who has dealt so kindly with us. His ways must be right; such wondrous acts of love as His have proved to us beyond all question that He is love, essential love, and cannot, therefore, do us an ill turn.

Beside this, we know the relationship in which He stands to us. It has been said that you cannot trust an enemy, and it has been equally well added you cannot trust a reconciled enemy: suspicion lingers long. But our God is no reconciled enemy, though He is sometimes represented as if He were so: He has loved us with an everlasting love; His is no friendship of yesterday, no passion which began to burn a month or two ago; but long ere the hills lifted up their heads He loved us. The bands of His fatherhood are upon us, and we can well commit ourselves into His hands.

Are any of us in great trouble this morning; then let us trust in the Lord now, for what else can we do? Suppose we give up trusting in Him, to whom or whither should we go? If this anchor drags, what other holdfast can there be? Let us continue to trust our Lord, for He deserves it. He has never done aught that could justify us in doubting Him. Has He ever been false to us? Ah, Judas, you sold your Master, but your Master never sold you. Ah, unbelieving heart, you have wandered from Jesus, but He never wandered from you. If you do not doubt Him till you have cause for doubting Him it will not be soon. Let us trust our God, for this is the sweetest comfort a man can have. This side heaven nothing can yield the afflicted man such support under trial as when he can fall back upon the strong love of God, and believe that the wisdom of God is overruling all. Nothing tends so to sanctify our trials, and produce good results from them, as faith in God. This is the Samson which finds honey in the lion. For a thousand reasons I would say, "Trust in the Lord at all times: ye people, pour out your hearts before Him. God is a refuge for us." Say ye each one, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"

III. And, now, the last point is this, A SECRET APPROPRIATENESS about it all.

There is something about our Lord's slaying us which should help us to trust Him. I would sooner the Lord should slay me with troubles and trials than let me alone in my sin. What saith the Scriptures? "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" I do not so much pity the children of God who have a cross to carry, I reserve my fears for those worldlings who are not in trouble as other men, neither plagued like other men. It would be very foolish for the afflicted one to say, "I am no child of God because He smites me": there would be more reason in the sinner's saying, "I am no child of God, for I have my portion in this life." Surely there is something in you which God loves, or else he would not be killing that which He hates. If He hates the sin in you, it is a good sign; for where do we hate sin most? Why, in those we love most. If you see a fault in a stranger, you wink your eye, and say but little, but in your own dear child you are deeply grieved to observe it. Where there is true love there is a measure of jealousy, and the more burning the love the more fierce the jealousy, especially on the part of Jesus Christ. Where He sees sin in those who are very dear to Him, His fury burns not against them, but against their sin, and He will not stop until He has slain it. His rebukes are severe, not because of want of love, but because He loves them so much. An ungodly man met me some years ago when I was suffering, and said to me in a jeering way, "Ah, whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, I see." I said, "Yes, it is His custom." "Ah," said he, "so long as I am without the chastisement I am very content to be without the love." Oh, it brought the red into my cheeks and the tears into my eyes, and I cried, "I would not change places with you for ten thousand worlds. If my God were to afflict me from head to foot, I would bear it joyfully sooner than live a moment without His love." When the Lord flogs us we love Him, and we would not leave Him though the devil should bribe us with all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. Our Father puts us sometimes into the black hole, and we are there crying bitterly under a sense of His wrath, but we love Him still, and if anybody were to find fault with Him we would be up at once and say "He is a good God, and blessed be His name."

Note again that *the slaying of the creature is the very condition in which faith was born,* and in which she delights to display her power. We are saved by passing from death unto life. As Noah was like a dead man out of mind shut up in the ark, and by this burial passed into the new world; and as in the ordinance of baptism we are in like figure buried with Christ that we may rise with Him so faith took her birth in the death of the creature at the time when the new life was breathed into us. When God is slaying all that is capable of death, and our new immortal life alone survives, faith feels as if her birthday had come over again and brought with it her native air.

Notice again, *it is at times when God is slaying us that our faith is being tested* whether it is true or not. When all the winds are fair how can you tell whether your barque would bear a storm? How much faith some of us have at times! Have you never felt as if you could fight seven devils with one hand? There was not a devil within seven miles when you were so bold; but when the smallest fiend has drawn near your courage has oozed out. We are like an old man whom I once knew, who said to me, "Here am I, eighty years old, and through the winter I often think, I wish I had a bit of mowing or reaping to do, for I feel quite young again; but as soon as harvest comes on, and I get down my old sickle, I have not done much before I feel the old man is a very old man, and had better leave that work alone." Slaying times let us know whether our strength is real strength, and whether our confidence is true confidence, and this is good, for it would be a great pity for us to be stocked with heaps of sham faith, and fictitious grace, and ready-made holiness. Some of my friends talk as if they had holiness enough for a dozen people, but I am afraid if they were tried as some of us are they would find they had not half enough for one. This is the benefit of trial—it lets us see what is gold and what is

tinsel, what is fact and what is fiction. Alas, how much religious fiction is abroad at this time!

Note further, that *slaying times are the most favourable for trusting God.* I have been putting a little riddle to myself. Here it is. Is it easier to trust God when you have nothing, or when you have all things? Is it easier to say, "Though He slay me, I will trust in Him," or to say, "Though He make me alive, I will trust in Him?" Will you think it over? Shall I help you? Here is a man without a farthing in the world; his cupboard is bare, his flocks are cut off from the field, and his herds from the stall; is it hard for that man to trust in God? If you say so I will not dispute with you. But here is another man who has a bank full of gold, his meadows are covered with flocks and herds, his barns are ready to burst with corn, and his trade prospers on all hands. Now, sirs, is it easy for that man to trust God? Do you say "Yes?" I say "No." I say that he has a very hard task indeed to live by faith, and the probabilities are that when he says, "I trust God," he is trusting his barn or his bank. All things considered, it occurs to me that it is easier to trust God in adversity, than in prosperity, because whatever there is in adversity is real trust, but a good deal of the faith we have in prosperity is a kind of trust which you will have to take upon trust, and whether it is faith or not is a matter of serious question. Sirs, where is the room for faith when you can see already all that you want? A full barn has no room for faith if she be any bigger than a mouse; but in an empty barn faith has scope and liberty. When the brook Cherith is dried up, when the poor widow has nothing left but a handful of meal and a little oil, then there is room for the prophet to exercise faith. O, brethren, it is well to go into action with clear decks. In the name of God, with double-shotted guns full of strong faith you can let the world and the flesh and the devil know what faith is; but while your deck is all hampered with comforts and visible resources faith can scarce stir a hand or move a gun. "Though He slay me,"—well, that means everything is gone, only breath enough left me just to exist; and now, my Lord, Thou art all in all to me. Now can I say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee; there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee."

Once more, *these slaying times* are very desirable occasions, because they *allow the child of God to show that he is not a mercenary professor,* held to Christ by a cupboard love. If God were always to prosper us the world would say, "These Christians follow their God as stray dogs follow those who give them bones, but they have no sincere love." When the Lord falls a whipping us, and we love Him all the more, then they cannot say but what we are faithful, nor can they deny the work of grace in our souls. O, you that are Christians as long as it is pleasant to be Christians, you who make your love to Christ depend upon your feeling happy,—what despicable beings you are. Our Lord wants not such base disciples, but such as can say, "If I lose all I have, still I love Thee, O my Saviour; Thy sweet love is so precious that if death were threatened me I would still choose Thee to be my all in all." Love desires opportunities for proving her disinterestedness, and such is the opportunity of the text.

There are seeking souls here this morning, and I daresay they have said, "Mr. Spurgeon has been describing great faith, we shall never get to that." I have been thinking, dear souls, what kind of a man is most like a little child. Is it not a very old man? What kind of faith is most like new-born faith? Why, the ripest and most advanced faith. My text is very old faith: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," but the very first faith I had in Christ—I remember it well—was just like it. I thought He would destroy me, I could not see how he could do otherwise and yet be a just God. I thought He must strike me down if I went to Him. He seemed to stand with a drawn sword in His hand, but I felt "Well, if He does slay me, I had better die by His hand than remain His enemy"; and I went to Him. I was like the boy who ran away from his home, and dared not return, because he feared his father would flog him. He was out all night, shivering, cold, and wet, and had nothing to eat all day. By the time he got to the next evening, such was his dread of being alone all through another night, that he said to himself, "I would sooner feel my father's rod than lie here," and so he went home, and was received with tenderness. So with me. I thought if I went to the Lord, I should have to smart for it, but I concluded I would rather smart than be as I was, and so I went to Him, and found I was safe. O poor souls, come to Jesus Christ in that fashion. Say

> "I can but perish if I go,
> I am resolved to try;
> For if I stay away, I know
> I must for ever die.
>
> "But if I die with mercy sought,
> When I the king have tried;
> That were to die, delightful thought,
> As sinner never died."

Say, "If I go to hell, I will trust Christ; if I am cast away for ever, I will trust Christ": and that cannot be, for "He that believeth in Him is not condemned." God grant you true faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

HOW TO CONVERSE WITH GOD

"Then call Thou, and I will answer; or let me speak, and answer Thou me."—Job xiii. 22.

JOB might well have been driven frantic by his miserable comforters; it is wonderful that he did not express himself far more bitterly than he did. Surely Satan found better instruments for his work in those three ungenerous friends than in the marauding Sabeans, or the pitiless whirlwind. They assailed Job remorselessly, and seemed to have no more bowels of compassion than so many flint stones. No wonder that he said to them many things which otherwise he would never have thought of uttering, and a few which I dare say he afterwards regretted. Possibly the expression of our test is one of those

passages of too forcible speech. The tormented patriarch did what none but a man of the highest integrity could have done so intensely as he did; he made his appeal from the false judgment of man to the bar of God, and begged to be forthwith summoned before the tribunal of the Judge of all, for he was sure that God would justify him. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before Him." He was ready to appear at the judgment seat of God, there to be tried as to his sincerity and uprightness. He says, "Only do not two things unto me: then will I not hide myself from Thee. Withdraw Thine hand far from me: and let not Thy dread make me afraid." He offers in the words of our text to come before the righteous Judge in any way which He might appoint—either he will be the defendant and God shall be the Plaintiff in the suit—"Call Thou and I will answer," or else he will take up the part of the plaintiff and the Lord shall show cause and reason for His dealings towards him, or convict him of falsehood in his pleas,—"Let me speak, and answer Thou me." He feels so sure he has not been a hypocrite that he will answer to the All-seeing there and then without fear of the result.

Now, brethren, we are far from condemning Job's language, but we would be quite as far from imitating it. Considering the circumstances in which Job was placed, considering the hideous libels which were brought against him, considering how he must have been stung when accused so wrongfully at such a time, we do not wonder that he thus spoke. Yet it may be that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips; at any rate it is not for us to employ his language in the same sense, or in any measure to enter upon self-justification before God. On the contrary, let our prayer be, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." How shall man be just with God? How can we challenge His judgment before whom the heavens are not pure, and who charged His angels with folly? Unless, indeed, it be in a gospel sense, when, covered with the righteousness of Christ, we are made bold by faith to cry, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, rather, that hath risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

I am going to use the words of Job in a different sense from that in which he employed them, and shall apply them to the sweet communion which we have with our Father, God. We cannot use them in reference to our appearance before His judgment seat to be tried; but they are exactly suitable when we speak of those blessed approaches to the mercy seat when we draw near to God to be enriched and sanctified by sacred communion. The text brings out a thought which I wish to convey to you—"Call Thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me." May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation.

The three points this morning will be, *two methods of secret converse*—"call Thou, I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me"; secondly, *the method of combining the two*, and here we shall try to show how the two modes of converse should be united in our communion with God; and thirdly, we shall show *how these two modes of fellowship are realised to the full in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who is our answer to God, and God's answer to us.

I. First, then, here are TWO METHODS OF SACRED CONVERSE BETWEEN GOD AND THE SOUL: sometimes the Lord calls to us and we reply, and at other times we speak to God and He graciously deigns to answer us. A missionary some years ago, returning from Southern Africa, gave a description of the work which had been accomplished there, through the preaching of the gospel, and among other things he pictured a little incident of which he had been an eye-witness. He said that one morning he saw a converted African chieftain sitting under a palm tree with his Bible open before him. Every now and then he cast his eyes on his book and read a passage, and then he paused and looked up a little while, and his lips were seen to be in motion. Thus he continued alternately to look down on the Scriptures and to turn his eyes upward towards heaven. The missionary passed by without disturbing the good man, but a little while after he mentioned to him what he had seen, and asked him why it was that sometimes he read, and sometimes he looked up? The African replied,—"I look down to the book, and God speaks to me, and then I look up in prayer, and speak to the Lord, and in this way we keep up a holy talk with each other." I would set this picture before you, as being the mirror and pattern of intercourse with heaven,—the heart hearkening to the voice of God, and then replying in prayer and praise.

We will begin with the first method of communion. *Sometimes it is well in our converse with God that we should wait till our heavenly Father has spoken*—"Call Thou, and I will answer." In this way the Lord communed with His servant Abraham. If you refer to those sacred interviews with which the patriarch was honoured, you will find that the record begins—"The Lord spake unto Abraham and said." After a paragraph or two you hear Abraham speaking to the Lord, and then comes the Lord's reply, and another word from the patriarch; but the conversation generally began with the Lord Himself. So was it with Moses. While he kept his flock in the wilderness he saw a bush which burned and was not consumed, and he turned aside to gaze upon it, and then the Lord spake to him out of the bush. The Lord called first, and Moses answered. Notably was this the case in the instance of the holy child Samuel. While he lay asleep the Lord said to him, "Samuel, Samuel," and he said, "Here am I," and yet a second and a third time the voice of God commenced a sacred intercourse. No doubt the Lord had heard the voice of the child in prayer at other times, but upon this notable occasion the Lord first called Samuel, and Samuel answered "Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth." So was it with Elijah. There was a still small voice, and the Lord said to the prophet, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Then Elijah replied, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, for they have thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword." To which complaint his great Master gave a comfortable answer. Now, as it was with these saints of old so has it been with us: the Lord our God has spoken to us by His Spirit, and our spiritual ears have listened to His words, and thus our intercourse with heaven has commenced. If the Lord wills to have the first word in the holy conversation which He intends to hold with His servants, God forbid that any speech

of ours should interpose. Who would not be silent to hear Jehovah speak?

How does God speak to us then, and how does He expect us to answer?

He speaks to us in the written word. This "more sure word of testimony, whereunto ye do well if ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." He speaks to us also in the ministry of His word, when things new and old which are in Holy Scripture are brought forth by His chosen servants, and are applied with power to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord is not dumb in the midst of His family, though, alas, some of His children appear to be dull of hearing. Though the Urim and Thummim are no longer to be seen upon the breasts of mortal men, yet the oracle is not silent. Oh that we were always ready to hear the loving voice of the Lord.

The Lord's voice has many tones, all equally divine. Sometimes He uses the voice of *awakening*, and then we should give earnest heed. We are dead and He quickens us. We are sluggish and need to be bestirred, and the Lord, therefore, cries aloud to us, "Awake thou that sleepest." We are slow to draw near to Him, and therefore lovingly He says, "Seek ye My face." What a mercy it is if our heart at once answers, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." When He arouses us to duty there is true communion in our hearts if we at once reply "Here am I, send me." Our inmost souls should reply to the Lord's call as the echo answers to the voice. I fear me it is sometimes far otherwise, and then our loving Lord has His patience tried. Remember how He says "Behold I stand at the door and knock": He knocks because He finds that door closed which should have been wide open. Alas, even His knocks are for a while in vain, for we are stretched upon the bed of ease and make idle excuses for remaining there—"I have put off my coat, how can I put it on? I have washed my feet, how can I defile them?" Let us no longer treat Him in this ungenerous manner lest He take it amiss and leave us, for if He go away from us we shall seek Him but find Him not, we shall call Him but He will give us no answer. If we will not arise at His call it may be He will leave us to slumber like sluggards till our poverty come as one that travelleth, and our want as an armed man. If our Beloved cries, "Rise up My love, My fair one, and come away," let us not linger for an instant. If He cries "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion," let us arise in the power of His call and shake ourselves from the dust. At the first sound of heaven's bugle in the morning, let us quit the bed of carnal ease and go forth to meet our Lord and King. Herein is communion, the Lord draws us and we run after Him, He arouses us and we wake to serve Him, He restores our soul and our hearts praise Him.

Frequently the voice of God is for our *instruction*. All Scripture is written for that purpose, and our business is to listen to its teachings with open ear and willing heart. Well did the Psalmist say "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace unto His people." God's own command of mercy is, "Incline your ear and come unto Me, hear and your soul shall live." This is the very Gospel of God to the unsaved ones, and it is an equally important message to those who have through grace believed, for they also need to receive of His words. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall men live." Hence one of the saints cried out, "Thy words were found and I did eat them"; and another said, "How sweet are Thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." God's word is the soul's manna and the soul's water of life. How greatly we ought to prize each word of divine teaching. But, dear brethren, do you not think that many are very neglectful of God's instructive voice? In the Bible we have precious doctrines, precious promises, precious precepts, and above all a precious Christ, and if a man would really live upon these choice things, he might rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But how often is the Bible left unread! And so God is not heard. He calls and we give no heed. As for the preaching of the Word when the Holy Spirit is in it, it is the "power of God unto salvation," and the Lord is pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe; but all believers do not hear the voice of the Lord by His ministers as they should. There is much carping criticism, much coldness of heart, much glorying in man, and a great want of teachableness of spirit, and thus the word is shut out of our hearts. The Lord would fain teach us by His servants, but our ears are dull of hearing. Is it any wonder that those professors cannot pray who are for ever grumbling that they cannot hear? God will be deaf to us if we are deaf to Him. If we will not be taught we shall not be heard. Let us not be as the adder which is deaf to the charmer's voice. Let us be willing, yea, eager to learn. Did not our Lord Jesus say, "take My yoke upon you and learn of Me"? And is there not a rich reward for so doing in His sweet assurance, "ye shall find rest unto your souls"? Search the Scriptures that no word from the Lord may be inadvertently slighted by you; hear the Word attentively and ponder it in your heart, and daily make this your prayer, "What I know not, teach Thou me." "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." Let us strive against prejudice, and never let us dream that we are so wise that we need learn no more. Jesus Christ would have us be teachable as little children and ready to receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls. You will have a blessed fellowship with your Lord if you will sit at His feet and receive His words. Oh for His own effectual teaching. Call Thou, O Lord, and I will answer.

The Lord also speaks to His servants with the voice of *command*. Those who trust Christ must also obey Him. In the day when we become the Lord's children we come under obligations to obey. Does He not Himself say, "If I be a Father, where is Mine honour?" Dear friends, we must never have a heavy ear towards the precepts. I know some who drink in the promises as Gideon's fleece did the dew, but as for the commands, they refuse them as a man turns from wormwood. But the child of God can say, "Oh, how I love Thy law, it is my meditation all the day: I will delight myself in Thy commandments which I have loved." The will of God is very sweet to His children; they long to have their own wills perfectly conformed to it. True Christians are not pickers and choosers of God's word; the part which tells them how they should live in the power of the Spirit of God is as sweet to them as the other portion which tells them how they are saved by virtue of the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Dear b[illegible]n, if we shut our ears

to what Jesus tells us, we shall never have power in prayer, nor shall we enjoy intimate communion with the Well-beloved. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love," saith He, "even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." If you will not hear God, you cannot expect Him to hear you, and if you will not do what He bids you, neither can you expect Him to give you what you seek at His hands. An obedient heart is needful if there is to be any happy converse between God and the soul.

The Lord sometimes speaks to His servants in the tone of *rebuke*, and let us never be among those who harden their necks against Him. It is not a pleasant thing to be told of our faults, but it is a most profitable thing. Brethren, when you have erred, if you are on good terms with God, He will gently chide you: His voice will sound in your conscience, "My child, was this right? My child, was this as it ought to be? Is this becoming in one redeemed with precious blood?" When you open the Bible, many a text will like a mirror show you yourself, and the spots upon your face, and conscience looking thereon will say, "Do not so, my son, this is not as thy Lord would have it." "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach Thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." If we do not listen to God's rebuking voice in His word, He will probably speak in harsher tones by some afflicting providence. Perhaps He will hide from us the light of His countenance and deny us the consolations of the Spirit. Before this is the case, it will be wise to turn our hearts unto the Lord, or if it has already come to that, let us say, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me. Make me to know my faults, my Father, and help me to purge myself from them." Brethren, be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, but pray to be made tender in spirit. Be this your prayer:

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O, God, my conscience make;
Awake, my soul, when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.

"Oh may the least omission pain
My well instructed soul;
And drive me to the blood again,
Which makes the wounded whole!"

Let us hear Nathan as kindly when he rebukes us as when he brings a promise, for in both cases the prophet speaks his Master's own sure word. Let us thank the Lord for chiding us and zealously set about destroying the idols against which His anger is stirred. It is due to the Lord, and it is the wisest course for ourselves.

But blessed be His name, the Lord will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger for ever. Very frequently the Lord speaks to us in *consolatory* language. How full the Bible is of comforts, how truly has God carried out His own precept to the prophet.—"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." What more, indeed, could God have said than He has said for the consolation of His own beloved? Be not slow to hear when God is swift to cheer you. Alas, our unbelief sometimes turns a deaf ear even to the sweetest note of Jehovah's love. We cannot think that all things will work together for our good; we cannot believe that the Providence which looks so evil can really be a blessing in disguise. Blind unbelief is sure to err, and it errs principally in stopping its ear against those dulcet tones of everlasting loving-kindness which ought to make our hearts leap within us for joy. Beloved, be ye not hard to comfort, but when God calls be ready to answer Him, and say, "I believe Thee, Lord, and rejoice in Thy word, and therefore my soul shall put away her mourning, and gird herself with delight." This is the way to keep up fellowship with God, to hear His consolations and to be grateful for them.

And last of all upon this point, God speaks to His people sometimes in the tones which *invite to innermost communion*. I cannot tell you how they sound, your ear must itself have heard them to know what they are. Sometimes He calls His beloved one to come away to the top of Amana, to ascend above the world and all its cares, and to come to the mount of transfiguration. "There," saith He, "will I show thee My loves." There the Lord seems to lay bare His heart to His child, and to tell him all the heights and depths of love unsearchable, and let him understand his eternal union with Christ, and the safety that comes of it, and the mystical covenant with all its treasures; "for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." It is a sad thing when the Lord calls us into the secret chamber, where none may approach but men greatly beloved, and we are not prepared to enter. That innermost heart-to-heart communion is not given to him who is unclean. God said even to Moses, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." There is no enjoying that extraordinary nearness to God with which He sometimes favours His choice ones, unless the feet have been washed in the brazen laver, and the hands have been cleansed in innocence. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." He that is of clean hands and a pure heart, he shall dwell on high; and only he, for God will not draw inconsistent professors and those who are dallying with sin into close contact with Himself. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord," and especially be ye clean who hope to stand in His holy place and to behold His face, for that face is only to be beheld in righteousness.

Brethren, it is clear that the voice of God speaks to us in different tones, and our business, as His children, is to answer at once when He speaks to us. This is one form of holy fellowship.

The second and equally common form is that *we speak to God and He graciously replies to us.*

How should we speak to the Most High? I answer, first, we ought constantly to speak to Him in the tone of *adoration*. We do not, I fear, adore and reverently magnify God one hundredth part as much as we should. The general frame of a Christian should be such that whenever his mind is taken off from the necessary thoughts of his calling, he should at once stand before the throne blessing the Lord, if not in words, yet in heart. I was watching the lilies the other day as they stood upon their tall stalks with flowers so fair and beautiful; they cannot sing, but they seemed to me to be offering continual hymns to God by their very existence. They had lifted themselves as near to heaven as they could, indeed they would not commence to flower till they had risen as far from the earth as their nature would permit, and then they just stood still in their beauty and showed to all around what God can do, and as they poured out

their sweet perfume in silence they said by their example, "Bless ye the Lord as we also do by pouring out our very souls in sweetness." Now, you may not be able to preach, and it would not be possible to be always singing, especially in some company; but your life, your heart, your whole being should be one perpetual discourse of the loving kindness of the Lord, and your heart, even if the Lord be silent, should carry on fellowship by adoring His blessed name.

Coupled with adoration, the Lord should always hear the voice of our *gratitude*. One of our brethren in prayer last Monday night commenced somewhat in this fashion. He said, "Lord, Thou dost so continuously bless us that we feel as if we could begin to praise Thee now and never leave off any more. We are half ashamed to ask for anything more, because Thou dost always give so promptly, and so bountifully." In this spirit let us live. Let us be grateful unto Him and bless His name, and come into His presence with thanksgiving! The whole life of the Christian man should be a psalm, of which the contents should be summed up in this sentence, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name." Now, adoration and thanksgiving, if rendered to God with a sincere heart through Jesus Christ, will be acceptable to God, and we shall receive an answer of peace from Him, so that we shall realise the second half of the text. "I will speak, and answer Thou me."

But, my brethren, it would not suffice for us to come before God with adoration only, for we must remember what we are. Great is He and therefore to be adored, but sinful are we, and therefore when we come to Him there must always be *confession* of sin upon our lips. I never expect, until I get to heaven, to be able to cease confessing sin every day and every time I stand before God. When I wander away from God I may have some idea of being holy, but when I draw near to Him I always feel as Job when he said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes." If you would have the Lord hear, be sure you speak to Him in humble notes. You have rebelled against Him, you are a sinner by nature, and though forgiven and accepted, and therefore freed from dread of wrath, you can never forget that you *were* a rebel, and if it had not been for sovereign grace you would have been so still; therefore speak with lowliness and humility before the Lord if you would receive an answer.

Beloved friends, we should also speak to God with the voice of *petition*, and this we can never cease to do, for we are always full of wants. "Give us this day our daily bread" must be our prayer as long as we are in the land where daily needs require daily supplies. We shall always need to make request for temporals and for spirituals, for ourselves and for others too. The work of intercessory prayer must never be allowed to cease. Speak ye to the Lord, ye that have His ear; speak for us His servants who are His ambassadors to men, speak for the Church also, plead for rebellious sinners, and ask that unnumbered blessings may be given from above.

We should also speak to Him sometimes in the language of *resolution*. If the poor prodigal was right in saying, "I will arise and go to my father," so are Christians right in saying, "Therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live," or in saying, "Long as I live I will bless the Lord." Sometimes when a duty is set before you very plainly which you had for a while forgotten, it is very sweet to say unto the Lord, "Lord, Thy servant will rejoice to do this, only help Thou me." Register the secret vow before the Lord, and honourably fulfil it.

We should often use the language of *intimate communion*. "What language is that?" say you; and again I answer, "I cannot tell you." There are times when we say to the blessed Bridegroom of our souls love-words which the uncircumcised ear must not hear. Why, even the little that is unveiled before the world in the Book of Solomon's Song has made many a man cavil, for the carnal mind cannot understand such spiritual secrets. You know how the Church cries out concerning her Lord: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for His love is better than wine." There are many love passages and love words between sanctified souls and their dear Lord and Master, which it were not lawful for a man to utter in a mixed assembly, it were like the casting of pearls before swine, or reading one's love-letters in the public streets. O, ye chosen, speak ye to your Lord. Keep nothing from Him. He has said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." He has told you all that He has seen with the Father, tell Him everything that is in your heart, and when you speak with sacred child-like confidence, telling Him everything, you will find Him answering you with familiar love, and sweet will be the fellowship thus created.

Thus I have shewn you that there are two forms of the believer's intercourse with God.

II. Let us now consider THE METHOD OF THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO. With regard to this subject, I would say that *they must be united*. Brethren, we sometimes go to prayer, and we want God to hear us; but we have not heard what God has to say. This is wrong. Suppose a person neglects the hearing of the word, but is very fond of prayer, I feel certain that his prayer will soon become flat, stale, and unprofitable, because no conversation can be very lively which is all on one side. The man speaks, but he does not let God speak, and therefore he will soon find it hard to maintain the converse. If you are earnest in regular prayer, but do not as regularly read or hear the Scriptures, your soul gives out without taking in, and is very apt to run dry. Not only thoughts and desires will flag, but even the expressions will become monotonous. If you consider how it is that your prayer appears to lack vivacity and freshness, the probable reason is that you are trying to maintain a maimed fellowship. When conversation is all one side, do you wonder that it flags? If I have a friend at my house to-night, and we wish to have fellowship with each other, I must not do all the talking, but I must wait for him to answer me, or to suggest new topics, as he may please; and if he be wiser than I am, there is the more reason why I should play second in the conversation, and leave its guidance very much to him.

It is such a condescension on God's part to speak with us that we ought eagerly to hear what He has to say. Let Him never have to complain that we turned away our ear from Him. At the same time we must not be silent ourselves; for to read the Scriptures, and to hear sermons, and never to pray, would not bring fellowship with God. That would be a lame conversation. Remember how Abraham

spoke with God again and again, though he felt himself to be but dust and ashes; how Moses pleaded; how David sat before the Lord and then spake with his tongue: above all, remember how Jesus talked with His Father as well as hearkened to the voice from Heaven. Let both forms of converse unite, and all will be well.

Again, it will be well sometimes to *vary the order.* Dear Mr. Müller, who is a man living near to God, whose every word is like a pearl, said the other day, "Sometimes when I go into my closet to pray, I find I cannot pray as I would. What do I then? Why, since I cannot speak to the Lord, I beg the Lord to speak to me, and therefore I open the Scriptures and read my portion; and then I find the Lord gives me matter for prayer." Is not this a suggestion of much weight? Does it not commend itself to your spiritual judgment? Have you not observed that when somebody calls to see you, you may not be in a fit condition to start a profitable conversation; but if your friend will lead, your mind takes fire, and you have no difficulty in following him. Frequently it will be best to ask the Lord to lead the sacred converse, or wait awhile till He does so. It is a blessed thing to wait at the posts of His doors, expecting a word of love from His throne. It is generally best in communion with God to begin with hearing His voice, because it is due to His sacred Majesty that we should first hear what He has to say to us; and it will especially be best for us to do so when we feel out of order for communion. If the flesh in its weakness hampers the spirit, then let the Bible reading come before the praying, that the soul may be awakened thereby. Still, there are times when it will be better to speak to our heavenly Father at once. For instance, if a child has done wrong, it is very wise of him to run straight away to his father, before his father has said anything to him, and say, "Father I have sinned." The prodigal had the first word, and so should our penitence seek for speedy audience, and pour itself out like water before the Lord. Sometimes too, when our heart is very full of thankfulness, we should allow praise to burst forth at once. When we have received a great favour we ought not to wait till the giver of it speaks to us, but the moment we see him we should at once acknowledge our indebtedness. When the heart is full of either prayer or praise, and the presence of Jesus is felt, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we begin addressing the Lord with all our hearts. The Lord *has* spoken, and it is for us to reply at once.

On the other hand, when for wise reasons our Lord is silent unto us, it is well to take with us words and come unto Him. If you have read your Bible, and have felt no visit from the Holy Spirit, or if you have heard a sermon and found no dew from the Lord attending it, then turn at once to prayer. Tell the Lord your condition, and entreat Him to reveal Himself unto you. Pray first and read afterwards, and you will find that your speaking with God will be replied to be His speaking to you through the Word. Take the two methods—common-sense and your own experience will guide you, and let sometimes one come first and sometimes the other.

But *let there be a reality about both.* Mockery in this matter is deadly sin. Do not let God's Word be before you as a mass of letterpress, but let the book speak to your soul. Some people read the Bible through in a set time, and in great haste, and they might just as well never look at it at all. Can a man understand a country by merely tearing through it at a railway pace? If he desires to know the character of the soil, and the condition of the people, he walks leisurely through the land and examines with care. God's Word needs digging, or its treasures will lie hidden. We must put our ear down to the heart of Scripture and hear its living throbs. Scripture often whispers rather than thunders, and the ear must be duly trained to comprehend its language. Resolve emphatically, "I WILL HEAR what God the Lord shall speak." Let God speak to you, and in order that He may do so, pause and meditate, and do not proceed till you grasp the meanings of the verses as far as the Spirit enables you. If you do not understand some passages read them again and again, and remember it is good to read even those parts of Scripture which you do not understand, even as it is good for a child to hear his father's voice whether he understands all his father has to say or not. At any rate, faith finds exercise in knowing that God never speaks in vain, even though He be not understood. Hear the Word till you do understand it. While you are listening the sense will gradually break in upon your soul, but mind that you listen with opened ear and willing heart. When you speak to God do not let it be a dead form, for that is an insult to the Most High. If the heart be absent, it is as wicked to say a prayer as to be prayerless. If one should obtain an audience of Her Majesty and then should read a petition in which he took no interest, which was in fact a mere set of words, it would be an insult of the worst kind. Beware lest you thus insult the Majesty of heaven!

III. The last thought is only meant to be dropped before you for you to enlarge upon it at your leisure,—THE BLESSED REALIZATION OF THESE TWO FORMS OF COMMUNION IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST. —"Call Thou, and I will answer." Infinite Majesty of God, call Thou upon me and ask Thou for all Thou canst ask, and I bless Thee that I have an answer for Thee. Ask thy poor servant for all Thou canst demand of him and he will gladly reply. Brethren do you ask in wonder—How can we answer Him? The answer is clear—By bringing Jesus to remembrance. Our Lord Jesus Christ is man's complete answer to God. Divine justice demands death as the penalty of sin:—Behold the Son of God taken down from the cross because He was surely dead, wrapped in the cerements of the grave and laid in Joseph's tomb. God's justice demands suffering, demands that the sinner be abandoned of God. See yonder cross and hear the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Great God, Thou hast in Jesus all the suffering Thy justice can ask, even to death itself. God's holiness righteously demands a life of obedience: man cannot be right before God unless he renders perfect obedience to the law. Behold our answer, we bring a perfect Saviour's active and passive obedience and lay it down at Jehovah's feet—what can He ask for more? He requires a perfect heart, and an unblemished person, and He cannot accept less than a perfect manhood. We bring the Father His Only Begotten, the Son of man, our brother; and here is our answer: there is the perfect Man, the unfallen head of the race. Oh, never try to reply to God with any other answer than this. Whatever He asks of thee, bring Him thy Saviour; He cannot ask more. Thou bringest before Him that which fully contents Him, for He

Himself has said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Let thine answer then to the justice of God be Christ.

But I said that Christ fulfilled the other purpose. He is God's answer to us. What have you to ask of God this morning? Are you so far away from Him that you enquire, "How can I be saved?" No answer comes out of the excellent glory except Christ on the cross, that is God's answer: believe in Him and live. By those wounds, by that bloody sweat, by that sacrificial death, you must be saved; look you there! Do you say unto the Lord, "I have trusted Christ, but am I secure of salvation?" No answer comes but Christ risen from the dead to die no more. Death hath no more dominion over Him, and He hath said, "Because I live ye shall live also." The risen Christ is the Lord's assurance of our safety for eternity. Do you ask the Lord, "How much dost Thou love me?" Thou hast asked a large question, but there is a large answer for thee. He gives His Son, behold what manner of love is here! Do you enquire, "Lord, what wilt Thou give me?" His Son is the answer to that question also. Behold these lines written on His bleeding person, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Would you know more? Do you say, "What sign showest Thou that all these things are so?" He gives thee Christ in heaven. Yea, if thou askest, "Lord, what shall Thy servant be when Thou hast completed Thy work of grace upon me?" He points you to Jesus in the glory, for you shall be like Him. If you ask what is to be your destiny in the future, He shows you Christ coming a second time without a sin-offering unto salvation. Dear friend, thou canst ask nothing of thy God, but what He gives thee at once a reply in Jesus. Oh what blessed talk is that when the Christian's heart says *Jesus*, and the Christian's God says *Jesus*, and how sweet it is when we come to Jesus and rest in Him, and God is in Jesus and makes Him His rest for ever. Thus do believers and their God rest together in the same beloved One. May the Lord add His blessing to our meditation, and make this kind of communion common among us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

OUR LIFE, OUR WORK, OUR CHANGE

"All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come."—Job xiv. 14.

JOB was well-nigh driven to desperation by the fearful torment of his bodily pains, by the exasperating remarks of his friends, and the cutting suggestion of his wife. It is no wonder if he became somewhat impatient. Never were words of complaint more excusable than in the sad case of Job when he cried, "Oh that Thou wouldst hide me in the grave!" Everything that could make life bearable had been taken from him, and every evil which could make death desirable came upon him. Yet, after Job had uttered those exclamations, he seems to have been half ashamed of his weakness, and girding up his loins, he argues with himself, reasoning his soul into a cooler, calmer frame. Job looks his life in the face: he perceives that his warfare is severe, but he remembers it is *but once*, and that when once over and the victory won, there will be no more fighting; and therefore he encourages himself to put up with his present sorrows, and even with future evils, be they what they may, and registers this solemn resolution—far more glorious than the resolve of Alexander to conquer the world—to conquer himself, and to abide with patience the will of God. He fixed it steadfastly in his heart, that all his appointed days until a change should come, he would endure the divine decree with constancy of resignation. None among us can afford to cast a stone at the patriarch for sighing and complaining, for we should not act one half so well ourselves.

We are too much at times like Jonah; we turn cowards, and would fain flee from our work when it becomes arduous or yields us no honour. If we do not seek a ship to convey us to Tarshish, we sigh for a seraph to bear us to heaven. This huge Nineveh has made most of us quail in times of depression. I fear that frequently we act like lineal descendants of those children of Ephraim who, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. We shrink as a bone out of joint, which slips aside under pressure. We are not only like Jacob, who halted upon one thigh, but we limp upon both legs at times. We are often disinclined for conflict, and pine for rest, crying, "When will the day be over? When shall we be perfectly at ease?" It is against such a spirit as this that we must struggle; and to help us in the struggle, it seemed to me to be good to consider the text now before us; and to that end may God bless it, that we may be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."

We shall call your attention this morning, first, to *the aspect of life* which Job gives; secondly, *to his estimate of our work;* and thirdly, *to his view of the future.*

I. First, let us observe THE ASPECT UNDER WHICH JOB REGARDED THIS MORTAL LIFE. He calls it an "*appointed time*," or, as the Hebrew has it, "*a warfare.*"

Observe that Job styles our life *a time.* Blessed be God, that this present state is not an eternity! What though its conflicts may seem long, they must have an end. We are in the finite state at present, in which all griefs have their closes and conclusions. Long as the night may last, it must yield in due season to the light of the morning. The winter may drag its weary length along, but the spring is hard upon its heels; the tide may ebb out till nothing remains but leagues of mud, and we lament that all the bright blue deep will vanish, but it is not so, the tide must flow again, for God has so decreed. Our whole life is brief indeed. Compared with eternity, a mere span, a hand's-breadth. From the summits of eternity, how like a flying moment will this

transient life appear. The pains of this mortal life will seem to be a mere pin's-prick to us when we get into the joys never ending and overflowing; and the toils of this life will be as child's play when we reach the everlasting rest. Let us then, my brethren, judge immortal judgment; let us not weigh our troubles in the ill-adjusted scales of this poor human life, but let us use the shekel of eternity. We are born for eternity; and although it is true we have to struggle through this one brief hour of toil and conflict, an hour with our God in glory will make up for it all. "I reckon," said that master of heavenly arithmetic, the apostle Paul, who was never out in his reckoning, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." The longest and most sorrowful life is but a "time." Whisper that simple truth into the ear of the languishing sufferer; tell this glad truth to the son of sorrow, poor and despised; tell it to every daughter of grief, life is but a *time*; it is not eternity. O mourner, contrast thy present sorrows with the griefs of lost spirits, to whom there is no time—who are cast away for ever—who cannot expect a termination to their bitter griefs, but who see this word written in letters of fire before their weeping eyes, "For ever! for ever! for ever! for ever!"

Job also calls our life an "*appointed*" time. Ye know who appointed your days. You did not appoint them for yourself, and therefore you can have no regrets about the appointment. Neither did Satan appoint it, for the keys of hell and of death do not hang at his girdle.

> "An angel's arm can't cast me to the grave:
> Millions of angels cannot keep me there."

To the almighty God belong the issues from death. He alone can speak the irrevocable word, and bid the spirit return to God who gave it. God alone can wing the shaft that shall end this mortal existence; until He putteth His hand to the bow, all the archers of earth and hell shall shoot in vain. Our pilgrimage has an appointed beginning and end. In yonder hour-glass, which measures thine existence, the sands which trickle to the nether globe were all measured into the upper bulb by the divine hand. There is not a sand too few, nor a grain too many. You shall find that God has appointed with exact wisdom, with profound knowledge, and with irreproachable love all the days and the doings of your life. Remember that thou wilt live out, but not *outlive* thine allotted years. Thou wilt live up to the last minute, and neither plagues, nor pestilences, nor dangers of flood, or field, or battle, can deprive thee of the last second which God had measured out to thee. But beyond the boundary line thou shalt not pass, though thou take great care, and call in the physician, yet canst thou not add an inch of time to thy determined period. Inexorable death will make no tarrying, but perform his errand promptly when the Master sends him.

> "Then to the dust, return thou must
> Without delay."

Should not this cheer us—that the appointment of our lot has been made by a loving Father's prudence, and that the days and bounds of our habitation are not left to the winds of chance or to the waves of uncertainty, but are all decreed immutably by our Father who is in heaven? In the volume of the book our life-story is written—in that same volume wherein the Saviour's covenant engagements were recorded.

You will observe, dear friends, also that Job very wisely speaks of the "*days*" of our appointed time. It is a prudent thing to forbear the burden of life as a whole, and learn to bear it in the parcels into which providence has divided it. Let us live as life comes, namely, by the day. Our God does not trust us with so much life as a month at once—we live as the clock ticks, a second at a time. Is not that a wiser method of living rather than to perplex our heads by living by the month, or by the year? You have no promise for the year: the word of mercy runs, "As thy *days* thy strength shall be." You are not commanded to pray for supplies by the year, but, "Give us this *day* our daily bread." Said a good man to me the other day who had many troubles, who has borne them manfully to my knowledge, for these fifteen or twenty years, when I asked him how his patience had held out—"Ah," said he, "I said to my afflicted wife the other day, when the coals came in, it takes several big fellows to bring in the sacks, but yet our little kitchen-maid Mary, has brought the whole ton up from the cellar into our parlour; but she has done it a scuttle-full at a time. She has as surely moved those tons of coal as ever did the wagons when they brought them in, but she has moved them by little and little, and done it easily." This is how to bear the troubles of life, a day's portion at a time. Wave by wave our trials come, and let us breast them one by one, and not attempt to buffet the whole ocean's billows at once. Let us stand as the brave old Spartan did, in the Thermopylæ of the day, and fight the Persians as they come on one by one, thus shall we keep our adversities at bay, and overcome them as they advance in single file; but let us not venture into the plain amidst the innumerable hordes of Persians, or we shall speedily be swallowed up, and our faith and patience will be overcome. I would fain live by the day, and work by the day, and suffer by the day, till all my days are over, and I see the Ancient of Days in that land where *days* are lost in one eternal *day*, and the soul swims in seas of joy for ever.

I must not fail to remind you of the Hebrew: "All the days of my *warfare* will I wait." Life is indeed a "warfare;" and just as a man enlists in our army for a term of years, and then his service runs out, and he is free, so every believer is enlisted in the service of life, to serve God till his enlistment is over, and we sleep in death. Our charge and our armour we shall put off together. Brethren, you are soldiers, enlisted when you believed in God. Let me remind you that you are a soldier, you will be always at war, you will never have a furlough or conclude a treaty. Like the old knights who slept in their armour, you will be attacked even in your rest. There is no part of the journey to heaven which is secure from the enemy, and no moment, not even the sweet rest of the Lord's-day, when the clarion may not sound. Therefore, prepare yourselves always for the battle. "Put on the whole armour of God," and look upon life as a continued battle. Be surprised when you have not to fight; be wonder-struck when the world is peaceful towards you; be astonished when your old corruptions do not rise and assault you. You must travel with your swords always drawn, and you may as well throw away the scabbard, for you will never want it. You are a

soldier who must always fight, and by the light of battle you must survey the whole of your life.

Taking these thoughts together as Job's view of mortal life, what then? Why, beloved, it is but once, as we have already said—we shall serve our God on earth in striving after His glory but once. Let us carry out the engagements of our enlistment honourably. He who enters into Her Majesty's service for a term of years, if he be an honourable man, resolves that he will act worthily, so long as he is in the ranks. So let it be with us: we shall never enter upon another war; let us wage the present warfare gloriously. We carry in our hands a sword, we have but to use it in one great life-battle, and then it shall be hung up on the wall for ever. Let us use our weapon well, that we may not have to resign it, rusty and dishonoured, as a memorial of our disgrace. Let us march cheerily to the fight, since it is but once. Let us play the man, and be like David's mightiest, who feared no risks, but accepted deadly odds, and won and held their own against all comers. Come, beloved, we have an appointed time, and it is running out every hour, let us rejoice to see it go. Our Captain appointed it, He commanded us to stand sentry, or to rush into the front of the battle. Since the time is appointed by our well-beloved King, let us not dishonour His appointment, but in the name of Him who gave us our commission to live and fight, let us war a good warfare, living at the highest bent of our force, and the utmost strength of our being. And since, dear friends, it is the Lord's war that we are engaged in, we are enlisted under the great Captain of our salvation, who leads us on to sure and certain victory, let us not be discouraged; let not our hearts fail us; let us quit ourselves like men, and be strong, for the Lord our God is with us, and we have the Mighty One of Israel to be our Captain. Let us glorify the grace of God while we are permitted to remain on earth to glorify it. Let us up and at our enemies while there are enemies for us to fight. Let us carve out victory while we have the raw material of conflict to carve. There are no battles to be fought, and no victories to be won in heaven. So now, in this life let us resolve in the name and strength of God the Holy Ghost, with all our force and vigour to glorify God, who has appointed us our warfare. We now leave this head to turn to the second, and may God the Holy Spirit bless us in so doing.

II. JOB'S VIEW OF OUR WORK while on earth is that we are to *wait*. "All the days of my appointed time will I *wait*." The word "wait" is very full of teaching. It contains the whole of the Christian life, if understood in all its various senses. Let us take up a few very briefly.

In the first place, the Christian life should be one of waiting; that is, *setting loose by all earthly things*. Many travellers are among us this morning; they are passing from one town to another, viewing divers countries; but if they are only travellers, and are soon to return to their homes, they do not speculate in the various businesses of Lombard Street or Cheapside. They do not attempt to buy large estates and lay them out, and make gold and silver thereby; they know that they are only strangers, and they act as such. They take such interest in the affairs of the country in which they are sojourning as may be becoming in those who are not citizens of it; they wish well to those among whom they sojourn and dwell; but that is all, for they are going home, therefore, they do not intend to bind themselves with anything that might make it difficult to part from our shores. They know that they are on the wing, and therefore they live like strangers and sojourners. As a Bedouin wandering across the desert, so is a Christian—a bird of passage; a voyager seeking the haven. This is not our rest: it is polluted.

> "Sad thought were this to be our home!"

The wisdom of the Christian is to disentangle himself as much as possible of the things of this life. He will act kindly towards the citizens of the country where he is called to dwell, and he will seek their good: still he will remember that he is not as they are. He is an alien among them. He may have to buy and sell in this world, but that is merely as a matter of transient convenience. He neither buys nor sells for eternity; for he has "bought the truth," and he "sells it not." He has received God to be his treasure, and his heart and his treasure too he has sent on ahead. On the other side of the river all his joys and all his treasures are to be found. Here he looks upon his earthly joys as things that are lent him—borrowed comforts. If his children die, he does not wonder: he knew that they were not immortal. If his friends are taken away, he is not astonished: he understood that they were born of women, and therefore would die like the rest. If his wealth takes to itself wings, he does not marvel: he knew that it was a bird of passage, and he is not astonished when, like the swallows, it flies elsewhere. He had long ago learned that the world is founded on the floods; and therefore, when it moves beneath him, he understands that this is the normal state of things, and he is not at all amazed, but rather wonders that the world is not all panic and confusion, since it is so unsubstantial. As Samson shook the Philistine temple, so shall the word of the Lord in the hour of final doom lay all nature prone in one common ruin; and vain is he who boasts of his possessions where all is waiting to be overturned. Brethren, are you doing so? Some of you professors, I am afraid, are living as though this were your rest. You do not wish to go home, do you? The nest is very comfortable: you have feathered it warmly. You have all that heart could wish. Here you would fain abide for ages. Ah! well, may this worldliness be cast out of you, and may you be seized with homesickness, that sweet disease which every true patriot ought to have, an insatiable longing for his dear fatherland. Have you never heard of the Swiss soldiers in the French army, who would fall sick when they heard the music of the song which reminded them of their native mountains, with their *châlets* and peasants, and the cowboy's song? Ill could they rest in sunny France, when their hearts were among Helvetia's rugged hills. Are there no sweet songs of Zion which remind you of that blessed land where our best friends, our kindred dwell, where God our Saviour reigns? If we are true citizens of the New Jerusalem, we shall long for that fair country, the home of the elect.

> "Ah! then my spirit faints
> To reach the land I love,
> The bright inheritance of saints,
> Jerusalem above."

It is your duty, Christian, and your privilege, to set loose by the things of earth, and say with Job,

"All the days of my appointed time I will wait"—like a mere waiter—"till my change come."

A second meaning of the text, however, is this: we must *wait expecting to be gone*—expecting daily and hourly to be summoned by our Lord. The proper and healthy estate of a Christian is to be anticipating the hour of his departure as near at hand. I have observed a great readiness to depart in many dying saints, but the same readiness ought to characterise living saints also. Our dear friend, Mr. James Smith, whom some of you remember as preaching the word at Park Street, and afterwards at Cheltenham, when I saw him, some little while before his departure, described himself thus: "You have seen a passenger that has gone to the station, taken his ticket, all his luggage brought in, all packed up, strapped, directed; and you have seen him with his ticket in his hand waiting till the train comes up. That," said he, "is exactly my condition. I am ready to go as soon as my heavenly Father pleases to come for me." And is not that how we should always live—waiting for the Lord's appearing? Mr. Whitefield used to say, of his well-known order and regularity, "I like to go to bed feeling that if I were to die to-night, there is not so much as a pair of my gloves out of their proper place." No Christian man ought to live without having his will made, and his estate put in proper condition, in case he should die suddenly. That hint may be useful to some of you who have neglected to set your house in order. No Christian man should live expecting to live another day. You cannot reckon upon an hour. You should rather be so ready, that if you were to walk out of this tabernacle and fall down dead upon the steps, it would not make any derangement in your affairs, because you are equally ready for life or death. One of our beloved sisters this week was walking down Paternoster Row: her mourning friends sit here, but they have no cause to mourn. A sudden faintness came over her: she was taken into a shop, and water was offered to her, but she could not drink; nay, she was already drinking of the water of the river of life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In a moment she closed her eyes to the sorrows of earth, and she opened them to the joys of heaven. When we visit the graves of those who have died in Christ, we ought not to weep for them; or, if we weep at all it should be with the regret that we are not yet admitted to the same reward. To "die daily" is the business of Christians. It is greatly wise to talk with our last hours, to make ourselves familiar with the grave. Our venerable forefathers had a queer habit of placing on the dressing-table a death's head, as a *memento mori*—either a real skull, or else an ornament fashioned in the form of it—to remind them of their end; yet, so far as I can gather, they were happy men and happy women, and none the less so because they familiarised themselves with death. A genuine Puritan, perhaps, never lived a day without considering the time when he should put off the garments of clay, and enter into rest; and these were the happiest and holiest of people, while this thoughtless generation, which banishes the thought of dying, is wretched amid all its hollow pretence of mirth. I exhort you, brethren, wait! wait ever for the trumpet call! Live as looking for the Lord to come and take you from this mortal state, waiting for the convoy of angels to waft you to the city of the blessed, in the land of the hereafter.

Nor is this all. Waiting means *enduring with patience*. We are put into this world for one appointed time of suffering, and in sacred patience we must abide steadfast amid the heat of the furnace. The life of many Christians is a long martyrdom: they are patiently to bear it. Here is the patience of the saints." Many believers go from one sickness to another, from one loss to another; but herein they fulfil their life's design, if through abundant grace they learn to bear their woes without a murmur, and to wait their appointed time without repining.

Serving is also another kind of waiting. The Lord Jesus gives us plain directions as to service in the parable recorded in the seventeenth of Luke: "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?" In this world we are to wait upon the Lord Jesus, running His errands, nursing His children, feeding His lambs, fighting His foes, repairing the walls of His vineyard, doing anything and everything which He may please to give us. And mark you, this is to be attended with perseverance, for Job says, "*All* the days of my appointed time will I wait." He would not be a servant sometimes, and then skulk home in idleness at another season, as if his term of service were ended. Every saint should say, "I will wait upon Thee, my God, as long as I live; so long as I have breath to draw, it shall be spent for Thee. So long as I have life to spend here below, I will spend it and be spent in Thy service." This should be the spirit of the Christian all his days, to his last day. Waiting still, like a holy man of God among the American Indians, who, when he lay dying, was observed to be teaching a poor little Indian to read his letters, and he said, "What a mercy, now I am laid aside from preaching, that I can teach this poor little child to read his letters; God has still something for me to do, and my prayer is, that I may not live an hour after I cannot do anything for Christ." May we be in just such a state of heart.

Moreover, to close this aspect of Christian life, we should be *desirous to be called home*. No Christian ought to desire to go out of the field of battle till the victory is won, nor to leave the field till the plough has gone up to the headland for the last time, but still he may desire to be at home, and must desire it because of the love which he bears his Lord. I cannot understand you if you do not sometimes sing that hymn—

> "My heart is with Him on His throne,
> And ill can brook delay;
> Each moment listening for the voice,
> 'Rise up, and come away.'"

Do you love your husband, wife, if you do not really wish to see him? Do you love your home, child, if you do not wish for the time when the school shall break up, and you shall leave for home? Oh! it is a weary world, even though our Lord makes it bearable by the sweet glimpses we get of Him through the telescope of faith, when He throws the lattices aside and shows Himself. Yet these sweets only cause us to long for more. I tell you, heavenly food on earth is a hunger-making thing; it makes you desire fresh supplies. You cannot sip from the

waters of grace on earth without longing to lie down at the well-head and drink your fill of glory. Do you never have a heart-sickness after heaven? Do you never feel the cords that bind you to Christ tugging at your heart-strings to draw you nearer? Oh, yes! You must feel this; and if you are mixing up these longings to be with Christ, these expectings to depart, with a patient endurance of the divine will, you have hit upon Job's true idea of life. May ye not only have the idea, but carry it out practically; may all the saints do so to the praise and glory of divine grace.

III. Now comes JOB'S ESTIMATE OF THE FUTURE. It is expressed in this word, "Till my change come." He refers to the two great changes which he views at one glance—the change of death when we shall "shuffle off this mortal coil"—the change of resurrection when we shall put on our imperishable garments—shall be girt about with eternal gladness.

Beloved, let it be observed that, in a certain sense, death and resurrection are not a change to a Christian: they are not a change as to his *identity*. The same man who lives here will live for ever. The same saint who serves God on earth will wake up in the image of Christ, to serve Him day and night in His temple, and that identity will exist, not only with regard to the soul, but the body; "My eyes shall see Him and not another." These very eyes which have wept for sin, shall see the King in His beauty; and these hands which here have served the Lord, shall embrace Him in His glory. Do not think that death will destroy the identity of the resurrection body: it will be as much the same as the full-blown flower is the same as the seed out of which it grew. There will be a mighty development, but it will still be the same. *It* is sown a natural body, and the same *it* is raised a spiritual body. There will also be to the regenerate no change as to his vitality. We are quickened now by the life of Christ, which is the same life that will quicken us in heaven; the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life." He has it now—the same life which he is to live in heaven, where it will be more developed, more glorious, but still the same.

There will be no difference in the Christian's object in life when he gets to heaven. He lives to serve God here: he will live for the same end and aim there. Here holiness is his delight; it shall be his delight there. And his occupation shall not change either. He served his Master like a waiting-servant during his day on earth: he will be taken up to serve Him day and night in His temple.

And the Christian will not experience a very great change as to his companions. Here on earth the excellent of the earth are all his delight; Christ Jesus his Elder Brother abides with him; the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is resident within him; he communes with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The fact is, heaven and earth to the Christian are the same house, only the one is the lower floor, and the other is the upper storey; the one is so low and near the ground, that sometimes the water of trouble rushes into it, and the windows of the rooms below are so dark, that but a small degree of the light of heaven ever enters them, and the view is contracted; but the other rooms upstairs have a fair view, and the sun shines always through its windows, and it is furnished with a matchless skill; but still it is the same house. Heaven is thus but a slight change in some respects, yet it *is* a change, and we shall see that readily enough.

To the Christian it will be a change *of place*. He will be away from the dull and coarse materialism of this defiled, sin-stricken earth, where thorns and thistles grow, and he will arrive at the place where the inhabitants shall no more say I am sick—the paradise of God, where flowers wither not. He will change his *neighbourhood*. He is vexed here with the ungodly conversation of the wicked; he often finds his neighbours to be like the men of Sodom, exceeding vile; but there angels shall be fellow-citizens with him, and he shall commune with the spirits of the just made perfect. No vain discourse shall vex his ear; no sin shall come before him to disgust his mind; he shall not be a stranger in a strange land, but a child at home. There, too, will be a great change as to his *outward circumstances*. No sweat will need to be wiped from his brow, no tear from his eye. There are no funeral knells to be heard in heaven; no open graves to be filled with the dead. In heaven there is no poverty, no proud man's scorn, no oppressor's heavy heel, no persecutor's fiery brand; but there "the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest."

Specially will it be a change to the Christian as to that which will be *within him*. No body of this death to hamper him; no infirmities to cramp him; no wandering thoughts to disturb his devotion; no birds to come down upon the sacrifice, needing to be driven away. As the body shall be free from the corruption which engendereth death, so shall the soul be free from the corruption which engendereth strife against the new law which is in the believer's members. He shall be perfectly free from sin. There will be this change too, that he will be delivered from that dog of hell who once howled in his ears: as the world will be afar off, and cannot tempt, so Satan will be afar off, and cannot molest. A change indeed it will be, in an especial manner, to some. Have you ever visited the hospital, and sat by the side of the poor Christian woman who has lain upon that bed for months—her hearing almost gone, her sight failing, scarcely able to breathe, palpitations of the heart, life a protracted agony? Oh! what a change from the bed of languishing to the throne of God! What a difference between that hospital, with its sounds of sickness and sorrow, and yonder New Jerusalem and the shout of them that triumph, the song of them that feast! What an escape from the dying bed to the living glory—from the glazing eye, and the wasting frame, and the cold death-sweat, to the glory which excelleth, and the harps of angels, and the songs of the glorified! What a change too, for some of the poor, for some of you sons of penury who are here this morning, from that hard work which scarcely knows a pause, from those weary fingers, and that flying needle, and that palpitating heart; from that sleep which gives but little rest, because the toil begins so soon that it seems to pervade and injure the sleep itself. What an exchange from that naked room, that unfurnished table! that cup which, so far from running over, you find it difficult to fill! from all these various pains and woes that penury is heir to, to the wealth and happiness of paradise! What a change for you, to the mansions of the blessed, and the crowns of immortality, and the company of the princes of the blood royal, with whom you shall dwell for ever! And what a change, again, for the persecuted! I know how a father's angry

word breaks your heart, and how a husband's cruel remarks grieve you; but you shall soon escape from it all. The jeer of the workshop sometimes reminds you of the cruel mockings you have often read of. What a change for you to be in sweet company, where friends shall cheer and make you glad! My brethren, what a leap it must have been for the martyrs, right away from their stakes to their thrones! What a change for the men who rotted in dungeons till the moss grew on their eyelids, to the immortal beauty of the fairest of the fair, midst the bright ones doubly bright! What a change!

Right well, good patriarch didst thou use the term, for it is the greatest of all changes. If you require a commentary upon this word "change," turn to the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, and read it through; we read it in your hearing just now. You will there see that all that needs to be changed, will be changed. All that must be changed to make the believer perfectly blessed, will be transformed and transfigured by the Master. If you desire a glimpse of what we shall be in heaven, remember the face of Moses when it glowed so that he covered it with a veil! remember Stephen's face when they looked upon him and saw as it were the face of an angel! remember our Lord transfigured till He was whiter than any fuller could make Him! They were transient gleams and glimpses of the beatific glory which shall surround and environ every one of the blessed ere long.

My brethren, perhaps to you it will be a sudden change. Last Sunday our sister sat here; this Sunday she sits there in heaven. Others, too, have gone this week to their home. I suppose week by week about two in this congregation die almost as regularly as I come into this pulpit. So ye melt away one after the other, and ye disappear; but blessed thought if, when ye disappear, it is to shine for ever in heaven! Well, let the change come suddenly. There is much to be envied in sudden death. I never could understand why it should be put in the litany, "From sudden death, good Lord deliver us." O brethren, sudden death may God send to us so long as we are but prepared, for then we miss the pain of sickness in the gradual breaking down of the frame. It must be desirable, a choice favour which God only gives to some of His peculiarly beloved ones: a thing to pray for, not to pray against. Well it may be sudden. There is this about it, however, that if we be in Christ, let it come suddenly, we are fully prepared, "For ye are complete in Him." "He that believeth hath everlasting life." "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Death has lost all its terror to you who are in Christ. And there is one very sweet thought to my mind, and that though a change, it is the last change. Glory be to God, there will be no more of it, once changed into the likeness of Christ, and there will be no more changes, but immortality for ever.

"For ever with the Lord."

We may well add—

"Amen! so let it be."

O you who have no hope in Jesus, death must be to you a gloomy thing indeed! It puts out your candle and leaves you for ever in the dark. But you who have a good hope through grace, and have built your house upon the rock, you may joyfully look forward to the end of your appointed days, waiting until your change come, blessing God that it will come in its appointed time, and that when it comes it will be a change for the better to you in all respects—a change which shall never be followed by another change, a change which shall make you like your Lord for ever and ever!

May God give His blessing! Amen.

OUR LAST JOURNEY

"When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return."—Job xvi. 22.

THE season of the year may well remind us of our mortality. The corn, which a few weeks ago was green and vigorous, has now for the most part yielded to the sickle; many flowers which adorned our gardens have exchanged their bloom for ripening seed; the year has commenced to die, its glory and prime have gone. The dews of evening are heavy, and the mists linger in the morning, for the summer heat is declining. The leaves are just upon the turn, and the fall of the year is close at hand. These are creation's warnings, reminding us that the Lord hath set a harvest for us, and that we all do fade as a leaf. Nature hath her prophets as well as revelation, and autumn in his rugged garb is one of them. He has now come to us with this solemn message, "The harvest is passed and the summer is ended; prepare to meet your God!"

In additions to the warnings of nature, we have been saluted by voices from divine providence. Loud calls have come to us of late from almost every part of our church work. Death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces. Death, who seldom comes into the Orphanage, has forced his cruel hand into our nest of young ones, and has taken thence the widow's child. A funeral has left our gates, and little boys have gathered around a grave to see one like themselves laid in the silent earth. Death has set his axe also against the College, and has cut down one of our growing trees, upon which there were abundant tokens of future fruitfulness. Our brother Winter had sharpened his sword for the conflict, and was just about to leave us for actual service, when in a few days his strength departed, and he was not. Death has come also among the ministers who were once our students, and were our crown of rejoicing as labourers for the Lord. One of the ablest and best of them has put a whole town in mourning for he has been taken home at an early age, when he had already become foremost for usefulness. Middlesborough mourns our brother Priter with no common sorrow. Beyond all this, almost every day we have report of this one and that one in the membership and in the

congregation going home. These dying ones are God's voices to us, and I should be unworthy of addressing you if I did not first hear them in the silence of my own soul, and then endeavour to interpret them to you. All these things bring to my mind the language of our text, "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return"; will they not have the same effect upon you? He that hath ears to hear let him hear.

My subject is one upon which it would be quite impossible to say anything new, since death is neither novel nor uncommon, for from the days of Abel until now it has honeycombed the earth with graves. Nor need I seek out elegancies of speech, for these would be incongruous with such a theme. When we speak of eternal things the less attempt we make at fine language the better; such solemn topics are most powerful when suffered to have their own natural voice and speak for themselves. Begone all trifling thoughts! Let the mind put off all gay apparel, and wear awhile the shroud. Instead of rising with gaiety, let the imagination bow with solemnity, for now we have to do with the dying chamber, and the grave, and the judgment throne. The blast of the archangel's trumpet is ringing in our ears, and we are to anticipate the day in which we shall receive our final sentence from the Judge of all the earth. Solemnity, therefore, should possess our minds. Let us shut out the present world and become familiar with the world to come. Very simple and self-evident will be the considerations which I shall set before you, but if already moved to a solemn frame of mind, you will be prepared to derive profit from them. May God the Holy Spirit bless the word, and by its means prepare us for our last remove, of which the text speaks so plainly.

First then, let us *realize our inevitable journey*—"I shall go the way whence I shall not return." Secondly, *let us contemplate its nearness*—"When a few years are come." Thirdly, let us *consider our non-return from the journey*—"Whence I shall not return"; and then we shall close in the fourth place by *enquiring whither we are going.* We are going whence we shall not return, but to what place are we bound? It is endless bliss or ceaseless woe?

I. First then let us REALIZE OUR INEVITABLE JOURNEY. I desire that these words may be earnestly taken up in a personal manner by each of us. The language is in the singular number. "*I* shall go the way whence I shall not return. Let us apply it each one to himself. The fact that all men are mortal has little power over our mind, for we always make a tacit exception and put off the evil day for ourselves. We own ourselves mortal, but do not expect to die just now. Even the aged look forward to a continuance of life, and the consumptive dream of possible recovery. I will not, therefore, remind you so much of the general truth, but place before you the individual, pointed, personal declaration of the text. "I," the preacher; you, each one of you looking upon the preacher now,—"*I* shall go the way whence *I* shall not return." As surely as you live you will die. It may help you to realise this fact if I ask you to accompany me first of all into the chamber of *a dying man*, and as you look upon him I entreat you to remember that you yourself will lie there in a like case ere long. It is sometimes my duty, and a very hard and painful task it is, to communicate to sick and dying persons the fact that it is not possible that they should recover. One beats about the bush a little, but at last you come with tenderness to the sad point and say, "Friend, do you know that there is very little hope, if any, that you can recover? In fact, it is as nearly certain as a thing can be that you must die. Your physicians are compelled to believe that your end is near." The news is taken in such different ways: sometimes it is not believed, at other times it occasions a thrill of pain which wounds your heart and cuts your soul to the quick. In many cases it is received with calm, patient resignation, but frequently have I seen the tidings accepted with joy, and the man of God has said, "It is a thing I have longed for. Now shall I be rid of this weary pain, and see the face of Him whom my soul loveth." Yet it is a solemn business, take it how you may—solemn to those who tell the news, and more solemn still to those who hear it. Look, then, at the poor dying man, wasting away before your eyes. He *must* now go to his long home. He *must* go. No one now can delay his departure. The chariot is at the door. If he could offer all the gold of the Indies he could not bribe inexorable death. No, he may be master of a mint of treasure, but it cannot buy him an hour's life: his time is come, and he *must* go. His beloved wife would fain detain him, but he must be torn from her embrace. His children weep, but he must not stay to dry their tears. A kind friend would almost make an exchange, and die in his stead, but there can be no proxies. There is no discharge in this war. It is appointed unto all men once to die, and die he *must.* The hour is come! His pulse is slow! His eye is glazing! Look at him! Do you not feel for a man in such solemn circumstances? There must you also lie, and thus must you also depart. I ask you to place yourself in his stead, and try this morning to feel as he must feel, seeing it is absolutely certain that to such a condition you also must come, unless, indeed, the Lord should descend from heaven with a shout at once, of which we know so little as to when it may be.

How the individuality of a dying man comes out in his dying hour! What an important being he becomes! You think more of that one man while dying than of all the thousands of the living who parade our streets. No matter who he is, he is dying, and we tread softly. Poor man, he must now die, and die alone. And now how important his character becomes! His life, his own life, is now being put into the balance, and he is looking back upon it; it is the most important thing in the universe to him. His outward circumstances are now a small matter, his life is the main consideration. Was he righteous or wicked? a fearer of God or a despiser of His grace? Be he rich or be he poor, his rank and station are subjects of indifference. The hangings of the bed are of very small account, the man who lies there is the sole concern. Whether he is now waited upon by the best physician, hired by the costliest fee, or whether he lies in the hospital tended by gentle charity, it is the man himself, the man's soul, the man's personal character that is now seen in all its grandeur, demanding his whole thought. Be he peer or be he peasant, be he king or be he serf, it is much the same to each man to die. Differences on the dying bed arise out of character and not out of rank. Now he has to face for himself the great things of eternity, and cannot leave them to another. He used to hear about eternity as one of the mass, but now he has to experience it alone, and by himself. Into the cold river his own feet must descend, the cool waves must chill his blood, death must close his eye, and into the

unknown future he must plunge alone. No brother's hand can grasp his hand when he has quitted the body, no fellow-mortal can fly side by side with him through the tracks unknown. How vividly the individuality of the man comes out, and the need of a personal interest in the great salvation. How much it is to be desired that it could be made quite as plain under happier circumstances. And yet how clear it is that each one of us must believe in the Saviour for himself, each serve God personally, and each have a good hope through grace wrought in his own soul. Will men never think of this till they come to die?

And now that candle burning in the sick man's chamber sheds a strange light upon his past life. Some said he was fortunate, but if he was sinful where is his good fortune? Men said he was a poor unsuccessful muddler, but he will be worth as much in a short time as if he had been the most prudent, and had prospered in the world, for here men come to a level. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked must I return thither." So must it be. In death the financial element looks contemptible, and *the moral and the spiritual come to be most esteemed.* How did he live? What were his thoughts? What was his heart towards God? Did he repent of sin? Does he still repent? Does he believe in Jesus? Is he resting upon the finished work of Christ or is he not? He, perhaps, failed to ask himself some of those questions a little while ago, but now, if he be in his sober senses, he is compelled to put his soul through its paces. How does his heart answer when cross-examined? Now he must reach down the accounts, the memoranda, and the day-book of his life, and he must look to what he did and what he was, and what he is. Ah me! how will the reckoning end? What will be the sum total? It matters little what he was before his fellow-men, whose judgments are fallible, but the question is, what was he before the all-searching eye of the Most High God? Such an account *you* will have to render.

The individuality of the man is clear, and the man's character before God, and now it is also evident that *death tests all things.* If you look upon this poor dying man you see that he is past the time for pretences and shams. You yourself, if you knew but little of him before, feel very concerned to know whether the religion he professed was truthful or not, whether he was really regenerate or merely dreamed that he was so. If *you* wish to answer that question, how much more does that poor dying man want to know for himself? Here let me tell you that very much of the comfort with which we wrap ourselves up in days of health proves to be very sorry stuff when we come to die. While you are in good health and strength you often derive a measure of peace of mind from things which will not stand the fiery ordeal of an approaching eternity. Some of the best men that ever lived have found this out. You may know the name of Mr. Durham, the author of a famous book on Solomon's Song, one of the most earnest of Scotland's ancient preachers. Some days before he died he seemed to be in some perplexity about his future well-being, and said to his friend Mr. Carstairs, "Dear brother, for all that I have written or preached, there is but one Scripture which I can now remember or dare grip unto now that I am hastening to the grave. It is this—'Whosoever cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.' Pray tell me if I dare lay the weight of my salvation upon it." Mr. Carstairs justly replied, "Brother, you may depend upon it, though you had a thousand salvations at hazard." You see it was a plain, sinner's text that he rested on. Just as Dr. Guthrie wanted them to sing a bairn's hymn, so do dying saints need the plain elementary doctrines of the gospel to rest upon. Those fine ideas and dainty notions of our nearing perfection and becoming completely sanctified dissolve like the hoar frost in the sun, when we come face to face with eternity. Those grand excitements, those high enjoyments, and those deep experiences, which lead us to think ourselves to be somebodies in the church of God are of small account in dying moments. Men cannot die on stilts. Death finds out the truth of our condition and blows away with his cold breath a heap of chaff which we thought to be good wheat. Then a man has to look to the mercy of God, to the blood of the covenant and to the promises of the gospel, and to cling as a poor needy, guilty sinner to free, rich, sovereign grace, or else his spirit will utterly sink. When life is ebbing nothing will do but the faithful saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I have heard children of God speak in their last moments just as seeking souls speak. They come to God again just as they came at first, and they find in Jesus all their hope. Dying men want realities, they want a sinner's Saviour, they want atonement for guilt, for so only can they pass out of the world with hope. O, brethren, follow after that which is solid and real, for nothing else will serve your turn when you come to die.

Still keep your eye on that dying man whom I have tried to picture—he is vividly before me now. He must go: there is no alternative. He cannot resist the power which now summons him to depart. Willing or unwilling, it matters not, *he must go.* The sheriff's officer has him in his grip, and he *must* go. Is he prepared? Pray God he may be; but whether he be so or not it makes no difference, he must leave all and take his journey. Has he children dependent upon him, and a wife who needs his support? Their necessities cannot detain him, he *must* go. Has he made his will, or has he left all his business affairs in a tangle? Whichever it is, he must go. The tide which bears all before it has seized his barque, and even now it drifts adown the stream.

That man who must go is yourself, projected only a little way further into time, Can you not realize what will certainly be the fact? Can you not already hear the ticking of the watch at your bed-head in the silence of your last night? Can you not anticipate that mysterious consultation of physicians, when each one owns to his fellows his incompetence to suggest a remedy. It is clear that the hour is come: you must go. This must happen to every mortal man and woman sitting or standing in this house this morning. Will you not lay it to heart?

Now survey another scene to help you to realize your departure. Look no longer on the dying, but bend over *the dead.* It is all over now. He has breathed his last, and he now lies upstairs alone in the darkened chamber. A loving one has stolen in and tremblingly lifted the coffin lid to gaze once more upon the dear face, and say another adieu; but there can be no more of this. The friends have gathered, and the mourners must go through the streets and bear him to the tomb. *That funeral is yours.*

The corpse is borne to the grave, and on the road it silently preaches to all passers by. Archbishop

Leighton one morning was asked by a friend, "Have you heard a sermon?" He said, "No, but I met a sermon, for I met a dead man carried out to be buried." Let every funeral be a discourse to you. Within a short time to each one of us it will happen that within the narrow limits of the coffin we must lie, and then will come for us the opened grave, the lowering of the corpse, and the gathering of mourners around it. Upon your coffin lid and mine the mould shall fall—"Earth to earth, dust to dust, and ashes to ashes." A green mound, a daisy or two amid the grass, a friend to bring a few fading flowers to scatter on our graves ever and anon; perhaps a head-stone, perhaps not,—to this we must all come. "Here he lies" is the universal epitaph. On the lap of earth *you* will lie; there shall I also lie. Do realize it; it is so near, so sure—when a few years shall come we shall be with the unnumbered throng.

Now let your realization go a little further. Can you picture the spirit of a man as it leaves the body? I confess my imagination does not enable me to picture it to myself, and certainly my words are not competent to convey to you what little I can realize to my mind. The soul finds itself rid of materialism; how will it feel when it has shaken itself loose of its shell of clay? I cannot tell. We all love this earthly house of our tabernacle, and leave it with reluctance.

> "For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
> This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
> Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
> Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?"

But it does not matter what lingering looks we cast, our soul will have done with the body in its present fashion, and it must for a while dwell apart from all materialism. At once it must come before God. Its state will immediately after death be known to it beyond a question. In a moment it will know beyond all doubt whether it is accepted before God, and beyond all hope it will know whether it is reprobate and condemned. That knowledge will at once commence its happiness, a happiness which will be increased as ages roll on; or that knowledge will at once commence its misery, which will deepen evermore. The soul will abide in the disembodied state for a while, and then will come the clarion note of the resurrection trumpet, and the body shall rise again to be again inhabited by the soul. What will the meeting be? What will be the sensation of the remarriage of mind with matter, of soul with body? We know not. The resurrection is the blessed hope of the Christian, but it is a terrible dread to the ungodly. The soul shall never more return to the world's cares, nor to the world at all as the world now is, but it shall again inhabit the body, and stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the verdict from the lips of Him who is appointed Judge of all mankind.

The divine verdict is given, and the soul must continue its journey. Still onward must it go: whether accepted or condemned, onward it must go. Onward, exulting in a bliss unspeakable like to the divine, if Christ pronounce it blessed; onward, in a misery unutterable if Christ pronounce it "cursed." *I* do not know whether you are able in imagination to place yourself in such a condition, but in such a condition you will certainly be found ere long. You will be stripped of this house of clay, and so you will die, but you will live again, live for ever. You will live to be judged, to be justified or to be condemned, and then you will live for ever, in happiness or torment, *and all this you will know in a short time to come.*

Thus I have helped you as best I could, and I fear but poorly, to realize the inevitable journey.

II. Now, let us very briefly CONTEMPLATE ITS MEANING. Very soon we shall have to start upon our solemn and mysterious pilgrimage. If we should fulfil the entire tale of our years the allotted period of human life is but short. The text in the Hebrew speaks of "years of number": they are so few that a child may count them. At the commencement of life the view before us looks like an endless avenue, but as we advance along the path the end seems very near, and we perceive how short our time is. Middle life has but a short view, either backwards or forwards. As for some of you, upon whom age is descending, you should be well enough aware how short for certain your time for lingering here must be. Your lease has almost run out; can you doubt it?

What are seventy or eighty years, if we live so long? But then we are further warned by the consideration that we cannot safely reckon upon the whole of that brief period, for children are carried away and young men are cut down by the scythe; and we see frequently the maiden before she reaches the full bloom of her years carried off, with death as her bridegroom. Does not the text say, "a few years"? Read it months, read it days, read it hours, read it minutes, for we cannot tell how soon we must set sail for the far-off land. In a short time we must join the great caravan, and cross the desert to a land whence we shall not return. Life is so short, that we have scarce begun to live ere we are called to die.

Hence, dear brethren, if there is anything grievous to be borne, we may well bear it cheerfully, for it cannot last long. When a few years are come we shall be gone from the thorn and the briar which now prick and wound. Hence, too, if there is any work to be done for Jesus let us do it at once, or else we shall never do it, for when a few years are come we shall have gone whence we shall not return. Hence, too, if there be salvation to be sought let us seek it, for soon we shall be where salvation is no more proclaimed. Hence, again, if worldly goods are possessed by us let us hold them very loosely, for in a short time we must leave them. Let us lay them out for God's glory, for our stewardship will not last for long, and we shall soon have to give an account. Hence, above all things, the need of being always prepared to die. Oh, brothers, he who is to die next had need be ready. Who is he? An old man who used to sell goods from house to house had an eccentric cry of his own, which he was wont to utter whenever he sold goods at the door. He would cry out aloud, "Who'll be the next? Who'll be the next?" One day a funeral passed just as he had given out his usual cry, and strange enough sounded the question—"Who'll be the next?" I may ask with solemn emphasis whenever the cemetery's gates are opened, and the funeral passes through, "Who will be the next? Who will be the next?" Your hymn says, "Who will be the next to follow Jesus?" but I must ask this morning, "Who will be the next among us to be carried to the silent tomb?" To be ready to depart is wisdom. It is the mark of the beast that it looks not beyond the present mouthful of grass which it crops from the sward; it never thinks of the butcher's knife and the shambles. Be not as the brutes which perish, but, being gifted with minds,

use them to look before you. It is the mark of the fool that he never looks before he leaps, but is content with present enjoyments though they leave him penniless. Be not as the fool, but be prudent and look before you, and consider your latter end. It is the mark of the worldling that he confines his thoughts within the narrow range of time: the Christian looks into the everlasting future as an immortal being should do. Be not worldlings, lest ye perish with them.

May God make you wise unto salvation! To be prepared to die is an immediate duty, will you neglect it? Some imagine that to be prepared to die would involve a life of perpetual gloom. If it did so it were well to face it. When a man comes to die and finds himself prepared, even if he had endured fifty years of perpetual anguish of heart, and had denied himself every worldly comfort, he would think himself well repaid to have the prospect of a blessed future. Heaven at any price is well secured. A good hope through grace is worth a thousand worlds. But it is a mistake to suppose that melancholy attends upon fitness to die. Why should it? To be unprepared for death, and to know that it may come at any moment, is a fair reason for sadness, but to have that great matter secure must surely be a source of joy. To be prepared to die is to be prepared to live; to be ready for eternity is in the best sense to be ready for time. Who so fit to live on earth as the man who is fit to live in heaven? Who hath brightness of the eye? Is it not the man who has looked within the gate of pearl, and seen his place prepared among the blessed? Who hath lightness of heart? Is it not the man who is unloaded of his sin, and has found mercy through the blood of Christ? Who can go to his bed and sleep in peace and wake with joy—who but the man that is reconciled to God by the death of His Son? Who hath the best of this world as well as the world to come? Is it not he to whom death has now become a changed thing, a cherub that has lost its way—no longer destruction, but rather development, and admission into a higher and nobler life? Since readiness for death is peace and happiness, and is above measure needful in prospect of the eternal state, let us see to it at once. We are to be gone so soon let us gird up our loins for our solemn journey. There is no time to spare. The end is drawing near. Every flying moment is hastening on our last hour. It is high time to awake out of sleep, and in earnest make ready to meet the Bridegroom, who is already on His way.

III. Now, thirdly, I want you to CONSIDER THE FACT THAT WE SHALL NOT RETURN—"When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return." To the occupations of life—to sow and reap, and mow; to the abodes of life—to the store and to the country house; to the pleasures of life,—the festival and the family, we shall not return. To the engagements of the sanctuary, the communion table, the pulpit, or the pew, we shall not return. To the chamber of love, to the hearth of affection, to the walk of friendship, we shall not return. To hopes and fears, and joys, and pains, we shall not return. To summer's flowers and winter's snows we shall not return. To our brothers, children, husband, or wife, we shall not return. To nothing that is done under the sun shall we return. Soul, unsaved soul, to the land of the gospel and the mercy seat thou shalt not return. If you die unsaved you will not be able to come back to the house of God to hear again the ministry of reconciliation; you will hear no more invitations and expostulations, neither will Jesus be set before you as your hope. You will not be able to come back to the prayer-meeting and to the earnest entreaties of a godly mother and other loving friends, nor even back to your Bible and to the opportunity of searching it that you may find eternal life. You will not return to find space for repentance, nor a second opportunity for prayer, nor another season for believing in Jesus. It shall be said concerning you, "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still." Where the tree falleth there must it lie. Once pass the barriers of life unsaved, and ye cannot return to a new probation. The die is cast.

Beloved Christian friends, we need not wish to return. What is there here that should either tempt us to stay in this world or induce us to return to it if we could? Still, I could suppose in a future state some reasons for wishing to return. I can suppose we might have it in our hearts, for instance, to wish to undo the mischief which we did in life. If a dying man should receive mercy in his last moments, one might imagine him as desiring to return to earth to tell the glad tidings and beseech his family and friends to seek salvation. Who would not wish for once to plead with his children if he felt that he had neglected his duty to them. A man might wish, even if he were in the unquenchable flame, to come back to earth or to send a messenger, as the rich man did, to tell his brethren, lest they should come into the place of torment. Selfishness might wish to be spared the reproaches of those we helped to ruin. But you cannot come back or send back to undo your ill deeds. Therefore seek to mend matters now. Avoid the doing of evil, and as for that which is already done, confess it before God, and seek to administer the antidote by an earnest and godly life.

You cannot come back to carry out those good resolutions, which as yet are as unripe fruit. Young man, you mean to do good some day, do you not? You have it in your heart to lead a grand life. Well, you must do it now, for you cannot come back to revise your conduct; it will not be possible to correct and amend it, for death stereotypes all. After death you cannot return to develop your promises into performances. Therefore bestir yourself betimes. We shall not be able to come back to finish the work we have begun; the half-built house will never be completed by our labour. We have many projects which are but half developed, we had better proceed with them or they will never be completed. If we leave our ships on the stocks we shall not be able to return to launch them. When our lives below are at an end we have reached the *finis* of our earthly career.

Neither can we come back to rectify any mistake we have made in our life-work, nor even return to look after it, in order to preserve that which was good in it. I sometimes think if I were in heaven I should almost wish to visit my work at the Tabernacle, to see whether it will abide the test of time and prosper when I am gone. Will you keep to the truth? Will you hold to the grand old doctrines of the gospel? Or will this church, like so many others, go astray from the simplicity of its faith, and set up gaudy services and false doctrine? Methinks I should turn over in my grave if such a thing could be. God forbid it! But there will be no coming back, and therefore we must build well, rejecting all wood, hay and stubble, using nothing but gold, silver, and

precious stones. We must build quickly to get the work done, but fast as we labour we must do it surely and honestly and thoroughly, for the fire will try it when we are gone. It will be a pity that our work should suffer loss, even though we ourselves should be saved. We cannot return to save the burning mass, nor to rebuild the ruin, but we shall, doubtless, see and know what comes of it. "Establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."

Therefore, dear brother, if your hand findeth anything to do, do it at once with all your might. If your heart suggests anything that should be done, let it be done at once; see to the bringing up of your children, the conversion of your neighbours, the laying out of your talents for Christ, the consecration of your substance, the propagation of the precious truth which has been revealed to you. If a good work is to be done, do it! Do it, do it at once. The curfew of time is sounding. Your own vesper bell is ringing out, and these are the words which I set to its music —"What thou doest do quickly, for when a few years are come, thou must go whither thou wilt not return." Again I say, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

IV. And now, lastly, let us ENQUIRE WHITHER WE SHALL GO? In some respects it happeneth alike to all, for all go upon the long journey. All go to the grave, which is the place of all living. It matters very little where our grave shall be, whether beneath a weeping willow or in the solemn deeps: the best of all, I think, that can happen to any of us is to be laid where we shall quickly moulder into the common earth, that none may afterwards profane our bones; but if they do, what matters it? we shall know nothing of it, and precious in the sight of the Lord will our dust be, though it be trodden under foot or blown of the winds. We shall all die, and then we shall all pass into the disembodied state. But of what character shall my death be and where shall I spend the time of waiting? May I urge upon you to ask yourselves this question?. May I press a second enquiry upon you? If at this very instant you were to leave your body where would your soul be? You may know very readily. Where does it delight to be now? I once visited an aged Christian woman who said to me when she was near death, "Sir, I do not think that God will appoint me my portion with the ungodly, for I could never bear their company; and I do hope I shall be among His people, though I am very unworthy, for I never was so happy as when I was with them." Yes, you will keep the same company for ever. The sheep shall be with the sheep, and the goats with the goats. Your delight prophesies your destiny. What you have chosen here shall be your portion hereafter. The scoffer, the drunkard, the liar, the unchaste shall be your comrades in hell if they were so here. If you love sin you shall be steeped up to the throat in it, and it shall burn around you like liquid fire. If you have loved the wages of unrighteousness, you shall receive them in full tale, for the wages of sin is death, and death shall rage about you and gnaw you with his undying worm. But if your delights have been with your God, you shall dwell with Him. If you have rejoiced in Christ Jesus, you shall reign with Him, and if you have loved His people, you shall abide with them for ever. Your disembodied state shall be spent either with Christ, and His people or with sin and sinners. If not in paradise with Jesus, you know where you must lie. Did not our Lord Himself tell us of the great gulf which cannot be passed, and of the torment of those upon the other side? *You* may know it all before yon clock strikes again. Do think of it and tremble.

Then, as I have already stated, we shall all go forward in our journey towards resurrection. We shall, every one of us, stand in the latter day upon the earth. To the righteous this is the greatest joy. "I know that my next of kin still liveth, and though after my skin worms devour this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Oh, blessed hope, it were worth while to die with this prospect. A child of God who died not long ago said to one who stood by, "I have enjoyed more in the two hours I have been dying than in the fifty years that I was living. It is so blessed a thing to die, for I have a clear prospect of the resurrection." But, oh, to have no blessed resurrection before you, but instead thereof the certainty of rising to shame and to everlasting contempt; rising so that both body and soul may be cast into hell, till the tongue that now dares to curse will ask in vain for a drop of water to cool its burnings, and every limb shall be made to suffer because it yielded itself up to be an instrument of unrighteousness and of rebellion against God. Which shall your resurrection be—a blessing or a horror? God help you to decide. Yea, may the Holy Ghost so work upon your heart and will that you may lay hold on Jesus at once and find eternal life in Him.

Speedily shall come the great and terrible scene of the judgment, when all that are in the earth and in the sea shall stand before the great white throne. What an assemblage! These mighty gatherings in the Tabernacle, and the crowds we hear of on great festival days, are but as a drop in a bucket compared with the innumerable hordes of men that shall spring up from their graves when the last trumpet soundeth. If you can think of anything, then, besides your Judge, you will cast your eye as far as you can see, and over hill and dale you will see myriads of our race. Men have been so numerous a host that they will cover every speck of earth; yea, and the sea itself shall yield for once a solid basis for them to stand upon, and all shall teem like a hive when the bees swarm around it, the world shall appear black with the multitude of men. And what a sight when the Assessor shall sit upon His throne, and He shall begin to divide them as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. To the right! To the left! Blessed! Cursed! Come! Depart! Oh, the terror of that Voice which shall pronounce a separate sentence upon each of the two great classes into which the population of earth shall then be divided. On which side would you be if now, instead of this poor voice saluting your ears, there should suddenly be a transformation scene, and Christ should sit upon His throne, and you be there and I be there to be judged before Him?

And then, after the judgment cometh the end, but what then? Do not flatter yourselves with the idea, ye ungodly, that ye shall be annihilated. You have chosen sin, you have deliberately rejected Christ, and if you continue to do so you have settled your own destiny, and settled it for ever. Look the danger in the face like honest men, and then escape from the wrath to come.

But if you believe in Jesus now, look your future in the face and rejoice, for your redemption draweth

nigh. See body and soul together, and both perfect, and Christ the Judge acquitting you, and saying, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." Can you conceive your overflowing joy, your ecstatic delight? The presence of angels, the fellowship of perfect saints, the sight of your Saviour, near communion with your God, and all this for ever and for ever! Why, methinks it makes me willing to use my solemn text no longer as a dirge, but as a sonnet, and say right joyously, "When a few years are come, I shall go whence I shall not return, nor ever wish to return, but shall be for ever with the Lord." Amen, so let it be.

THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

"The righteous also shall hold on his way."—Job xvii. 9.

THE man who is righteous before God has a way of his own. It is not the way of the flesh, nor the way of the world; it is a way marked out for him by the divine command, in which he walks by faith. It is the King's highway of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it: only the ransomed of the Lord shall walk there, and these shall find it a path of separation from the world. Once entered upon the way of life, the pilgrim must persevere in it or perish, for thus saith the Lord, "If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." Perseverance in the path of faith and holiness is a necessity of the Christian, for only "he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." It is in vain to spring up quickly like the seed that was sown upon the rock, and then by-and-by to wither when the sun is up; that would but prove that such a plant has no root in itself, but "the trees of the Lord are full of sap," and they abide and continue and bring forth fruit, even in old age, to show that the Lord is upright. There is a great difference between nominal Christianity and real Christianity, and this is generally seen in the failure of the one and the continuance of the other. Now, the declaration of the text is that the truly righteous man shall hold on his way; he shall not go back, he shall not leap the hedges and wander to the right hand or the left, he shall not lie down in idleness, neither shall he faint and cease to go upon his journey; but he "shall hold on his way." It will frequently be very difficult for him to do so, but he will have such resolution, such power of inward grace given him, that he will "hold on his way," with stern determination, as though he held on by his teeth, resolving never to let go. Perhaps he may not always travel with equal speed; it is not said that he shall hold on his *pace*, but he shall hold on his *way*. There are times when we run and are not weary, and anon when we walk are thankful that we do not faint; aye, and there are periods when we are glad to go on all fours and creep upward with pain; but still we prove that "the righteous shall hold on his way." Under all difficulties the face of the man whom God has justified is steadfastly set towards Jerusalem; nor will he turn aside till his eyes shall see the King in His beauty.

This is a great wonder. It is a marvel that any man should be a Christian at all, and a greater wonder that he should continue so. Consider the weakness of the flesh, the strength of inward corruption, the fury of Satanic temptation, the seductions of wealth and the pride of life, the world and the fashion thereof: all these things are against us, and yet behold, "greater is He that is for us than all they that be against us," and defying sin, and Satan, and death, and hell, the righteous holds on his way.

I take our text as accurately setting forth the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. "The righteous shall hold on his way." Years ago when there was an earnest, and even a bitter controversy between Calvinists and Arminians it was the habit of each side to caricature the other. Very much of the argument is not directed against the real sentiment of the opposite party, but against what had been imputed to them. They made a man of straw, and then they burned him, which is a pretty easy thing to do, but I trust we have left these things behind. The glorious truth of the final perseverance of the saints has survived controversy, and in some form or other is the cherished belief of the children of God. Take care, however, to be clear as to what it is. The Scripture does not teach that a man will reach his journey's end without continuing to travel along the road; it is not true that one act of faith is all, and that nothing is needed of daily faith, prayer, and watchfulness. Our doctrine is the very opposite, namely, that the righteous shall hold on his way; or, in other words, shall continue in faith, in repentance, in prayer, and under the influence of the grace of God. We do not believe in salvation by a physical force which treats a man as a dead log, and carries him whether he will it or not towards heaven. No, "he holds on," he is personally active about the matter, and plods on up hill and down dale till he reaches his journey's end. We never thought, nor even dreamed, that merely because a man supposes that he once entered on this way he may therefore conclude that he is certain of salvation, even if he leaves the way immediately. No, but we say that he who truly receives the Holy Ghost, so that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall not go back, but persevere in the way of faith. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and this he cannot be if he were left to go back and delight in sin as he did before; and, therefore, he shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Though the believer to his grief will commit many a sin, yet still the tenor of his life will be holiness to the Lord, and he will hold on in the way of obedience. We detest the doctrine that a man who has once believed in Jesus will be saved even if he altogether forsook the path of obedience. We deny that such a turning aside is possible to the true believer, and therefore the idea imputed to us is clearly an invention of the adversary.

No, beloved, a man, if he be indeed a believer in Christ, will not live after the will of the flesh. When he does fall into sin it will be his grief and misery, and he will never rest till he is cleansed from guilt; but I will say this of the believer, that if he could live as he would like to live he would live a perfect life. If you ask him if, after believing, he may live as he lists, he will reply, "Would God I could live as I list, for I desire to live altogether without sin. I would be perfect, even as my Father in heaven is perfect." The doctrine is not the licentious idea that a believer may live in sin, but that he cannot and will not do so. This is the doctrine, and we will first *prove it;* and, secondly, in the Puritanic sense of the word, we will briefly *improve it*, by drawing two spiritual lessons therefrom.

I. LET US PROVE THE DOCTRINE. Please to follow me with your Bibles open. You, dear friends, have most of you received as a matter of faith the doctrines of grace, and therefore to you the doctrine of final perseverance cannot require any proving, because it follows from all the other doctrines. We believe that God has an elect people whom He has chosen unto eternal life, and that truth necessarily involves the perseverance in grace. We believe in special redemption, and this secures the salvation and consequent perseverance of the redeemed. We believe in effectual calling, which is bound up with justification, a justification which ensures glorification. The doctrines of grace are like a chain —if you believe in one of them you must believe the next, for each one involves the rest; therefore I say that you who accept any of the doctrines of grace must receive this also, as involved in them. But I am about to try to prove this to those who do not receive the doctrines of grace; I would not argue in a circle, and prove one thing which you doubt by another thing which you doubt, but "to the law and to the testimony," to the actual words of Scripture we shall refer the matter.

Before we advance to the argument it will be well to remark that those who reject the doctrine frequently tell us that there are many cautions in the word of God against apostatizing, and that those cautions can have no meaning if it be true that the righteous shall hold on his way. But what if those cautions are the means in the hand of God of keeping His people from wandering? What if they are used to excite a holy fear in the minds of His children, and so become the means of preventing the evil which they denounce. I would also remind you that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which contains the most solemn warnings against apostasy, the apostle always takes care to add words which show that he did not believe that those whom he warned would actually apostatize. Turn to Hebrews vi. 9. He has been telling these Hebrews that if those who had been once enlightened should fall away, it would be impossible to renew them again into repentance, and he adds, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." In the 10th chapter he gives an equally earnest warning, declaring that those who should do despite to the spirit of grace are worthy of sorer punishment than those who despised Moses' law, but he closes the chapter with these words, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Thus he shows what the consequences of apostasy would be, but he is convinced that they will not choose to incur such a fearful doom.

Again, objectors sometimes mention instances of apostasy which are mentioned in the Word of God, but on looking into them it will be discovered that these are cases of persons who did but profess to know Christ, but were not really possessors of the divine life. John, in his first Epistle, ii. 19, fully describes these apostates: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The like is true of that memorable passage in John, where our Saviour speaks of branches of the vine which are cut off and cast into the fire: these are described as branches in Christ that bear no fruit. Are those real Christians? How can they be so if they bear no fruit? "By their fruits ye shall know them." The branch which bears fruit is purged, but it is never cut off. Those which bear no fruit are not figures of true Christians, but they fitly represent mere professors. Our Lord, in Matt. vii. 22, tells us concerning many who will say in that day "Lord, Lord," that He will reply, "I never knew you." Not "I have forgotten you," but "I never knew you": they were never really His disciples.

But now to the argument itself. First we argue the perseverance of the saints, most distinctly *from the nature of the life which is imparted at regeneration.* What saith Peter concerning this life? (1 Peter i. 23.) He speaks of the people of God as "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." The new life which is planted in us when we are born again is not like the fruit of our first birth, for that is subject to mortality, but it is a divine principle, which cannot die nor be corrupt; and, if it be so, then he who possesses it must live for ever, must, indeed, be evermore what the Spirit of God in regeneration has made him. So in 1 John iii. 9 we have the same thought in another form. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." That is to say, the bent of the Christian's life is not towards sin. It would not be a fair description of his life that he lives in sin; on the contrary, he fights and contends against sin, because he has an inner principle which cannot sin. The new life sinneth not; it is born of God, and cannot transgress; and though the old nature warreth against it, yet doth the new life so prevail in the Christian that he is kept from living in sin. Our Saviour, in His simple teaching of the gospel to the Samaritan woman, said to her (John iv. 13), "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Now, if our Saviour taught this to a sinful and ignorant woman, at His first interview with her, I take it that this doctrine is not to be reserved for the inner circle of full-grown saints, but to be preached ordinarily among the common people, and to be held up as a most blessed privilege. If you receive the grace which Jesus imparts to your souls, it shall be like the good part which Mary chose, it shall not be taken away from you; it shall abide in you, not as the water in a

cistern, but as a living fountain springing up unto everlasting life.

We all know that the life given in the new birth is intimately connected with faith. Now, faith is in itself a conquering principle. In the First Epistle of John, which is a great treasury of argument (1 John v. 4) we are told, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" See, then, that which is born of God in us, namely, the new life, is a conquering principle; there is no hint given that it can ever be defeated: and faith, which is its outward sign, is also in itself triumphant evermore. Therefore of necessity, because God has implanted such a wondrous life in us in bringing us out of darkness into His marvellous light, because He has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, because the eternal and ever blessed Spirit hath come to dwell in us, we conclude that the divine life within us shall never die. "The righteous shall hold on his way."

The second argument to which I shall call your attention shall be drawn *from our Lord's own express declarations.* Here we shall look to the gospel of John again, and in that blessed third of John, where our Lord was explaining the gospel in the simplest possible style to Nicodemus, we find Him laying great stress upon the fact that the life received by faith in Himself is eternal. Look at that precious verse, the fourteenth:—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, *but have eternal life.*" Do men therefore believe in Him and yet perish? Do they believe in Him and receive a spiritual life which comes to an end? It cannot be, for "God gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish": but he would perish if he did not persevere to the end; and therefore he must persevere to the end. The believer has eternal life, how then can he die, so as to cease to be a believer? If he does not abide in Christ, he evidently has not eternal life, therefore he shall abide in Christ, even to the end. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To this some reply that a man may have everlasting life and lose it. To which we answer, the words cannot so mean. Such a statement is a self-evident contradiction. If the life be lost the man is dead; how, then, did he have everlasting life? It is clear that he had a life which lasted only for a while: he certainly had not everlasting life, for if he had it he must live everlastingly. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John iii. 36). The saints in heaven have eternal life, and no one expects them to perish. Their life is eternal; but eternal life is eternal life, whether the person possessing it dwells on earth or in heaven.

I need not read all the passages in which the same truth is taught; but further on, in John vi. 47, our Lord told the Jews, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting life:" not temporary life, but "everlasting life." And in the 51st verse He said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall life for ever." Then comes that famous declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, if there were no other at all, would be quite sufficient to prove our point. John x. 28: "And I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any" (the word "man" is not in the original) "pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." What can He mean but this, that He has grasped His people, and that He means to hold them securely in His mighty hand?

> "Where is the power can reach us there,
> Or what can pluck us thence?"

Over and above the hand of Jesus which was pierced comes the hand of the Omnipotent Father as a sort of second grasp. "My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." Surely this must show that the saints are secure from anything and everything which would destroy them, and consequently safe from total apostasy.

Another passage speaks to the same effect—it is to be found in Matthew xxiv. 24, where the Lord Jesus has been speaking of the false prophets that should deceive many. "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect;" which shows that it is impossible for the elect to be deceived by them. Of Christ's sheep it is said, "A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers," but by divine instinct they know the voice of the Good Shepherd, and they follow Him.

Thus has our Saviour declared, as plainly as words possibly can express it, that those who are His people possess eternal life within themselves, and shall not perish, but shall enter into everlasting felicity. "The righteous shall hold on his way."

A very blessed argument for the safety of the believer is found in *our Lord's intercession.* You need not turn to the passage, for you know it well, which shows the connection between the living intercession of Christ and the perseverance of His people—"Wherefore also He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews vii. 25). Our Lord Jesus is not dead; He has risen, He has gone up into the glory, and now before the eternal throne He pleads the merit of His perfect work, and as He pleads there for all His people whose names are written on His heart, as the names of Israel were written on the jewelled breastplate of the high priest, His intercession saves His people even to the uttermost. If you would like an illustration of it you must turn to the case of Peter which is recorded in Luke xxii. 31, where our Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The intercession of Christ does not save His people from being tried, and tempted, and tossed up and down like wheat in a sieve, it does not save them even from a measure of sin and sorrow, but it does save them from total apostasy. Peter was kept, and though he denied his Master, yet it was an exception to the great rule of his life. By grace he did hold on his way, because not only then, but many a time beside, though he sinned, he had an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

If you desire to know how Jesus pleads, read at your leisure at home that wonderful 17th of John—the Lord's prayer. What a prayer it is! "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." Judas was lost, but he was only given to Christ as an apostle and not as one of His sheep. He had a temporary faith, and maintained a temporary profession, but he never had eternal life or he would have lived on. Those groans and cries of the Saviour which accompanied His pleadings in Gethsemane were heard in heaven, and answered. "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me"; the Lord does keep them by His word and Spirit, and will keep them. If the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane was answered, how much more that which now goeth up from the eternal throne itself!

"With cries and tears He offered up
His humble suit below;
But with authority He asks,
Enthroned in glory now.

"For all that come to God by Him,
Salvation He demands;
Points to their names upon His breast,
And spreads His wounded hands."

Ah, if my Lord Jesus pleads for me I cannot be afraid of earth or hell: that living, intercessory Voice hath power to keep the saints, and so hath the living Lord Himself, for He hath said—"Because I live ye shall live also." (John xiv. 19.)

Now for a fourth argument. We gather sure confidence of the perseverance of the saints *from the character and work of Christ.* I will say little about that, for I trust my Lord is so well known to you that He needeth no word of commendation from me to you; but if you know Him you will say what the apostle does in 2 Tim. i. 12,—"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." He did not say "I know *in* whom I have believed," as most people quote it, but, "I know whom I have believed." He knew Jesus, he knew His heart and His faithfulness, he knew His atonement and its power, he knew His intercession and its might; and he committed his soul to Jesus by an act of faith, and he felt secure. My Lord is so excellent in all things that I need give you but one glimpse of His character and you will see what He was when He dwelt here among men. At the commencement of John xiii. we read, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." If He had not loved His disciples to the end when here we might conclude that He was changeable now as then; but if He loved His chosen to the end while yet in His humiliation below, it bringeth us the sweet and blessed confidence that now He is in heaven He will love to the end all those who confide in Him.

Fifthly, we infer the perseverance of the saints from *the tenor of the covenant of grace.* Would you like to read it for yourselves? If so, turn to the Old Testament, Jeremiah xxxii., and there you will find the covenant of grace set forth at some length. We shall only be able to read the fortieth verse: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." He will not depart from them, and they shall not depart from Him,—what can be a grander assurance of their perseverance even to the end? Now, that this is the covenant of grace under which we live is clear from the Epistle to the Hebrews, for the apostle in the 8th chapter quotes that passage to this very end. The question runs thus—"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people." The old covenant had an "if" in it, and so it suffered shipwreck; it was—"If you will be obedient then you shall be blessed"; and hence there came a failure on man's part, and the whole covenant ended in disaster. It was the covenant of works, and under it we were in bondage, until we were delivered from it and introduced to the covenant of grace, which has no "if" in it, but runs upon the strain of promise; it is "I will" and "You shall" all the way through. "I will be your God, and ye shall be My people." Glory be to God, this covenant will never pass away, for see how the Lord declares its enduring character in the book of Isaiah (liv. 10): "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." And again in Isaiah lv. 3: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." The idea of falling utterly from grace is a relic of the old legal spirit, it is a going away from grace to come under law again, and I charge you who have once been manumitted slaves, and have had the fetters of legal bondage struck from off your hands, never consent to wear those bonds again. Christ has saved you, if indeed you are believers in Him, and He has not saved you for a week, or a month, or a quarter, or a year, or twenty years, but He has given to you eternal life, and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hands. Rejoice ye in this blessed covenant of grace.

The sixth most forcible argument is drawn *from the faithfulness of God.* Look at Romans xi. 29: what saith the apostle there, speaking by the Holy Ghost? "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," which means that He does not give life and pardon to a man and call him by grace and afterwards repent of what He has done, and withdraw the good things which He has bestowed. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent." When He putteth forth His hand to save He doth not withdraw it till the work is accomplished. His word is, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6). "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent" (1 Sam. xv. 29). The apostle would have us ground our confidence of perseverance upon the confirmation which divine faithfulness is sure to bestow upon us. He says in 1 Cor. i. 8, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that *ye* may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called

unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." And again he speaks to the same effect in 1 Thess. v. 24, "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." It was of old the will of God to save the people whom He gave to Jesus, and from this He has never turned, for our Lord said (John vi. 39), "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me. that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Thus you see from these passages, and there are numbers of others, that God's faithfulness secures the preservation of His people, and "the righteous shall hold on his way."

The seventh and last argument shall be drawn *from what has already been done in us.* I shall do little more than quote the Scriptures, and leave them to sink into your minds. A blessed passage is that in Jeremiah xxxi. 3: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." If He did not mean that His love should be everlasting He would never have drawn us at all, but because that love is everlasting therefore with loving-kindness has He drawn us. The apostle argues this in a very elaborate manner in Romans v. 9, 10: "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." I cannot stop to show how every word of this passage is emphatic, but so it is: if God reconciled us when we were enemies, He certainly will save us now we are His friends, and if our Lord Jesus has reconciled us by His death, much more will He save us by His life; so that we may be certain He will not leave nor forsake those whom He has called. Do you need me to bring to your minds that golden chapter, the 8th of Romans, the noblest of all language that was ever written by human pen? "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." There is no break in the chain between justification and glory: and no supposable breakage can occur, for the apostle puts that out of all hazard, by saying, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then he heaps on all the things that might be supposed to separate, and says, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In the same manner the apostle writes in Philippians i. 6. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." I cannot stay to mention the many other Scriptures in which what has been done is made an argument that the work shall be completed, but it is after the manner of the Lord to go through with whatever He undertakes. "He will give grace and glory," and perfect that which concerneth us.

One marvellous privilege which has been bestowed upon us is of peculiar significance: we are one with Christ by close, vital, spiritual union. We are taught of the Spirit that we enjoy a marriage union with Christ Jesus our Lord—shall that union be dissolved? We are married to Him. Has He ever given a bill of divorce? There never has been such a case as the heavenly Bridegroom divorcing from His heart a chosen soul to whom He has been united in the bonds of grace. Listen to these words from the prophecy of Hosea ii. 19, 20. "And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord."

This marvellous union is set forth by the figure of the head and the body: we are members of the body of Christ. Do the members of His body rot away? Is Christ amputated? Is He fitted with new limbs as old ones are lost? Nay, being members of this body, we shall not be divided from Him. "He that is joined unto the Lord," says the apostle, "is one spirit," and if we are made one spirit with Christ, that mysterious union does not allow of the supposition of a separation.

The Lord has wrought another great work upon us, for He has sealed us by the Holy Spirit. The possession of the Holy Ghost is the divine seal which sooner or later is set upon all the chosen. There are many passages in which that seal is spoken of, and is described as being an earnest, an earnest of the inheritance. But how an earnest if after receiving it we do not attain the purchased possession? Think over the exceedingly weighty words of the apostle in 2 Corinthians i. 21, 22: "Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." To the same effect the Holy Spirit speaks in Ephesians i. 13, 14: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." Beloved we feel certain that if the Spirit of God dwelleth in us, He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead will keep our souls and will also quicken our mortal bodies and present us complete before the glory of His face at the last.

Therefore we sum up the argument with the confident expression of the apostle when he said (2 Tim. iv. 18), "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

II. Now, how shall we IMPROVE THE DOCTRINE PRACTICALLY? The first improvement is *for encouragement to the man who is on the road to heaven.* "The righteous shall hold on His way." If I had to take a very long journey, say from London to John o' Groats, with my poor tottering limbs to carry me, and such a weight to carry too, I might begin to despair, and, indeed, the very first day's walking would knock me up: but if I had a divine assurance unmistakably saying, "You will hold on your way, and you will get to your journey's end," I feel that I would brace myself up to achieve the task. One might hardly undertake a difficult journey if he did not believe that he would finish it, but the sweet assurance that we shall reach our home makes us

pluck up courage. The weather is wet, rainy, blusterous, but we must keep on, for the end is sure. The road is very rough, and runs up hill and down dale; we want for breath, and our limbs are aching; but as we shall get to our journey's end we push on. We are ready to creep into some cottage and lie down to die of weariness, saying, "I shall never accomplish my task"; but the confidence which we have received sets us on our feet, and off we go again. To the right-hearted man the assurance of success is the best stimulus for labour. If it be so, that I shall overcome the world, that I shall conquer sin, that I shall not be an apostate, that I shall not give up my faith, that I shall not fling away my shield, that I shall come home a conqueror—then will I play the man, and fight like a hero. This is one of the reasons why British troops have so often won the fight, because the drummer-boy did not know how to beat a retreat, and the rank and file did not believe in the possibility of defeat. They were beaten oftentimes by the French, so the French tell us, but they would not believe it, and therefore would not run away. They felt like winning, and so they stood like solid rocks amidst the dread artillery of the foe till victory declared on their side. Brethren, we shall do the same if we realise that we are preserved in Christ Jesus, kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Every true believer shall be a conqueror, and hence the reason for warring a good warfare. There is laid up for us in heaven a crown of life that fadeth not away. The crown is laid up for *us*, and not for chance comers. The crown reserved for me is such that no one else can wear it; and if it be so, then will I battle and strive to the end, till the last enemy is overcome, and death itself is dead.

Another improvement is this: what *an encouragement this is to sinners* who desire salvation. It should lead them to come and receive it with grateful delight. Those who deny this doctrine offer sinners a poor twopenny-halfpenny salvation, not worth having, and it is no marvel that they turn away from it. As the Pope gave England to the Spanish king—if he could get it—so do they proffer Christ's salvation if a man will deserve if by his own faithfulness. According to some, eternal life is given to you, but then it may not be eternal; you may fall from it, it may last only for a time. When I was but a child I used to trouble myself because I saw some of my young companions, who were a little older than myself, when they became apprentices and came to London, become vicious; I have heard their mother's laments, and seen their tears about them; I have heard their fathers expressing bitterest sorrow over the boys whom I knew in my class to be quite as good as ever I had been, and it used to strike me with horror that I perhaps might sin as they had done. They became Sabbath-breakers; in one case there was a theft from the till to go into Sunday pleasuring. I dreaded the very thought; I desired to maintain an unsullied character, and when I heard that if I gave my heart to Christ He would keep me, that was the very thing which won me; it seemed to be a celestial life assurance for my character, that if I would really trust Christ with myself He would save me from the errors of youth, preserve me amid the temptations of manhood, and keep me to the end. I was charmed with the thought that if I was made righteous by believing in Christ Jesus I should hold on my way by the power of the Holy Spirit. That which charmed me in my boyhood is even more attractive to me in middle life: I am happy to preach to you a sure and everlasting salvation. I feel that I have something to bring before you this morning which is worthy of every sinner's eager acceptance. I have neither "if" nor "but" with which to dilute the pure gospel of my message. Here it is: "He that believeth and is baptized *shall be saved*." I dropped a piece of ice upon the floor yesterday, and I said to one who was in the room, "Is not that a diamond?" "Ah," he said, "you would not leave it on the floor, I warrant you, if it were a diamond of that size." Now I have a diamond here—eternal life, everlasting life! Methinks you will be in haste to take it up at once, to be saved now, to be saved in living, to be saved in dying, to be saved in rising again, for ever and ever, by the eternal power and infinite love of God. Is not this worth having? Grasp at it, poor soul; thou mayest have it if thou dost but believe in Jesus Christ, or, in other words, trust thy soul with Him. Deposit thine eternal destiny in this divine bank, then thou canst say, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH

"For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."—Job xix. 25–27.

THE hand of God has been upon us heavily this week. An aged deacon, who has been for more than fifty years a member of this church, has been removed from our midst; and a sister, the beloved wife of another of our church officers, a member for nearly the same term of years, has fallen asleep. It is not often that a church is called to sorrow over the departure of two such venerable members—let not our ears be deaf to such a double admonition to prepare to meet our God. That they were preserved so long, and upheld so mercifully for so many years, was not only a reason of gratitude to them, but to us also. I am, however, so averse to the preaching of what are called *funeral sermons*, that I forbear, lest I appear to eulogise the creature, when my only aim should be to magnify the grace of God.

Our text deserves our profound attention; its preface would hardly have been written had not the matter been of the utmost importance in the judgment of the patriarch who uttered it. Listen to Job's remarkable desire: "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead

in the rock for ever!" Perhaps, hardly aware of the full meaning of the words he was uttering, yet his holy soul was impressed with a sense of some weighty revelation concealed within his words; he therefore desired that it might be recorded in a book; he has had his desire; the Book of books embalms the words of Job. He wished to have them graven on a rock; cut deep into it with an iron pen, and then the lines inlaid with lead; or he would have them engraven, according to the custom of the ancients upon a sheet of metal, so that time might not be able to eat out the inscription. He has not had his desire in that respect, save only that upon many and many a sepulchre those words of Job stand recorded, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." It is the opinion of some commentators that Job, in speaking of the rock here, intended his own rock-hewn sepulchre, and desired that this might be his epitaph; that it might be cut deep, so that ages should not wear it out; that when any asked, "Where does Job sleep?" as soon as they saw the sepulchre of the patriarch of Uz, they might learn that he died in hope of resurrection, resting upon a living Redeemer. Whether such a sentence adorned the portals of Job's last sleeping-place we know not; but certainly no words could have been more fitly chosen. Should not the man of patience, the mirror of endurance, the pattern of trust, bear as his memorial this golden line, which is as full of all the patience of hope, and hope of patience, as mortal language can be? Who among us could select a more glorious motto for his last escutcheon? I am sorry to say that a few of those who have written upon this passage cannot see Christ or the resurrection in it at all. Albert Barnes, among the rest, expresses his intense sorrow that he cannot find the resurrection here, and for my part I am sorry for him. If it had been Job's desire to foretell the advent of Christ and His own sure resurrection, I cannot see what better words he could have used; and if those truths are not here taught, then language must have lost its original object, and must have been employed to mystify and not to explain: to conceal and not to reveal. What I ask, does the patriarch mean, if not that he shall rise again when the Redeemer stands upon the earth? Brethren, no unsophisticated mind can fail to find here what almost all believers have here discovered. I feel safe in keeping to the old sense, and we shall this morning seek no new interpretation, but adhere to the common one, with or without the consent of our critics.

In discoursing upon them I shall speak upon three things. First, *let us, with the patriarch, descend into the grave and behold the ravages of death.* Then, with him, *let us look up on high for present consolation.* And, still in his admirable company, let us, in the third place, *anticipate future delights.*

I. First of all then, with the patriarch of Uz, LET US DESCEND INTO THE SEPULCHRE.

The body has just been divorced from the soul. Friends who loved most tenderly have said—"Bury my dead out of my sight." The body is borne upon the bier and consigned to the silent earth; it is surrounded by the earthworks of death. Death has a host of troops. If the locusts and the caterpillars be God's army, the worms are the army of death. These hungry warriors begin to attack the city of man. They commence with the outworks; they storm the munition, and overturn the walls. The skin, the city wall of manhood, is utterly broken down, and the towers of its glory covered with confusion. How speedily the cruel invaders deface all beauty. The face gathers blackness; the countenance is defiled with corruption. Those cheeks once fair with youth, and ruddy with health, have fallen in, even as a bowing wall and a tottering fence; those eyes, the windows of the mind whence joy and sorrow looked forth by turns, are now filled up with the dust of death; those lips, the doors of the soul, the gates of Mansoul, are carried away, and the bars thereof are broken. Alas, ye windows of agates and gates of carbuncle, where are ye now? How shall I mourn for thee, O thou captive city, for the mighty men have utterly spoiled thee! Thy neck, once like a tower of ivory, has become a fallen column; thy nose, so lately comparable to "the tower of Lebanon, which looketh toward Damascus," is as a ruined hovel; and thy head, which towered like Carmel, lies low as the clods of the valley. Where is beauty now? The most lovely cannot be known from the most deformed. The vessel so daintily wrought upon the potter's wheel, is cast away upon the dunghill with the vilest potsherds. Cruel have ye been, ye warriors of death, for though ye wield no axes and bear no hammers, yet have ye broken down the carved work; and though ye speak not with tongues, yet have ye said in your hearts, "We have swallowed her up, certainly this is the day that we have looked for; we have found, we have seen it." The skin is gone. The troops have entered into the town of Mansoul. And now they pursue their work of devastation; the pitiless marauders fall upon the body itself. There are those noble aqueducts, the veins through which the streams of life were wont to flow, these, instead of being rivers of life, have become blocked up with the soil and wastes of death, and now they must be pulled to pieces; not a single relic of them shall be spared. Mark the muscles and sinews, like great highways that, penetrating the metropolis, carry the strength and wealth of manhood along—their curious pavement must be pulled up, and they that do traffic thereon must be consumed; each tunnelled bone, and curious arch, and knotted bond must be snapped and broken. Fair fabrics, glorious storehouses, costly engines, wonderful machines—all, all must be pulled down, and not one stone left upon another. Those nerves, which like telegraphic wires connected all parts of the city together, to carry thought and feeling and intelligence—these are cut. No matter how artistic the work might be,—and certainly we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and the anatomist stands still and marvels to see the skill which the eternal God has manifested in the formation of the body—but these ruthless worms pull everything to pieces, till like a city sacked and spoiled that has been given up for days to pillage and to flame, everything lies in a heap of ruin—ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But these invaders stop not here. Job says that next they consume his reins. We are wont to speak of the heart as the great citadel of life, the inner keep and donjon, where the captain of the guard holdeth out to the last. The Hebrews do not regard the heart, but the lower viscera, the reins, as the seat of the passions and of mental power. The worms spare not; they enter the secret places of the tabernacle of life, and the standard is plucked from the tower. Having died, the heart cannot preserve itself, and falls like the rest of the frame—a prey to worms. It is gone, it is all gone! The skin, the body, the vitals, all, all has departed. There is nought left. In a few years ye shall turn

up the sod and say, "Here slept so-and-so, and where is he now?" and ye may search and hunt and dig, but ye shall find no relic. Mother Earth has devoured her own offspring.

Dear friends, why should we wish to have it otherwise? Why should we desire to preserve the body when the soul has gone? What vain attempts men have made with coffins of lead, and wrappings of myrrh and frankincense. The embalming of the Egyptians, those master robbers of the worm, what has it done? It has served to keep some poor shrivelled lumps of mortality above ground to be sold for curiosities, to be dragged away to foreign climes, and stared upon by thoughtless eyes. No, let the dust go, the sooner it dissolves the better. And what matters it how it goes! If it be devoured of beasts, if it be swallowed up in the sea and become food for fishes! What, if plants with their roots suck up the particles! What, if the fabric passes into the animal, and from the animal into the earth, and from the earth into the plants, and from the plant into the animal again! What, if the winds blow it along the highway! What, if the rivers carry it to the waves of the ocean! It is ordained that somehow or other it must be all separated—"dust to dust, ashes to ashes." It is part of the decree that it should all perish. The worms or some other agents of destruction must destroy this body. Do not seek to avoid what God has purposed; do not look upon it as a gloomy thing. Regard it as a necessity; nay more, view it as the platform of a miracle, the lofty stage of resurrection, since Jesus shall surely raise again from the dead the particles of this body, however divided from one another. We have heard of miracles, but what a miracle is the resurrection! All the miracles of Scripture, yea even those wrought by Christ, are small compared with this. The philosopher says, "How is it possible that God shall hunt out every particle of the human frame?" He can do it: He has but to speak the word, and every single atom, though it may have travelled thousands of leagues, though it may have been blown as dust across the desert, and anon have fallen upon the bosom of the sea, and then have descended into the depths thereof to be cast up on a desolate shore, sucked up by plants, fed on again by beasts, or passed into the fabric of another man,—I say that individual atom shall find its fellows, and the whole company of particles at the trump of the archangel shall travel to their appointed place, and the body, the very body which was laid in the ground, shall rise again.

I am afraid I have been somewhat uninteresting while tarrying upon the exposition of the words of Job, but I think very much of the pith of Job's faith lay in this, that he had a clear view that the worms would after his skin destroy his body, and yet that in his flesh he should see God. You know we might regard it as a small miracle if we could preserve the bodies of the departed. If, by some process, with spices and gums we could preserve the particles, for the Lord to make those dry bones live, and to quicken that skin and flesh, were a miracle certainly, but not palpably and plainly so great a marvel as when the worms have destroyed the body. When the fabric has been absolutely broken up, the tenement all pulled down, ground to pieces, and flung in handfuls to the wind, so that no relic of it is left, and yet when Christ stands in the latter days upon the earth, all the structure shall be brought together, bone to his bone—then shall the might of Omnipotence be seen. This is the doctrine of the resurrection, and happy is he who finds no difficulty here, who looks at it as being an impossibility with man but a possibility with God, and lays hold upon the omnipotence of the Most High and says, "Thou sayest it, and it shall be done!" I comprehend Thee not great God; I marvel at Thy purpose to raise my mouldering bones; but I know that Thou doest great wonders, and I am not surprised that Thou shouldst conclude the great drama of Thy creating works here on earth by re-creating the human frame by the same power by which Thou didst bring from the dead the body of Thy Son Jesus Christ, and by that same divine energy which has regenerated human souls in Thine own image.

II. Now, having thus descended into the grave, and seen nothing there but what is loathsome, LET US LOOK UP WITH THE PATRIARCH AND BEHOLD A SUN SHINING WITH PRESENT COMFORT.

"I know," said he, "that my Redeemer liveth." The word "Redeemer" here used, is in the original "goel"—kinsman. The duty of the kinsman, or goel, was this: suppose an Israelite had alienated his estate, as in the case of Naomi and Ruth; suppose a patrimony which had belonged to a family, had passed away through poverty, it was the goel's business, the redeemer's business, to pay the price as the next of kin, and to buy back the heritage. Boaz stood in that relation to Ruth. Now, the body may be looked upon as the heritage of the soul—the soul's small farm, that little plot of earth in which the soul has been wont to walk and delight, as a man walketh in his garden or dwelleth in his house. Now, that becomes alienated. Death, like Ahab, takes away the vineyard from us who are as Naboth; we lose our patrimonial estate; Death sends his troops to take our vineyard and to spoil the vines thereof and ruin it. But we turn round to Death and say, "I know that my Goel liveth, and He will redeem this heritage; I have lost it; thou takest it from me lawfully, O Death, because my sin hath forfeited my right; I have lost my heritage through my own offence, and through that of my first parent Adam; but there lives One who will buy this back." Brethren, Job could say this of Christ long before He had descended upon earth, "I know that He liveth"; and now that He has ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, surely we may with double emphasis say, "I know that my Goel, my Kinsman liveth, and that He hath paid the price, that I should have back my patrimony, so that in my flesh I shall see God." Yes, my hands, ye are redeemed with blood; bought not with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Yes, heaving lungs and palpitating heart, ye have been redeemed! He that redeemed the soul to be His altar has also redeemed the body, that it may be a temple for the Holy Ghost. Not even the bones of Joseph can remain in the house of bondage. No smell of the fire of death may pass upon the garments which His holy children have worn in the furnace.

Remember, too, that it was always considered to be the duty of the goel, not merely to redeem by price, but where that failed, to redeem by power. Hence, when Lot was carried away captive by the four kings, Abraham summoned his own hired servants, and the servants of all his friends, and went out against the kings of the East, and brought back Lot and the captives of Sodom. Now, our

Lord Jesus Christ, who once has played the kinsman's part by paying the price for us, liveth, and He will redeem us by power. O Death, thou tremblest at this name! Thou knowest the might of our Kinsman! Against His arm thou canst not stand! Thou didst once meet Him foot to foot in stern battle, and O Death, thou didst indeed tread upon His heel. He voluntarily submitted to this, or else, O Death, thou hadst no power against Him. But He slew thee, Death, He slew thee! He rifled all thy caskets, took from thee the key of thy castle, burst open the door of thy dungeon; and now, thou knowest, Death, thou hast no power to hold my body; thou mayst set thy slaves to devour it, but thou shalt give it up, and all their spoil must be restored. Insatiable Death, from thy greedy maw yet shall return the multitudes whom thou hast devoured. Thou shalt be compelled by the Saviour to restore thy captives to the light of day. I think I see Jesus coming with His Father's servants. The chariots of the Lord are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. Blow ye the trumpet! blow ye the trumpet! Immanuel rides to battle! The Most Mighty in majesty girds on His sword. He comes! He comes to snatch by power, His people's lands from those who have invaded their portion. Oh, how glorious the victory! No battle shall there be. He comes, He sees, He conquers. The sound of the trumpet shall be enough; Death shall fly affrighted; and at once from beds of dust and silent clay, to realms of everlasting day the righteous shall arise.

To linger here a moment, there was yet, very conspicuously in the Old Testament, we are informed, a third duty of the goel, which was to avenge the death of his friend. If a person had been slain, the goel was the avenger of blood; snatching up his sword, he at once pursued the person who had been guilty of bloodshed. So now, let us picture ourselves as being smitten by Death. His arrow has just pierced us to the heart, but in the act of expiring, our lips are able to boast of vengeance, and in the face of the monster we cry, "I know that my Goel liveth." Thou mayst fly, O Death, as rapidly as thou wilt, but no city of refuge can hide thee from Him; He will overtake thee; He will lay hold upon thee, O thou skeleton monarch, and He will avenge my blood on thee. I would that I had powers of eloquence to work out this magnificent thought. Chrysostom, or Christmas Evans could picture the flight of the King of Terrors, the pursuit by the Redeemer, the overtaking of the foe, and the slaying of the destroyer. Christ shall certainly avenge Himself on Death for all the injury which Death hath done to His beloved kinsmen. Comfort thyself then, O Christian; thou hast ever living, even when thou diest, One who avenges thee, One who has paid the price for thee, and One whose strong arms shall yet set thee free.

Passing on in our text to notice the next word, it seems that Job found consolation not only in the fact that he had a Goel, a Redeemer, but that this Redeemer liveth. He does not say, "I know that my Goel *shall live*, but that He *lives*,"—having a clear view of the self-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And you and I looking back do not say, "I know that He *did live*, but He *lives* to-day." This very day you that mourn and sorrow for venerated friends, your prop and pillar in years gone by, you may go to Christ with confidence, because He not only lives, but He is the source of life; and you therefore believe that He can give forth out of Himself life to those whom you have committed to the tomb. He is the Lord and giver of life originally, and He shall be specially declared to be the resurrection and the life, when the legions of His redeemed shall be glorified with Him. If I saw no fountain from which life could stream to the dead, I would yet believe the promise when God said that the dead shall live; but when I see the fountain provided, and know that it is full to the brim and that it runneth over, I can rejoice without trembling. Since there is One who can say, "I am the resurrection and the life," it is a blessed thing to see the means already before us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us look up to our Goel then who liveth at this very time.

Still the marrow of Job's comfort it seems to me lay in that little word "My." "I know that MY Redeemer liveth." Oh, to get hold of Christ! I know that in His offices He is precious. But, dear friends, we must get a property in Him before we can really enjoy Him. What is honey in the wood to me, if like the fainting Israelites, I dare not eat. It is honey in my hand, honey on my lip, which enlightens mine eyes like those of Jonathan. What is gold in the mine to me? Men are beggars in Peru, and beg their bread in California. It is gold in my purse which will satisfy my necessities, purchasing the bread I need. So, what is a kinsman if he be not a kinsman to me. A Redeemer that does not redeem me, an avenger who will never stand up for my blood, of what avail were such? But Job's faith was strong and firm in the conviction that the Redeemer was his. Dear friends, dear friends, can all of you say, "I know that *my* Redeemer liveth." The question is simple and simply put; but oh, what solemn things hang upon your answer, "Is it MY Redeemer?" I charge you rest not, be not content until by faith you can say, "Yes, I cast myself upon Him; I am His, and therefore He is mine." I know that full many of you, while you look upon all else that you have as not being yours, yet you can say, "*My* Redeemer is mine." He is the only piece of property which is really ours. We borrow all else, the house, the children; nay, our very body we must return to the Great Lender. But Jesus, we can never leave, for even when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord, and I know that even death cannot separate us from Him, so that body and soul are with Jesus truly even in the dark hours of death, in the long night of the sepulchre, and in the separate state of spiritual existence. Beloved, have you Christ? It may be you hold Him with a feeble hand, you half think it is presumption to say, "He is my Redeemer"; yet remember, if you have but faith as a grain of mustard seed, that little faith entitles you to say, and say now, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

There is another word in this consoling sentence which no doubt served to give a zest to the comfort of Job. It was that he could say, "I KNOW"—"I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth." To say "I hope so, I trust so," is comfortable; and there are thousands in the fold of Jesus who hardly get much further. But to reach the marrow of consolation you *must* say, "I KNOW." Ifs, buts, and perhapses, are sure murderers of peace and comfort. Doubts are dreary things in times of sorrow. Like wasps they sting the soul! If I have any suspicion that Christ is not mine, then there is vinegar mingled with the gall of death. But if I know that Jesus is

mine, then darkness is not dark; even the night is light about me. Out of the lion cometh honey; out of the eater cometh forth sweetness. "I know that my Redeemer liveth." This is a brightly-burning lamp cheering the damps of the sepulchral vault, but a feeble hope is like a flickering smoking flax, just making darkness visible, but nothing more. I would not like to die with a mere hope mingled with suspicion. I might be safe with this but hardly happy; but oh, to go down into the river knowing that all is well, confident that as a guilty, weak, and helpless worm I have fallen into the arms of Jesus, and believing that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him. I would have you, dear Christian friends, never look upon the full assurance of faith as a thing impossible to you. Say not, "It is too high; I cannot attain unto it." I have known one or two saints of God who have rarely doubted their interest at all. There are many of us who do not often enjoy any ravishing ecstacies, but on the other hand we generally maintain the even tenour of our way, simply hanging upon Christ, feeling that His promise is true, that His merits are sufficient, and that we are safe. Assurance is a jewel for worth but not for rarity. It is the common privilege of all the saints if they have but the grace to attain unto it, and this grace the Holy Spirit gives freely. Surely if Job in Arabia, in those dark misty ages when there was only the morning star and not the sun, when they saw but little, when life and immortality had not been brought to light,—if Job before the coming and advent still could say, "*I know*," you and I should not speak less positively. God forbid that our positiveness should be presumption. Let us try ourselves, and see that our marks and evidences are right, lest we form an ungrounded hope; for nothing can be more destructive than to say, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." But oh, let us build for eternity, and build solidly. Let us not be satisfied with the mere foundation, for it is from the upper rooms that we get the widest prospect. Let us pray the Lord to help us to pile stone on stone, until we are able to say as we look at it, "Yes, I *know*, I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth." This, then, for present comfort to-day in the prospect of departure.

III. And now, in the third and last place, as THE ANTICIPATION OF FUTURE DELIGHT, let me call to your remembrance the other part of the text. Job not only knew that the Redeemer lived, but he anticipated the time when He should *stand in the latter day upon the earth.* No doubt Job referred here to our Saviour's first advent, to the time when Jesus Christ, "the goel," the kinsman, should stand upon the earth to pay in the blood of His veins the ransom price, which had, indeed, in bond and stipulation been paid before the foundation of the world in promise. But I cannot think that Job's vision stayed there; he was looking forward to the second advent of Christ as being the period of the resurrection. We cannot endorse the theory that Job arose from the dead when our Lord died, although certain Jewish believers held this idea very firmly at one time. We are persuaded that "the latter day" refers to the advent of glory rather than to that of shame. Our hope is that the Lord shall come to reign in glory where He once died in agony. The bright and hallowed doctrine of the second advent has been greatly revived in our churches in these latter days, and I look for the best results in consequence. There is always a danger lest it be perverted and turned by fanatical minds, by prophetic speculations, into an abuse; but the doctrine in itself is one of the most consoling, and, at the same time, one of the most practical, tending to keep the Christian awake, because the Bridegroom cometh at such an hour as we think not. Beloved, we believe that the same Jesus who ascended from Olivet shall so come in like manner as He ascended up into heaven. We believe in His personal advent and reign. We believe and expect that when both wise and foolish virgins shall slumber; in the night when sleep is heavy upon the saints; when men shall be eating and drinking as in the days of Noah, that suddenly as the lightning flasheth from heaven, so Christ shall descend with a shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise and reign with Him. We are looking forward to the literal, personal, and actual standing of Christ upon earth as the time when creation's groans shall be silenced for ever, and the earnest expectation of the creature shall be fulfilled.

Mark, that Job describes Christ as *standing.* Some interpreters have read thê passage, "He shall stand in the latter days against the earth"; that as the earth has covered up the slain, as the earth has become the charnel-house of the dead, Jesus shall arise to the contest and say, "Earth, I am against thee; give up thy dead! Ye clods of the valley, cease to be custodians of My people's bodies! Silent deeps, and you, ye caverns of the earth, deliver once for all, those whom ye have imprisoned!" Macphelah shall give up its precious treasure, cemeteries and graveyards shall release their captives, and all the deep places of the earth shall resign the bodies of the faithful. Well, whether that be so or no, the posture of Christ, in standing upon the earth, is significant. It shows His triumph. He has triumphed over sin, which once like a serpent in its coils had bound the earth. He has defeated Satan. On the very spot where Satan gained his power Christ has gained the victory. Earth, which was a scene of defeated goodness, whence mercy once was all but driven, where virtue died, where everything heavenly and pure, like flowers blasted by pestilential winds, hung down their heads, withered and blighted—on this very earth everything that is glorious shall blow and blossom in perfection; and Christ Himself, once despised and rejected of men, fairest of all the sons of men, shall come in the midst of a crowd of courtiers, while kings and princes shall do Him homage, and all the nations shall call Him blessed. "He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth."

Then, at that auspicious hour, says Job, "In my flesh I shall see God." Oh, blessed anticipation—"I shall see God." He does not say, "I shall see the saints"—doubtless we shall see them all in heaven—but, "I shall see *God.*" Note he does not say, "I shall see the pearly gates, I shall see the walls of jasper, I shall see the crowns of gold and the harps of harmony," but "I shall see God"; as if that were the sum and substance of heaven. "In my flesh shall I see *God.*" The pure in heart shall see God. It was their delight to see Him in the ordinances by faith. They delighted to behold Him in communion and prayer. There in heaven they shall have a vision of another sort. We shall see God in heaven, and be made completely like Him; the divine character shall be stamped upon us; and being made like to Him we shall be perfectly satisfied and content. Likeness to God, what can

we wish for more? And a sight of God, what can we desire better? We shall see God, and so there shall be perfect contentment to the soul and a satisfaction of all the faculties. Some read the passage, "Yet I shall see God in my flesh," and hence think that there is here an allusion to Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Word made flesh. Well, be it so, or be it not so, it is certain that we shall see Christ, and He, as the divine Redeemer, shall be the subject of our eternal vision. Nor shall we ever want any joy beyond simply that of seeing Him. Think not, dear friend, that this will be a narrow sphere for your mind to dwell in. It is but one source of delight, "I shall see God," but that source is infinite. His wisdom, His love, His power, all His attributes shall be subjects for your eternal contemplation, and as He is infinite under each aspect, there is no fear of exhaustion. His works, His purposes, His gifts, His love to you, and His glory in all His purposes, and in all His deeds of love—why, these shall make a theme that never can be exhausted. You may with divine delight anticipate the time when in your flesh you shall see God.

But I must have you observe how Job has expressly made us note that it is in the same body. "Yet, *in my flesh* shall I see God"; and then he says again, "whom I shall see for myself, and mine eye shall behold and not another." Yes, it is true that I, the very man standing here, though I must go down to die, yet I shall as the same man most certainly arise and shall behold my God. Not part of myself, though the soul alone shall have some view of God, but the whole of myself, my flesh, my soul, my body, my spirit, shall gaze on God. We shall not enter heaven, dear friends, as a dismasted vessel is tugged into harbour; we shall not get to glory some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, but the whole ship shall be floated safely into the haven, body and soul both being safe. Christ shall be able to say, "*All* that the Father giveth to Me shall come to Me," not only all the persons, but all of the persons—each man in his perfection. There shall not be found in heaven one imperfect saint. There shall not be a saint without an eye, much less a saint without a body. No member of the body shall have perished; nor shall the body have lost any of its natural beauty. All the saints shall be all there, and all of all; the same persons precisely, only that they shall have risen from a state of grace to a state of glory. They shall be ripened; they shall be no more the green blades, but the full corn in the ear; no more buds but flowers; not babes but men.

Please to notice, and then I shall conclude, how the patriarch puts it as being a real personal enjoyment. "Whom mine eye shall behold, and not another." They shall not bring me a report as they did the Queen of Sheba, but I shall see Solomon the King for myself. I shall be able to say, as they did who spake to the woman of Samaria, "Now I believe, not because of thy word who did bring me a report, but I have seen Him for myself." There shall be personal intercourse with God; not through the Book, which is but as a glass; not through the ordinances; but directly, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be able to commune with the Deity as a man talketh with his friend. "Not another." If I could be a changeling and could be altered, that would mar my comfort. Or if my heaven must be enjoyed by proxy, if draughts of bliss must be drunk for me, where were the hope? Oh, no; for myself, and not through another, shall I see God. Have we not told you a hundred times that nothing but personal religion will do, and is not this another argument for it, because resurrection and glory are personal things? "Not another." If you could have sponsors to repent for you, then, depend upon it, you would have sponsors to be glorified for you. But as there is not another to see God for you, so you must yourself see and yourself find an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In closing let me observe how foolish have you and I been when we have looked forward to death with shudders, with doubts, with loathings. After all, what is it? Worms! Do ye tremble at those base crawling things? Scattered particles! Shall we be alarmed at these? To meet the worms we have the angels; and to gather the scattered particles we have the voice of God. I am sure the gloom of death is altogether gone now that the lamp of resurrection burns. Disrobing is nothing now that better garments await us. We may long for evening to undress, that we may rise with God. I am sure my venerable friends now present, in coming so near as they do now to the time of the departure, must have some visions of the glory on the other side the stream. Bunyan was not wrong, my dear brethren, when he put the land Beulah at the close of the pilgrimage. Is not my text a telescope which will enable you to see across the Jordan; may it not be as hands of angels to bring you bundles of myrrh and frankincense? You can say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." You cannot want more; you were not satisfied with less in your youth, you will not be content with less now. Those of us who are young, are comforted by the thought that we may soon depart. I say comforted, not alarmed by it, and we almost envy those whose race is nearly run, because we fear—and yet we must not speak thus, for the Lord's will be done—I was about to say, we fear that our battle may last long, and that mayhap our feet may slip; only He that keepeth Israel does not slumber nor sleep. So since we know that our Redeemer liveth, this shall be our comfort in life, that though we fall we shall not be utterly cast down; and since our Redeemer liveth, this shall be our comfort in death, that though worms destroy this body, yet in our flesh we shall see God.

May the Lord add His blessing on the feeble words of this morning, and to Him be glory for ever Amen.

"Grave, the guardian of our dust!
Grave, the treasury of the skies!
Every atom of thy trust
Rests in hope again to rise.
Hark! the judgment trumpet calls;
Soul, rebuild thy house of clay,
Immortality thy walls,
And Eternity thy day."

THE OLD WAY OF THE WICKED

"Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with blood; which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?"—Job xxii. 15–17.

"HAST thou marked the old way?" Antiquity is no guarantee for truth. It was the old way, but it was the wrong way. If our religion is to be settled by antiquity, we shall presently pass back to the worst form of idolatry, for we must needs become Druids. It is not always that "the old is better." Sometimes, by reason of the depravity of human nature, the old is the more corrupt. The oldest of all would be the best, but how shall we come at it? Adam was once perfection—but how shall we regain that state? Old, exceeding old, is the path of sin and the path of error, for as old as the father of lies is sin. Antiquity is, moreover, no excuse for sin. It may be that men have long transgressed, but use in rebellion will not mitigate the treason before the eternal throne. If thou knowest better, it will not stand thee in any stead that God winked at the ignorance of others in former ages. If thou hast had more light than they, thou shalt have severer judgment than they; therefore plead not the antiquity of any evil custom as an excuse for sin. It was an old way, but they who ran in it, perished in it just as surely as if it had been a new way of sinning entirely to their own invention: antiquity will be no consolation to those who perish by following evil precedent. It will serve no purpose to lost souls, that they sinned as thousands sinned before them; and if they shall meet long generations of their ancestors, lost in the same overthrow, they shall by no means be comforted by such grim companionship. Hence, it becomes all of us to examine whether those religious dogmas which we have accepted on account of their apparent venerableness of age and universality of custom, are indeed the truth. We are not amongst those who believe that the traditions of the fathers are the ultimate tests of truth. We have heard the voice which saith, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." We would not affect novelty for its own sake—that were folly; neither will we adore and venerate antiquity for its own sake, for that would lead us into idolatry, and superstition. Is the thing right? then follow it, though thou hast discovered it but yesterday; is it wrong? then, though the road were trodden by sinners of the first ages, yet do not thou pursue it unless thou desire to meet with the same end as they. Search and look to your creeds, your worships and your customs, for this world has long enough been deluded by hoary superstitions. Search, my hearer, search and look right carefully within thy heart, for thou mayst be deceived, and it were a pity it should be so with thee, while there are such opportunities given thee to discover and rectify thy mistakes.

We shall now, this morning, in the words of the text, mark the old way of wicked men, observe it carefully, and consider it well. There shall be three points this morning, *the way, the end, the warning.*

I. The first shall be THE WAY—"the old way which wicked men have trodden."

First, *what it was.* There is no doubt that Eliphaz is here alluding to those who sinned before the flood. He is looking to what were ancient days to him. Living as he did, in what is olden time to us, his days of yore were the days beyond the flood, and the old way he speaks of is the way and course of sinners before the world was destroyed by water.

Now this way, in the first place, was *a way of rebellion against God.* Adam, our first parent, knew God's will; that will ought not to have been irksome to him. The command was a very easy one; the denial of the one tree to him should have been no great loss. He ought to have been well content when all the rest of the garden was his own leasehold, to have let that one tree belong to the Great Freeholder of all; but he set his will in direct antagonism to the will of the Most High. The sin itself looked small, the act of plucking the forbidden fruit appeared to be trivial, but within the loins of it lurked a dark hostility to the mind of God, which led to open breach of the Lord's command. That is the way in every transgressor's case, for every sinner is a rebel against God. Though the man at the time when he commits the sin may claim that he was not thinking of God, yet the fact of his acting without regard to Him whom he ought always reverently to consider, was in itself a sin. Sin is a defiance of divine authority, it throws down the gauntlet, and challenges the rights of the King of kings. Are there any here this morning who are pursuing that old way which wicked men have trodden. Do not many of you neglect as a rule the consideration of what is God's mind? Do you not act as unrestrainedly as if there were no God at all? Do you not constantly follow after that which the Lord abhors? I fear many of you are traversing the way of rebellion and are daily provoking the Great Judge. I pray you beware, for this is the old way which wicked men have trodden, and you may be sure that as God met with them, and their rebellion soon ended in terrible destruction, so will He also meet with you, for God's ways are equal, and He dealeth out justice to sinners now as He did then.

In the next place, the old way was *a way of selfishness.* Why did Eve take of that fruit? It was because she believed that the taking of it would delight her appetite, and would also make her wise. It was to gain something for self that evil was done; and her children also have participated in the same feeling. It was this that made Nimrod the mighty tyrant of the world; it was this which led the sons of God before the flood to look upon the daughters of men, for they were fair, because they sought their own pleasure and not the service of God. Self reigned. The men cast themselves down before their own natural propensities, indulged their wantonness, and had no delight in God. This is the old way which wicked men have trodden, and I fear it is a well-trodden path to-day. How do the mass of man-

kind cry? "Show us any good; show us something that shall give us pleasure, amusement, sport, we care little what it is. Let it be decent and respectable, if so it may be, but by any means let us disport ourselves and find pleasure, or get gain, or heap to ourselves honour"; for man seeks himself still, and this is the root of man's sin. He cannot believe that if he would find himself he must not seek himself. He cannot believe the Saviour's testimony that he that would save his life must be content to lose it; that in looking after God and denying self we follow the highest and surest road to promote our own happiness. No, the sinner resolves to serve self first, and then perhaps, he will condescend even to follow God Himself out of self-love, and be religious, and devout, and worship God after his fashion, in order to save himself, still seeking self even at the foot of the throne of God. Well, dear friend, if you, this morning, have not been taught that you must live unto God and not to self, if you are still following out your own ends and aims, and if the main object of your life is to acquire wealth or to get position, or to live in comfort, or to indulge your passions—then depend upon it you are treading in the old way which wicked men have trodden; and as it has always ended in disappointment, so will it with you. The apple stolen out of God's garden has turned to ashes in the hand; the Abimelech of self has become a tyrant; fire has come forth from the bramble which men have made a king, and their cedars have been burned. Be wise, I pray you, and forsake the road which leads to misery.

The old way, in the third place, was *a way of pride.* Our mother Eve rebelled against God because she thought she knew better than God did. She would be as a god, that was her ambition, and the same thought had entered into her husband's mind: he was not content to be what his Maker would have him, he would, if he could, leap into the very throne of Deity, and put upon his own head the diadem of universal dominion. An ambitious pride led them both astray, and this, I fear, is the road in which many are constantly treading. Content to be as nothing before God! no, that they will not; they boast that they are something, and they lift up their heads, and claim dignity, and ask for respect. Lie at the feet of Jesus Christ, and receive salvation as a gift of mercy, pure mercy! nay, that they will not; they talk of merits, prayers, tears; they will, if they can, find something of their own in which to trust, they wrap their miserable rags about them, and claim that they are well clad, and being fascinated by self-deceit, they imagine that they are rich and increased in goods when they are naked, and poor, and miserable. This old way which wicked men have trodden is still frequented by the mass of those who hear the gospel, but who reject it, to their own confusion. O you who are pilgrims in it, remember Pharaoh, and how the Lord crushed the pride of that haughty monarch! Remember He has always cut down the lofty trees and levelled towering hills, and it is His sworn purpose to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the excellency of earth. Tarry awhile, O pilgrim of pride, and humble thyself in dust and ashes, that thou mayest be exalted by the hand of God.

Hoping that each one before me is undergoing the process of self-examination, I would further remark that the old way which wicked men have trodden is *a way of self-righteousness.* Cain, especially, trod that road. He was not an outwardly irreligious man, but quite the reverse. Inasmuch as a sacrifice must be brought, he will bring an offering on his own account. If Abel kneels by the altar, Cain will kneel by the altar also. It was respectable and reputable in that age to pay deference to the unseen God, Cain therefore does the same; but mark where the flaw was in his religion! Abel brought a bloody sacrifice, a lamb, indicating his faith in the great atoning sacrifice, which was to be offered in the end of the world in the person of the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus; but Cain presented an unbloody offering of the fruits of the earth, the products of his own toil, and he thought himself as good as Abel, perhaps better. When the Lord did not accept his service, the envious heart of the self-righteous man boiled over with indignation, and he became a persecutor, aye, a murderer. None are so bitter as the self-righteous; none so cruelly persecute the righteous as those who think themselves righteous and are not. It was because Saul of Tarsus boasted in a fancied righteousness of his own that he breathed out threatenings against those who found their righteousness alone in Christ. The old way of self-righteousness, then, was trodden by the feet of the first murderer, and it is trodden still by tens of thousands of men. Ah, your church-goings and your chapel-goings, your eatings of the sacrament, your baptism, your confirmation, your ceremonies of all sorts and kinds, your gifts to the poor, your contributions to charities, your amiable speeches, and your repetitions of your liturgies, or of your extemporaneous prayers; these, put together, are rested on as the rock of your salvation. Beware, I entreat you, for this is the old way of the Pharisee when he thanked God that he was not as other men; it is the old way of universal human nature which evermore goeth about to establish its own righteousness, and will not submit itself to the righteousness of Christ. As surely as the Pharisees were condemned as a generation of vipers, and could not escape the damnation of hell, so surely every one of us, if we set up our righteousness in the place of Christ's righteousness, will meet with condemnation, and will be overthrown by God's sudden wrath. Mark that old way, and I beseech you, men and brethren, flee from it; by God's grace, flee from it now.

The old way which wicked men have trodden was, in the next place, *a way of unbelief.* Noah was sent to tell those ancient sinners that the world would be destroyed by a flood. They thought him an old dotard, and mocked him to scorn. For one hundred and twenty years that "preacher of righteousness" continually lifted up his warning voice. He threatened that the world should certainly be deluged, and the ungodly sons of men should surely be swept away. He pointed to the ark of safety which he was building in testimony against them, and besought them to humble themselves, and break off their sins by righteousness, but they would not believe the prophet, preacher of righteousness though he was; they turned his most earnest words into jests, and his tenderest invitations were made the subject of their scorn. This was the old way, and the old way has not lost its pilgrims; in different forms and different ways, the atheism of the human heart still continues to discover itself, aye, and discover itself in Christian congregations, for you that are unconverted, surely do not believe that you will be condemned by the righteous justice of God, or you would

not be so much at ease. Did you solemnly believe in the justice of God, you would not dare to bring it down upon your heads; did you really and in very truth believe in the great assize and in the Judge of all, you would not surely spend your lives in violation of the law and in bringing upon yourself the penalty. Oh, did you believe that there is a hell for such as die out of Christ, you would be afraid to remain out of Christ another day, you would seek your chambers, fall upon your knees, and cry to God in mercy that He would now accept you and let you now be reconciled to Him through His blood. Alas! you hear of God's anger, and you profess to believe in it, but you act like infidels, and as you act, so you are. This old way of disbelief has always ended in confusion, for the flood did come, and their disbelief could not arrest its rising; the angry waters burst out from their lairs like beasts of prey, hungry for human life, and the rebellious race was utterly destroyed; even thus most surely shall the vengeance of God overtake us, whether we believe it or no, unless we fly to Christ the Ark and are housed in Him from the coming tempest.

I will not detain you much longer over this very terrible story, but the old way which wicked men have trodden is *a way of worldliness and carelessness, and procrastination.* What did those men before the flood? They married and were given in marriage till the flood came and swept them all away. If any of them believed in Noah, they at any rate said, "We will wait a little longer, there will be time for us to escape from the threatened flood when the first appearance of the descending rains and the upheaving fountains shall be visible to us." The whole world seems to have been making festival on that black day that closed the years of mercy. Never did the joy-bells ring more sweetly; never was the marriage dance more merry, never did eyes more sweetly look love to eyes that spake again, than when the first boomings of the terrible battle were heard afar off, and Jehovah came forth to vengeance, dressed like a man of war, resolved to ease Him of His adversaries. In this old way of worldliness, are there not some of you, dear hearers, treading this very morning? Perhaps you are professors of religion, and yet treading in this way. I mentioned the sons of God just now who are said by Moses to have looked upon the daughters of men, and formed alliance with them, peradventure you may be contemplating the same act, and when the flood comes, your profession will be no refuge to you, but you shall be swept away with the rest. Alas! this is the world's great catechism, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" and this is the world's trinity in unity, "The lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life," and this is the course of this world, ever doth it seek after its own gain and its own pleasure, saying to more solemn and serious things, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." Though the King of heaven has spread a banquet, yet men make light of it; though He has killed His oxen and His fatlings, they go their way every man to his farm and to his merchandise, and so will they do till

> "God's right arm is bared for war,
> And thunder clothes His cloudy car."

Where shall the ungodly fly in that tremendous day? they have chosen this old way, and have walked therein, but how will they escape Him when His flood shall sweep them away?

Eliphaz says, "Hast thou marked the way?" I want you to stop a little while, and look at that road again, and mark it anew. The first thing I observe as I look into it is, that it is *a very broad way.* Our Saviour's words are most true, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." The road of sin is so wide that it has room for rebels, for selfish sinners, for proud sinners, for professors of religion, for infidels, for the worldly, and for the hypocrite. Those who tread the narrow way must all go in at one gate, they must all partake of one washing in the Saviour's blood, they must all be renewed by one Holy Spirit, they must walk in one command; but as for the ungodly, they may follow

> "Each a different way
> Though all the downward road."

The road is so wide, that there may be many independent tracks in it, and the drunkard may find his way along it without ever ruffling the complacency of the hypocrite; the mere moralist may pick a clean path all the way; while the immoral wretch may wade up to his knees in mire throughout the whole road. Behold how sinners disagree and yet agree! how the Sadducee and the Pharisee are opposed to each other in most respects, and yet agree in this, that they are opposed to God! It is a broad road.

Observe that *it is a very popular road.* The way downward to destruction is a very fashionable one, and it always will be. To follow God and to be right has always been a thing espoused by the minority. Holy Richard Baxter says that, when a child, he marvelled that if he ever met with a man who was much more holy than other men, spoke more of Christ, was more prayerful, was more scrupulous in business, he was always the man of whom the neighbours spoke worst; and he wondered more, as he read history, that the children of God always were the nick-named ones, the persecuted ones, the despised ones, until he began to understand that text of Scripture, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed." It must be so; the people of God must expect to go against the stream, as the living fish always do; they must stem the torrent of custom and of fashion, but if you want to follow the old way which wicked men have trodden, you will find plenty of companions, and everyone will give you good cheer.

It is a *very easy way, too.* You need not trouble yourself about finding the entrance into it, you can find it in the dark; and the path is so exceedingly smooth that you need not exert yourself much to make great progress in it. If you desire to go to heaven, and you ask me what is to be done, why, I am earnest to inform you rightly; but if you ask me what you are to do to be damned, well, nothing at all, it is only a little matter of neglect. "How shall we escape," says the apostle, "if we neglect so great salvation?" Leave your boat alone, ship the oars, just sit still and fold your arms, and she will descend to the rapids swiftly enough. The way to total destruction is most easy; but ah! if you would escape, grace must make you work out your own salvation; you must trust in Jesus, and by His grace tug at the oars like a man, for if the righteous

scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and the wicked appear?

This old way, if you look at it, is *the way in which all men naturally run.* I called it a popular road, and a crowded road, but, indeed, it is the road of universal human nature. Only put a child on his feet, and leave him alone, and his first footsteps are towards this broad way; he will need no teaching, you shall have no difficulties in training him, he will find out the evil path, and he will run in it, aye, and will delight in it, and unless the grace of God shall turn him, he will continue in it even when he leaneth upon his staff; and when his hair grows grey, he will still persevere in the old way which wicked men have trodden.

For all that, it is a most unsatisfactory road. Dangerous I should think it must clearly be seen to be, even by those who think the least of it; for since you set out on it, my brother, how many have perished from the way? Look back, I pray you, upon your companions, where are they now? They have gone to the place appointed for all living one by one, and I will ask you now what testimony have they left behind as to the way? When I speak of the pathway to the skies, I can recount a thousand testimonies of dying Christians who have all spoken well of the ways of God. Their unanimous testimony borne, mark you, in the light of another world, where hypocrisy will be impossible—the unanimous testimony has been, that her "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." But who ever heard of the testimony of an ungodly man, when dying, to the sweetness of sin, and to the excellence of unholiness? Why, I think I might stake the whole matter upon the testimony of such a one as Byron, a man of gigantic genius, having an experience of the widest kind, who had drank of the bowl of pleasure and of fame to its very dregs; but his testimony put into other words is precisely that of Solomon: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He became an unhappy man, wearied of life, and died disgusted with all that he had seen. Better far for him had he lived the obscurest believer in Christ, who dying should have exclaimed, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life that fadeth not away!" Let the testimonies, then, of those who have trodden this road, and found it out to be so poor a one, convince you that it is dangerous for you to tread it; for all along the route you meet with nothing but disappointments. If you wish to spend your money for that which is bread, and your labour for that which truly profiteth, you will leave this tempting but deceptive pathway, and fly to another road, in which you shall find present comfort and everlasting felicity.

One thing more I want you to notice before I take you away from this old way which wicked men have trodden, and it is this, that across it here and there *divine mercy has set bars.* Along the road of sin men dash with increasing rapidity every year. It is marvellous the rate at which wickedness will travel when it has once over-mastered all the drags and brakes of common sense and of respect to one's fellows. The course of sin is downhill, and the rate of sinning is every day accelerated. Across the first part of the ungodly man's course God has been pleased to place many chains, and bars, and barricades, and one of those, though it may be but a frail one, is to you, dear hearer, the subject of this morning; you were led here that I might say to you as solemnly as I can, if you are selfish, if you are proud, if you are self-righteous, if you are indulging the lusts of your flesh, you are on the old way which wicked men have trodden, and, for your own sake, stop! The angel of mercy stands before you now, and bids you tarry. Why will ye die? Why will ye choose a path that even now gives you no rest? Why select a way which hereafter shall fill you with eternal misery? Oh tarry awhile, and ask yourself whether it be well to fling away your everlasting hope, and ruin yourself for present wilfulness! Oh pause awhile! That dead child at home lies in your pathway like the dead Amasa, who, as he lay weltering in his blood, made an army pause. That sickness of yours from which you have just recovered, that loss of property which has made you so sorrowful, that dire affliction which you see in a beloved wife, all these are bars and chains—will you overleap them, will you go steeple-chase to hell? Oh, sorry exertion for so miserable an end! Nay, but let mercy arrest thee. God's hand is put upon the bridle now, He reins up thy horse, He thrusts back the steed upon its haunches; man, wilt thou heed thy Maker, wilt thou let thy conscience listen to His voice? Stay thou on the plains of mercy. If thou break this warning through, thou mayst have another and another, but the further the road is travelled the fewer the barricades and the impediments become, till the last part of that tremendous road which leads down to death is all smooth as glass, and a soul may take a dreadful glissade, as down the steep sides of an Alpine mountain, and so glide into hell without the soul being disturbed. The Lord may give you up, and then, like the train of which we read the other day in the newspapers, when the engine had become overpowered by the weight, and the brakes were of no further use, the whole will run down the tremendous decline to destruction. God permits the last end of many men be just such an awful descent. Oh, for God's sake put the brakes on this morning, for Christ's sake I pray you seek to arrest the growing force of your lusts, its growing tendency towards evil, and may His Spirit make use of the words which the text has suggested to us, to come to a dead halt, and to be saved by faith in Jesus!

II. We come now to say a little concerning THE END: "Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood."

The end of these ancient travellers was that the flood came and swept them all away. It is a parallel case to the end of all ungodly men. I do not intend, however, to detain you long upon the terrible subject, but only to utter these few words. The end of these travellers was not according to their unbelief, but according to the despised truth. They would not believe Noah, but the flood came. You may reject the testimony of God's Bible, you may despise the daily warnings of God's ministers, but the result will be as we have said. God is bound to make true His threatenings as well as His promises. His people bear witness that He has never lied to them in a single gracious word, and you may be sure He will never lie to you if you persevere in your sin: every single threatening word will be fulfilled. He is very loath to punish, but He will do it. He will bathe His sword in heaven, and He will smite, and none shall stand against the stroke. God did not fail at the end of the one hundred and twenty years to visit the guilty world, and He will not fail, when your iniquities are full, to visit you. If your ears refuse the language of His grace, as surely as there is a God in heaven,

you shall be made to feel the power of His vengeance. Those who will not be covered by the wings of mercy, as a hen covereth her chickens, shall see justice darting upon them as with the wings of an eagle. Power reigned in the world's creation, providence reigns in the world's preservation; mercy reigned in its redemption, but justice will reign in its condemnation. Remember this, then, unbelief will not, laugh as it may, remove one jot of the penalty.

The flood, like the destroying fire which will come upon ungodly men, was total in its destructiveness. It did not sweep away some of them, but all, and the punishments of God will not be to a few rebels, but to all. It will find out the rich in their palaces, as well as the poor in their hovels. The sword of vengeance will not be bribed, neither will it be made quiet by prayers and entreaties; when it is once drawn out of the scabbard of mercy, it shall find out the sinner, even though he seek sanctuary in the church of God, and lay hold on the horns of the altar by profession. He that is not washed in Jesus' blood, and covered with His righteousness, shall find the overthrow of God to make no exceptions. It will be an overthrow of the most awful kind. What a sight the angels must have seen as they saw the miserable men and women of that old world fleeing to the hills, and to the mountains, and to the tops of the craggy rocks, if possible to escape the ever-advancing flood. I shall not try to make your ears listen to their cries and their imprecations. Oh! will it ever be your fate thus hopelessly to see the floodgates of divine vengeance drawn up, and the wrath of God, like flaming fire, let loose upon you and your fellow sinners?

Moreover, it was a final overthrow. None out of the ark outlived the flood, they perished every one; so shall it be when the wrath of God cometh, it shall be eternal destruction from the glory of the Lord, and from the presence of His power. There is no hope for those with whom God deals in justice, no expectation, nay, not a ray of expectancy can ever reach the gloomy chambers of their despair. Their death-knell is tolled, their prison-house is fastened for ever. God has turned the key in the lock and hurled that key into the abyss where even He will never find it to unlock and to unloose. The fetters of the damned are everlasting, the fires that burn about them never can be quenched, and their worm shall never die. Oh that men would take heed of this, and not want only incur that tremendous wrath of which the Scripture, if it speaketh but sparingly, yet speaketh most solemnly. I am not of those who delight to dwell upon this subject. I have accused myself sometimes that I have so seldom spoken of the terrors of the law, that I have not entered into details with regard to the wrath to come, and the judgments that await the wicked. Oh let me urge you not to tempt the mercy of God, nor provoke His wrath, lest you should know in your own experience with a bitter and fearful knowledge far more than I either care to say to you this morning, or could say if I cared. Consider the old way which wicked men have trodden, and how they were swept away with the devouring flood.

The text gives us two pictures, and these two may suffice to bring out the meaning of Eliphaz. First, he says, they were "cut down out of time." The representation here is that of a tree with abundant foliage and wide-spreading boughs, to which the woodman comes. He feels his axe, it is sharp and ready, and he gives blow after blow, till the tree begins to shake and quiver, and at last, leaning to the side to which it must fall, with a tremendous crash it falls headlong on the turf. Such is the sinner in his prosperity, spreading himself like a green bay tree; birds of song are amongst his branches, and his fruit is fair to look upon; but the axe of death is near, and where the tree falleth there it must for ever lie; fixed is its everlasting state. The crash which we hear in this world as the sinner dies, does but foretell to us his perpetual doom.

The other picture of the text is that of a building which is utterly swept away, Here I would have you notice that Eliphaz does not say that the flood came and swept away the building of the wicked, but swept away their very foundations. If in the next world the sinner only lost his wealth or his health, or his outward comforts of this life, it would be subject for serious reflection; but when it comes to this, that he loses his soul, his very self; when not the comfort of life, but life itself is lost—not the comforts of the mind, but the mind itself, oh! then, it becomes a thing to consider with all one's reason, and with something more of the enlightenment which God's Spirit can add to our reason. Oh that we would but be wise and think of this! May God grant that we may not run the risks of having the foundation of our hope, our comfort, our joy uptorn by an overwhelming torrent, and swept away every stone of it, while we poor fools who built on sand shall wring our hands with anguish to think that we would not take the warning and build on the rock while we might have done so.

III. And now our last word is THE WARNING of the text; and its warning seems to me to be summed up in the enquiry of everyone of us, "Am I or am I not treading in that broad way?"

I would not like a hearer to go out of the place this morning without my having accosted him personally, as best I may while standing here, and put to him the question, Art thou treading in the old way which wicked men have trodden? "Ah!" saith one, "I do not know." Dost thou want to know? I will help thee to answer it. Are you travelling in the narrow way in which believers in Christ are walking? "I cannot say that," say you. Well, then, I can tell you without hesitation that you are treading in the broad way, for there are but two ways, the one the way of mercy, that leadeth upward to the chambers of peace, and the other the way of sin, that leadeth down to the gates of hell. Be not deceived, there are no neutrals here. Christ's word is, "He that is not with Me, is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth abroad." Dost thou say, "I take no part in this quarrel, I am not for God, and I am not against Him?" Nay, then, out of thine own mouth art thou condemned. If thou art not for God, who made thee, then thou hast thrown off thine allegiance and denied the rights of God to possess the creature which He Himself has formed. Thou art in the wide and broad way. The Lord help thee! But if thou canst not answer the question, I will help thee in another way. Friend, didst thou ever experience a great change? Are you a new man? If not, you are in the old way, for the way of nature for every one of us is the old way, and none ever run in the way of righteousness, but such as are renewed by the interposition of the Holy Spirit. "Ye must be born again." "Except a man be born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Do I hear one say, "Then I trust I am changed, I trust I have come into the narrow way?" Brother, bless

God for it this morning. Hang your head in shame to think thou shouldst have been in the broad road, but bless the grace which has taken thee from it; and be sure to prove thy gratitude by trying to rescue others. This very day as much as lieth in thee, tell the gospel of your salvation, that it may be the gospel of their salvation too. Hast thou bread to eat whilst others starve? Eat not thy morsel alone. Hast thou light while others are in the dark? Lend them thy candle; thou shalt see all the better for the loan. God help thee, dear brother, to prove by thy life to others, that thou lovest God, because thou lovest thy brother also.

As for you who confessedly are in the old way, would you turn, would you leave it? Then the turning point is at yonder cross where Jesus hangs, a bleeding sacrifice for the sons of men. Stop there, stay there! Look up and count the purple drops which flow from His dear hands, and feet, and side, and if the Holy Ghost shall help thee to say, "Jesus, accept me, wash me from my sin and take me to be Thy servant, and lead me in a right way, even the way everlasting," then it is done, and this very day you may go your way rejoicing. For the turning point is not a thing of months, weeks, and years, but rather of seconds, when the grace of God comes to work with man. My prayer is, that some who came in here to-day the serfs of Satan, may go out the Lord's free men, and that pilgrims in the way to ruin, may become travellers on the road to heaven, and God's be the glory. Amen.

THE ANXIOUS ENQUIRER

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!"—Job xxiii. 3.

WE will say nothing at this time concerning Job, we will leave the patriarch out of the question, and take these words as the exclamation forced from the aching heart of a sinner, when he finds that he is lost on account of sin, and can only be saved by Christ. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him,"—my Saviour,—that I might be saved by His love and blood!" There are some who tell us that a man can, if he pleases, in one moment obtain peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost. Such persons may know something of religion in their own hearts; but I think they are not competent to be judges of others. God may have given them some peace through believing, and brought them immediately into a state of joy; He may have given them some repentance for sin, and then made them quickly to rejoice in Jesus; but I believe that, in many more cases, God begins by breaking the stony heart in pieces, and often makes a delay of days, of weeks, and even of months, before He heals the soul which He has wounded, and gives life to the spirit which He has killed. Many of God's people have been even for years seeking peace, and finding none; they have known their sins, they have been permitted to feel their guilt, and yet, notwithstanding that they have sought the Lord earnestly with tears, they have not attained to a knowledge of their justification by faith in Christ. Such was the case with John Bunyan; for many a dreary month he walked the earth as one desolate, and said he knew himself to be lost without Christ; on his bended knees, with tears pouring like showers from his eyes, he sought mercy, but he found it not. Terrible words haunted him continually; dreadful passages of Scripture kept ringing in his ears; and he found no consolation until, afterwards, God was pleased to appear unto him in all the plentitude of grace, and led him to cast himself on the Saviour.

I think there may be some here, who have been for a long while under the hand of God;—some who have been brought so far towards heaven as to know that they are undone for ever unless Christ shall save them. I may be addressing some who have begun to pray; many a time the walls of their chamber have resounded with their supplications; not once, nor twice, nor fifty times, but very often have they bent their knees in agonizing prayer; and yet, up to this moment, so far as their own feelings are concerned, their prayers are unanswered, Christ has not smiled upon them, they have not received the application of His precious blood, and mayhap each one of them is at this hour saying, "I am ready to give up in despair; Jesus said He would receive all who came to Him, but, apparently, He has rejected me." Take heart, O mourner! I have a sweet message for thee; and I pray the Lord that thou mayest find Christ on the spot where thou art now standing or sitting, and rejoice in a pardon bought with blood.

I shall now proceed to consider the case of a man who is awakened, and is seeking Christ, but who, at present, has not, in his own apprehension, found Him. First, I shall notice *some helpful signs in this man's case;* secondly, I shall try to give *some reasons why it is that a gracious God delays an answer to prayer in the case of penitent sinners;* and then, thirdly, I shall close by giving *some brief and suitable advice to those who have been seeking Christ, but have up to the present time found it a hopeless search.*

I. First, then, observe that THERE ARE SOME VERY HOPEFUL SIGNS IN THE CASE OF THE MAN WHO HAS BEEN SEEKING CHRIST, THOUGH HE MAY NOT HAVE FOUND HIM.

Taking the text as the basis of observation, I notice, as one hopeful sign, that *the man has only one object, and that is, that he may find Christ.* "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" The worldling's cry is, "Who will show us any good;—this good, that good, or any other good,—fifty kinds of good; who will show us any of these?" But the quickened sinner knows of only one good, and he cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" When the sinner is truly awakened to feel his guilt, if you could pour the gold of India at his feet, he would say, "Take it away; I want to find HIM." If you could give him all the joys and delights of the flesh, he would tell you he had tried all these, and they but cloyed upon his appetite. His only cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!"

"These will never satisfy;
Give me Christ, or else I die."

It is a blessed thing for a man when he has brought his desires into a focus; while he has fifty different wishes, his heart resembles a pool of water, which is spread over a marsh, breeding miasma, and pestilence; but when all his desires are brought into one channel, his heart becomes like a river of pure water, running along, and fertilizing the fields. Happy is the man who has only one desire, if that one desire is set on Christ, even though it may not yet have been realized. If it be his desire, it is a blessed sign of the divine work within him. Such a man will never be content with mere ordinances. Other men will go up to God's house, and when they have heard the sermon, they will be satisfied; but not so this man; he will say, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" His neighbour, who hears the discourse, will be content; but this man will say, "I want more than that; I want to find Christ in it." Another man will go to the communion table; he will eat the bread, and drink the wine, and that will be enough for him; but the quickened sinner will say, "No bread, no wine, will satisfy me; I want Christ, I must have Him. Mere ordinances are of no use to me; I want not the Saviour's clothes, I want Himself. Do not offer me these things; you are only bringing me the empty pitcher while I am dying of thirst; give me water, the Water of life, or I shall die. It is Christ that I want." This man's cry is, as we have it here in our text, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!"

Is this thy condition, my friend, at this moment? Hast thou but one desire, and is that desire that thou mayest find Christ? Then, as the Lord liveth, thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven. Hast thou but one wish in thy heart, and is that one wish that thou mayest be washed from all thy sins in Jesu's blood? Canst thou really say, "I would give all I have to be a Christian; I would give up everything I have and hope for, if I might but feel that I have an interest in the person and death of Christ"? Then, poor soul, despite all thy fears, be of good cheer; the Lord loveth thee, and thou shalt come out into the daylight soon, and rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free.

There is another hopeful sign about this anxious enquirer; not only has the man this one desire, but *it is an intense desire.* Hear the text again: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" There is an "*Oh!*" here; this proves an intensity of desire. There are some men who are apparently very religious, but their religion is never more than skin deep, it does not reach as far as their heart. They can talk of it finely, but they never feel it; it does not well up from the heart, and that is a bad spring that only comes from the lip. But this character whom I am describing is no hypocrite: he means what he says. Other men will say, "Yes, we should like to be Christians; we should like to be pardoned; we should like to be forgiven." And so they would; but they would like to go on in sin, too. They would like to be saved, but they would also like to live in sin; they want to hold with the hare and run with the hounds. They have no desire whatever to give up their sins; they would like to be pardoned for all their past transgressions, and then go on just the same as before. Their wish is of no use, because it is so superficial; but when the sinner is really quickened, there is nothing superficial about him then. His cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" and that cry comes from his very heart.

Art *thou* in that condition, my friend? Is thy sigh a real one? Is thy groan no mere fancy, but a real groan from the heart? Is that tear which steals down thy cheek a genuine tear of penitence, which is the evidence of the grief of thy spirit? I think I hear you saying, "Sir, if you knew me, you would not ask me that question; my friends say I am miserable day after day, and so indeed I am. I go to my chanber, at the top of the house, and often do I cry to God; aye, sir, I cry in such a style that I would not have any one hear me; I cry, with groans and tears, that I may be brought near to God; I do mean what I say." Then, beloved, thou shalt be saved; so surely as it is a real emotion of the heart, God will not let thee perish. Never was there a sinner whose inmost spirit cried to the Lord for salvation, who was not already loved of God; never was there one who, with all his might, desired to be saved, and whose soul groaned out that desire in hearty prayer, who was cast away by God. His mercy may tarry, but it will come. Pray on still; He will hear thee at last, and thou shalt yet "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

But notice again that, in the text, *there is an admission of ignorance,* which is another very hopeful sign. "Oh that I *knew*!" Many people think they know everything, and, consequently, they know nothing. I think it is Seneca who says, "Many a man would have been wise if he had not thought himself so; if he had but known himself to be a fool, he would have become wise." The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance; he cannot learn aright who has not first been taught that he knows nothing. A sense of ignorance is a very excellent sign of grace. It is a singular thing, that every man seems to think himself qualified to be a Doctor of Divinity; a man who knows nothing of any other science, fancies he perfectly understands this greatest of all sciences; and, alas! alas! for those who think they know so much about God's things, and yet have never been taught of God! Man's school is not God's school. A man may go to all the Colleges in creation, and know as little of theology when he comes out as when he went into them. It is a good thing for a man to feel that he is only beginning to learn, and to be willing to open his mind to the teaching of God's Spirit, that he may be guided in everything by Him. He that is foolish enough to fancy that he knoweth everything need not think himself a Christian; he that boasteth that he understands all mysteries needeth to fear as to his true state; but the quickened soul prays to the Lord, "Teach Thou me." We become little children when God begins to deal with us. Before that, we were big, tall men and women, and oh! so wise; but when He takes us in hand, He cuts us down to the stature of children, and we are put on the form of humility, to learn the true lessons of wisdom, and then we are taught the mysteries of the kingdom. Happy are thou, O man, if thou knowest thyself to know nothing! If God hath emptied thee of thy carnal wisdom, He will fill thee with that which is heavenly; if He hath taught thee thine ignorance, He will teach thee His wisdom, and bring thee to Himself; and if thou art taught to reject all thy knowings and findings-out, God will certainly reveal Himself to thee.

There is one more hopeful sign in my text that I must mention. It is this, the person I have spoken of *is quite careless where it is he finds Christ, so that he*

does find Him. Do you know, beloved, that people, when they really feel the weight and the guilt of their sins, are the worst people in the world to stick up for sects? Other men can fight with their fellow-creatures about various minor matters; but a poor awakened sinner says, "Lord, I will be glad to meet Thee anywhere." When we have never seen ourselves to be sinners, we are the most respectable religionists in the world; we venerate every nail in the church or chapel door, and we would not have any one differ from us on any point of doctrine or practice; but when we feel our sins, we say, "Lord, if I could find Thee anywhere, I would be glad; if I could find Thee at the Baptist meeting-house, if I could find Thee in the Independent chapel, I should be glad enough to go there. I have always attended a large, handsome church; but if I could find Thee in that little despised meeting-house, I should be glad to go there; though it would be degrading to my rank and respectability, there would I go to find my Saviour." Some are foolish enough to think that they would rather not have Christ, if He goes anywhere except to their own church; they must keep to their own sect, and can by no means overstep the line.

It is a marvellous thing, but I believe I only describe the experience of many whom I am now addressing, when I say that there are very few of you who were brought to know the Lord where you were in the habit of attending. You have perhaps worshipped there since you were converted; but it was not your father's church, not the place where you were born and bred, but some other into which you strayed for a time, where the King's arrows stuck fast in your heart. I know it was so with me; I never thought of going to the chapel where I was first brought to know the Lord, but it snowed so hard that I could not go to my ordinary place of worship, so I was obliged to go to the little Primitive Methodist meeting; and when I got in, the preacher read his text: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." It was a blessed text, and it was blessedly applied to my soul; but if there had been any stickling as to going into other places, I should not have been there. So the awakened sinner says, "'Oh that I knew where I might find Him!' Only let me know where Christ is to be found; let the minister be the most despised in the world. I will go and hear him; let the sect to which he belongs be the most calumniated and slandered, there I will be found seeking Him. If I can but find Christ, I will be content to meet Him anywhere." If divers can go into the deeps to bring up pearls, we should not be ashamed sometimes to dive deep to bring up precious jewels of grace. Men will do anything to get gold; they will work in the most muddy streams, or under the most scorching sun; surely, then, we ought not to mind how much we stoop, if we find that which is more precious then gold and silver, even "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Is this also thy feeling? Then, beloved, I have not only a hope of thee, but I have a certainty concerning thee; if thou art brought to cry out, in all the senses I have mentioned, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" then, assuredly, the Lord hath begun a good work in thee, and He will carry it on even unto the end.

II. But now, for my second point, I SHALL ENDEAVOUR TO GIVE SOME REASONS WHY IT IS THAT A GRACIOUS GOD DELAYS AN ANSWER TO THE PRAYER OF PENITENT SINNERS. Methinks I hear someone asking, "How is it that God does not give a man comfort as soon as he repents? Why is it that the Lord makes some of His people wait in bondage when they are longing for liberty?"

In the first place, it is *to display His own sovereignty.* Ah! that is a word that is not often mentioned in pulpits. Divine sovereignty is a very unfashionable doctrine. Few people care to hear of a God who doeth as He pleaseth, who is absolute Monarch over man, who knoweth of no law but His own will, which is always the will to do that which is right, to do good to those whom He hath ordained unto eternal life, and to scatter mercy lavishly upon all His creatures. But we assert that there is such a thing as divine sovereignty, and more especially in the work of salvation. God seems to me to argue thus, "If I gave to all men peace so soon as they asked for it, they would begin to think they had a right to it. Now, I will make some of them wait, so that they may see that the mercy is absolutely in My hand; and that, if I chose to withhold it altogether, I might do so most justly; and so I will make men see that it is a gift of My free grace, and not of their own deserving." In some of our squares, where the owners are anxious to keep the right of way in their own hands, they sometimes shut the gates, not because they would inconvenience us, but because they would have the public see that, although they let them through, yet they have no right of way, and might be excluded if the proprietors pleased. So is it with God: He says, "Man, if I save thee, it is entirely of My own will and pleasure; my grace I give, not because thou deservest it, for then it were no grace at all; but I give it to the most undeserving of men, that I may maintain My right to dispense it as I please." And I take it that this is the best way of proving God's sovereignty, namely, His making delay between penitence and faith, or between penitence and that faith which brings peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost. I think that is one very important reason.

But there is another. God sometimes delayeth manifesting His forgiving mercy to men, *in order that they may find out some secret sin.* There is something hidden in their hearts of which they do not know. They come to God confessing their sins, and they think they have made a clean breast of all their transgressions. "Nay," saith God, "I will not give you pardon yet, or I will not at present apply it to your conscience; there is a secret sin you have not yet discovered"; and He sets the heart to examine itself again,—as Jerusalem is searched with candles,—and, lo! there is some iniquity dragged out from the corner in which it was hidden. Conscience says, "I never knew of this sin before; I never felt it to be a sin; Lord, I repent of it; wilt Thou not forgive me?" "Ah!" saith the mighty Maker, "now I have proved thee, and tried thee, and cast out this dross, I will speak to thee the word of consolation and comfort." Art thou, then, a mourner, seeking rest, and not finding it? I beseech thee, look into thine heart once more. Perhaps there is some hidden lust there, some secret sin; if so, turn the traitor out. Then will the Holy Spirit come and dwell in thy soul, and give unto thee "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

Another reason why God delayeth His mercy is, *that He may make us more useful in after life.* A Christian man is never made thoroughly useful until

he has passed through suffering; I do not think there is much good done by a man who has never been afflicted. We must first prove in our own hearts and lives the truths we are afterwards to preach, or we shall never preach them with effect; and if we are private Christians, we can never be of much use to our fellow-men unless we have passed through trials similar to those which they have had to endure. So God makes some of His people wait a long time before He gives them the manifestation of their pardon, in order that, in after days, they may comfort others. The Lord is saying to many a tried soul, "I need thee to be a consolation to others; therefore I will make thee full of grief, and drunken with wormwood, so that, when thou shalt, in after years, meet with the mourner, thou mayest say to him, 'I have suffered and endured the same trial that thou art passing through.'" There are none so fit to comfort others as those who have once needed comfort themselves. Then take heart, poor afflicted one, perhaps the Lord designs thee for a great work. He is keeping thee low in bondage, and doubt, and fear, that He may bring thee out more clearly, and make thy light like the light of seven days, and bring forth thy righteousness "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Wait, then, with patience, for God intends good to thee, and good to others through thee, by this delay.

But the delay often arises, not so much from God, as from ourselves. It is *ignorance of the way of salvation* which keeps many a man longer in doubt than he would be if he knew more about it. I do not hesitate to affirm that one of the hardest things for a sinner to understand is the way of salvation. It seems the plainest thing in all the world; nothing appears more simple than "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But when the sinner is led to feel himself a sinner, he finds it not so easy to understand as he thought. We tell a man that, with all their blackness, sinners may be pardoned; that, with all their sins, they can be forgiven freely for Christ's sake. "But," says the man when he feels himself to be black, "do you mean to tell me that I am to be made whiter than snow? Do you really mean that I, who am lost, am to be saved, not through anything I do, or hope to do, but purely through what Another did?" He can hardly believe it possible; he will have it that he must do something; he must do this, or that, or the other, to help Christ; and the hardest thing in the world is to bring a man to see that salvation is of the Lord alone, and not at all of himself; that it is God's free and perfect gift, which leaves nothing of ours to be added to it, but is given to us to cover us completely, from head to foot, without anything of our own. Men will conceive what God would not have them imagine, and they will not receive that which God would have them embrace. It may be very easy to talk of certain cures, and to read of them; we may say, "Such-and-such a medicine is very effective, and will work such-and-such a cure"; but when we are ourselves sick, we are often very dubious about the medicine; and if, having taken draught after draught of it, we find that it does not help us, perhaps we are brought to think that, though it may cure others, it cannot cure us, because there has been such delay in its operation. So the poor soul thinks of the gospel, "Certainly it cannot heal me"; and then he misunderstands the nature of the sacred medicine altogether, and begins to take the law instead of the gospel. Now the law never saved anyone yet, though it has condemned full many in its time, and will condemn us all unless we receive the gospel.

If any man here should be in doubt on account of ignorance, let me, as plainly as I can, state the gospel. I believe it to be wrapped up in one word,—*Substitution*. I have always considered, with Luther and Calvin, that the sum and substance of the gospel lies in that word, Substitution,—Christ standing in the stead of man. If I understand the gospel, it is this: I deserve to be lost and ruined; the only reason why I should not be damned is this, that Christ was punished in my stead, and there is no need to execute a sentence twice for the same sin. On the other hand, I know that I cannot enter heaven unless I have a perfect righteousness; I am absolutely certain I shall never have one of my own, for I find that I sin every day; but then Christ had a perfect righteousness, and He said, "There, take My garment, put it on; you shall stand before God as if you were Christ, and I will stand before God as if I had been the sinner; I will suffer in the sinner's stead, and you shall be rewarded for works which you did not do, but which I did for you." I think the whole substance of salvation lies in the thought that Christ stood in the place of man. The prisoner is in the dock, he is about to be taken away to death; he deserves to die, for he has been a great criminal. But before he is removed, the judge asks whether there is any possible plan whereby the prisoner's life can be spared. Up rises One who is Himself pure and perfect, and has known no sin, and by the allowance of the judge, for that is necessary, He steps into the dock, and says, "Consider Me to be the prisoner; pass the sentence on Me, and let Me die. Reckon the prisoner to be Myself. I have fought for My country; I have deserved a reward for what I have done; reward him as if he had done good, and punish Me as if I had committed the sin." You say, "Such a thing could not occur in an earthly court of law." No, but it has happened in God's court of law, in the great court of King's Bench where God is the Judge of all, it has happened. The Saviour said, "The sinner deserves to die; let Me die in his stead, and let him be clothed in My righteousness."

To illustrate this, I will give you two instances. One is that of an ancient king, who enacted a law against a certain crime, and the punishment of anyone who committed the crime was, that he should have both his eyes put out. His own son committed the crime. The king, as a strict judge, said, "I cannot alter the law; I have said that the loss of two eyes shall be the penalty; take out one of mine and one of his." So, you see, he strictly carried out the law; but at the same time, he was able to have mercy in part upon his son. But the case of Christ goes further than that; He did not say, "Exact half the penalty of Me, and half of the sinner;" He said, "Put both My eyes out; nail Me to the tree; let Me die; let Me take all the guilt away, and then the sinner may go free." We have heard of another case, that of two brothers, one of whom had been a great criminal, and was about to die, when his brother, coming into the court, decorated with medals, and having many wounds upon him, rose up to plead with the judge, that he would have mercy on the criminal for his sake. Then he began to strip himself, and show his scars,—how here and there on his big broad chest he had received sabre cuts in defence

of his country. "By these wounds," he said,—and he lifted up one arm, the other having been cut away,—"by these my wounds, and the sufferings I have endured for my country, I beseech thee, have mercy on him." For his brother's sake, the criminal was allowed to escape the punishment that was hanging over his head. It was even so with Christ. "The sinner," He said, "deserves to die; then I will die in his stead. He deserves not to enter heaven, for he has not kept the law; but I have kept the law for him, he shall have My righteousness, and I will take his sin; and so the Just shall die for the unjust, to bring him to God."

III. I have thus turned aside from the subject somewhat, in order to clear away any ignorance that might exist in the minds of certain of my hearers as to this essential point of the gospel plan; and now I am, in closing my discourse, to give SOME ADVICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SEEKING CHRIST, AND WHO HAVE NEVER FOUND HIM, AS TO HOW THEY MIGHT FIND HIM.

In the first place, let me say, *Go wherever Christ goes.* If Christ were to walk this earth again, and heal the sick, as He did when He was here before, many sick people would enquire, "Where will Christ be to-morrow?" and as soon as they found out where He would take His walks abroad, there they would be lying on the pavement, in the hope that, as He passed by, He would heal them. Go up, then, sick soul, to Christ's house; it is there that He meets with His people. Read His Word; it is there that He blesses them by applying sweet promises to them. Observe His ordinances; do not neglect them. Christ comes to Bethesda pool; so lie by the water, and wait till He arrives. If you cannot put in your foot, be where Christ comes. Thomas did not get the blessing, for he was not with the other disciples when the Master came to them. Stay not away from the house of God, poor seeking soul; be there whenever the doors are opened, so that, when Jesus passes by, He may haply look on thee, and say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

And whatever else you do, when Christ passes by, *cry after Him with all your might;* never be satisfied until you make Him stop; and if He should frown on you, seemingly, for the moment, do not be silenced or stayed. If you are stirred by a sermon, pray over it; do not lose the auspicious moment. If you hear anything read which gives you some hope, lift up your heart in prayer at once. When the wind blows, then should the sails be set; and it may happen that God will give you grace to reach the harbour's mouth, and you may find the haven of perpetual rest. There was a man who was born blind, and who longed to have his sight. As he sat by the roadway, one day, he was told that Jesus was passing by; and when he heard that, he cried after Him, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." The people wanted to hear Christ preach, so they tried to hush the poor man; but he cried again, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." The Son of David turned not His head; He did not look upon the man, but continued His discourse; yet still the man shouted, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." And then Jesus stopped. The disciples ran to the poor man, and said, "Be still, trouble not the Master"; but he cried so much the more, "Jesus Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." And Jesus at last asked him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" He answered, "Lord, that I might receive my sight." He received it, "and followed Jesus in the way." Perhaps your doubts say to you, "Hush! do not pray any more;" or Satan says, "Be still; do not cry to Christ any more." Tell your doubts and fears, and the devil, too, that you will give Christ no rest till He turns His eyes upon you in love, and heals your diseases. Cry aloud unto Him, O thou awakened sinner, when He is passing by!

The next piece of advice I would give you is this, *think very much of Christ.* No way that I know of will bring you faith in Christ so well as thinking of Him. I would advise you, conscience-stricken sinner, to spend an hour in meditation on Christ. You do not need to devote that time to meditation on yourself; you will get very little good from that; you may know beforehand that there is no hope for you in yourself; but spend an hour in meditation on Christ. Go, beloved, to thy most private place of seclusion, sit down, and picture Christ in the garden; think you see Him there, sweating as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground. Then view Him standing in Pilate's hall; behold Him with His hands bound, His back streaming with blood; then follow Him till you see Him coming to the hill called Calvary; think you see Him hurled backwards, and nailed to the tree; then let your imagination or rather your faith, bring before you the cross lifted up, and dashed into its socket, where every bone of Christ was put out of joint. Look at Him; look at His thorn-crown, and watch the beaded drops of blood trickling down His cheek:

"See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown!

"His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er His body on the tree,
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me."

I know of no means, under God, so profitable for producing faith, as thinking of Christ; for whilst you are looking at Him, you will say, "Blessed Jesus, didst Thou die for sinners? Then surely, my soul, His death is sufficient for thee." He is able to save unto the uttermost all those who trust in Him. You may think of a doctrine for ever, and get no good from it, if you are not already saved; but think of the person of Christ, and specially of His death, for that will bring you faith. Think of Him everywhere, wherever you go; try to meditate on Him in all your leisure moments, and then He will reveal Himself to you, and give you peace.

None of us, not even the best of Christians, think and say enough of Christ. I went into a friend's house, one day, and he said to me, as a sort of hint, I suppose, "I have known So-and-so these thirty years, without hearing anything of his religion." I said, "You will not know me thirty minutes without hearing something of mine." It is a fact that many Christian people spend their Sunday afternoons in talking about other subjects, and Jesus Christ is scarcely ever mentioned. As for poor ungodly worldlings, of course they neither say nor think anything of Him; but oh, thou that knowest thyself to be a sinner, despise not the Man of Sorrows! Let His bleeding hands drop on thee; look thou on His pierced side; and, looking, thou shalt live; for, remember, it is only by looking to Christ that we shall be saved, not by doing anything ourselves.

This brings me to close by saying to every awakened sinner,—If you would have peace with God, and have it now, *venture on Christ.* We must venture on Christ, and venture wholly, or else we never can be saved; yet it is hardly right to say venture, for it is no venture; there is not a grain of haphazard in it. He that trusteth himself to Christ need never fear. "But," someone asks, "how am I to trust Christ? What do you mean by trusting in Christ?" Why, I mean just what I say; fully rely on what Christ did for the salvation of sinners. A negro, when he was asked how he believed, said, "Massa, dis is how I believe; I fall flat down on de promise, I can't fall no lower." He had just the right idea about believing in Jesus. Believing is falling down on Christ, and looking to Him to hold you up. I will illustrate it by an anecdote which I have often told. A boy at sea, who was very fond of mounting to the masthead, one day climbed to the maintop, and could not get down again. The sea was very rough, and it was seen that, in a little while, the boy would fall on the deck, and be dashed to pieces. His father saw but one way of saving his life. Seizing a speaking-trumpet, he shouted, "Boy, the next time the ship lurches, drop into the sea." The next time the ship lurched, the boy looked down, and, not at all liking the idea of throwing himself into the sea, still clung to the mast. The father, who saw that the boy's strength would soon fail him, took a gun in his hand, and cried out, "Boy, if you don't drop into the sea the next time the ship lurches, I'll shoot you!" The boy knew his father meant it, and the next time the ship lurched, he leaped into the sea. It seemed like certain destruction, but out went a dozen brawny arms, and he was saved. The sinner, in the midst of the storm, thinks he must cling to the mast of his good works, and so be saved. Says the gospel, "Let go your own works, and drop into the ocean of God's grace." "No," says the sinner, "it is a long way between me and God's grace; I must perish if I trust to that; I must have some other reliance." "If you have any other reliance than that, you are lost." Up comes the thundering law, and declares to the sinner that, unless he does give up every dependence, he will be lost. Then follows the happy moment when the sinner says, "Dear Lord, I give up all my dependence, and cast myself on Thee; I take Thee, Jesus, to be my one object in life, my only trust, the refuge of my soul." Can any of you say that in your hearts? I know there are some of you who can; but are there any who could not say it when they came here, but who can say it now? Oh, I would rejoice if one such were brought to God! I am conscious that I have not preached to you as I could desire; but if one such has been brought to believe and trust in the Saviour, I rejoice, for thereby God will be glorified.

But, alas! for such of you as will go away and say, "The man has talked about salvation, but what matters it to us?" You think you can afford to laugh to-day at God and His gospel; but remember, men cannot afford to despise boats when their vessel is going down in a storm, although they may do so on land. Death is after you, and will soon seize you; your pulse must soon cease to beat; strong as you are now, your bones are not made of brass, nor are your ribs of steel. Sooner or later, you must lie on your lowly pallet, and there breathe out your last; or, if you be ever so rich, you must die on your curtained beds, and must depart from all your enjoyment into everlasting punishment. You will find it hard work to laugh at Christ then; you will find it dreadful work to scoff at religion then, in that day when death gets hold of you, and asks, "Will you laugh now, scoffer?" "Ah!" you will say, "I find it different from what I supposed; I cannot laugh now death is near me." Take warning, then, before death comes; take warning! He must be a poor ignorant man who does not insure his house before it is on fire; and he must be the greatest of fools who thinks it unnecessary to seek the salvation of his soul till he comes to the last moment, and is in peril of his life. May God give you thought and consideration, so that you may be led to flee from sin, and fly to Jesus; and may God the everlasting Father give you what I cannot,—His grace, which saveth the soul, and maketh sinners into saints, and landeth them in heaven! I can only close by repeating the words of the gospel, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Having said this, if I had said no more, I should have preached Christ's gospel to you. The Lord give you understanding in all things, and help you to believe; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF GODLY SINCERITY

"Will he always call upon God?"—Job xxvii. 10.

WHEN Job resumes his address in this chapter, he appeals to God in a very solemn matter as to the truth of all that he had spoken. No less vehemently does he assert his innocence of any signal crime, or his consciousness of any secret guile, which could account for his being visited with extraordinary suffering. I do not know that his language necessarily implies any culpable self-righteousness; it appears to me rather that he had good cause to defend himself against the bitter insinuations of his unfriendly friends. Possibly his tone was rash, but his meaning was right. He might well feel the justice of vindicating his character before men; but it was a pity if in so doing he seemed to utter a protest of complete purity in the sight of God. You may remember how Paul under equal, if not exactly similar, provocation, tempered his speech and guarded against the danger of misconstruction. Thus he wrote to the Corinthians: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself [or of myself, as though he should say, 'My conscience does not accuse me of wrong'] ; *yet am I not hereby justified.*" But the two

holy men are very like in one respect, for just as Paul, in the struggles of the spirit against the flesh, faced the peril and mounted guard against it, "lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself shall be a castaway"; so Job lays bare before his own eyes, and paints to the view of those who heard him, the features of a hypocrite, lest by any means he should turn out to be such. In terrible language he describes and denounces the hypocrite's flattering hope and withering doom. The suspicion that he himself could harbour a vain pretence in his own breast, or would pretend to be what he was not, was utterly abhorrent to Job's honest heart. He placed himself at the bar, he laid down the law with rigour, he weighed his case with exactness; and so forestalled his adversaries' verdict, by judging himself that he might not be judged.

Who, then, is this "wicked man," thus portrayed before us? And what are the first symptoms of his depravity? We ask not the question idly, but in order that we take heed against the uprise of such an evil in ourselves.

> "Beneath the saintly veil the votary of sin
> May lurk unseen; and to that eye alone
> Which penetrates, the heart, may stand revealed."

The hypocrite is very often an exceedingly neat imitation of the Christian. To the common observer he is so good a counterfeit that he entirely escapes suspicion. Like base coins which are cunningly made, you can scarcely detect them by their ring; it is only by more searching tests that you are able to discover that they are not pure gold, the current coin of the realm. It would be difficult to say how nearly any man might resemble a Christian, and yet not be "in Christ a new creature"; or how closely he might imitate all the virtues, and yet at the same time possess none of the fruits of the Spirit as before the judgment of a heart-searching God. In almost all deceptions there is a weak point somewhere. Never is a lying story told but, if you be keen enough, you may from internal evidence somewhere or other detect the flaw. Though Satan himself has been engaged in the manufacture of impostures for thousands of years, yet whether through the lack of skill on his part, or through the folly of his agents, he always leaves a weak point; his flattering statements are a little too strongly scented and smell of a lie; and his mimic Christians are so overdone in one place, and slovenly in another, that their falsehood betrays itself. Now, in discriminating between saints and hypocrites, one great test-point is prayer. "Behold, he prayeth," was to the somewhat sceptical mind of Ananias demonstration enough that Paul was really converted. If he prays, it may be safely inferred that the breath of prayer arises from the life of faith. The process of spiritual quickening has at least begun. Hence the hypocrite feigns to possess that vital action. If the Christian prays, he will betake himself to the like exercise; if the Christian calls upon God, the deceiver takes care that he will likewise make mention of the name of the Lord. And yet, between the prayer of the truly converted man and the prayer of the hypocrite there is a difference as radical as between life and death, although it is not apparent to everybody. No one, it may be, at first can be aware of it except the man himself, and sometimes even he scarcely perceives it. Many are deceived by the fine expressions, by the apparent warmth, and by the excellent natural disposition of the hypocrite, and they think when they hear him call upon God that his supplications are sufficient evidence that he is truly a quickened child of God. Prayer is always the tell-tale of spiritual life. No right prayer, then is there no grace within. Slackened prayer, then is there a decrease of grace. Prayer stronger, then the whole man also is stronger. Prayer is as good a test of spiritual life and health as the pulse is of the condition of the human frame. Hence I say the hypocrite imitates the action of prayer while he does not really possess the spirit of prayer.

Our text goes deeper than the surface, and enquires into vital matters. Prayer is a test, but here is a test for the test—a trial even for prayer itself. "Will he *always* call upon God?" There is the point. He does call upon God now, and he appears to be intensely devout; he says he was converted in the late revival; he is very fervid in expression, and very forward in manner at present. But will it wear? Will it wear? Will it last? His prayerfulness has sprung up like Jonah's gourd in a night. Will it perish in a night? It is beautiful to look upon, like the early dew that glistens in the sunlight as though the morning had sown the earth with orient pearl; will it pass away like the dew? or will it always abide? "Will he always call upon God?" There is the point. Oh that each one of us now may search ourselves, and see whether we have those attributes connected with our prayer which will prove us not to be hypocrites, or whether, on the contrary, we have those sad signs of base dissembling and reckless falsehood which will before long discover us to be dupes of Satan, imposters before heaven.

"Will he always call upon God?" This question, simple as it is, I think involves several pertinent enquiries. The first point which it raises is that of CONSISTENCY. Is the prayer occasional, or is it constant? Is the exercise of devotion permanent and regular, or is it spasmodic and inconstant? Will this man call upon God *in all seasons of prayer?* There are certain times when it is most fit to pray, and a genuine Christian will and must pray at such periods. Will this hypocrite pray at all such times, or will he only select some of the seasons for prayer? Will he only be found praying at certain times and in selected places? Will he always, in all fit times, be found drawing near to God? For instance, he prayed standing at the corners of the streets where he was seen of men: he prayed in the synagogue, where everybody could mark his fluency and his fervour, but will he pray at home? Will he enter into his closet and shut to the door? Will he there speak unto the Father who heareth in secret? Will he there pour forth petitions as the natural outflow of his soul? Will he walk the field at eventide, in lonely meditation, like Isaac, and pray there? Will he go to the housetop with Peter, and pray there? Will he seek his chamber as Daniel did, or the solitude of the garden as did our Lord? Or is he one who only prays in public, who has the gift of prayer rather than the spirit of prayer, who is fluent in utterance rather than fervent in feeling? Oh, but this, this is one of the surest of tests, by which we may discern between the precious and the vile. Public prayer is no evidence of piety: it is practised by an abundance of hypocrites; but private prayer is a thing for which the hypocrite has no heart—and if he gives himself to it for a little time he soon finds it too hot and heavy a business for his soulless soul to persevere in, and he lets it drop. He will sooner perish than

continue in private prayer. Oh for heart searchings about this! Do I draw near to God alone? Do I pray when no eye sees, when no ear hears? Do I make a conscience of private prayer? Is it a delight to pray? For I may gather that if I never enjoy private prayer I am one of those hypocrites who will not always call upon God.

The true Christian will pray in business; he will pray in labour; he will pray in his ordinary calling: like sparks out of the smithy chimney short prayers fly up all day long from truly devout souls. Not thus is it with the mere pretender. The hypocrite prays at prayer-meetings, and his voice is heard in the assembly, sometimes at tedious length; but will he pray with ejaculatory prayer? Will he speak with God at the counter? Will he draw near to God in the field? Will he plead with his Lord in the busy street with noiseless pleadings? When he finds that a difficulty has occurred in his daily life, will he without saying a word breathe his heart into the ear of God? Ah, no! hypocrites know nothing of what it is to be always praying, to abide in the spirit of prayer. This is a choice part of Christian experience with which they do not meddle. But be sure of this—where there is genuine religion within, it will be more or less habitual to the soul to pray. Some of us can say that to be asking blessings from God in brief, wordless prayers, comes as natural to us as to eat and drink, and breathe. We never encounter a difficulty now but we resolve it by appealing to the wisdom of God—never meet with any opposition but what we overcome it by leaning upon the power of God. To wait upon the Lord and speak with Him has become a habit with us—not because it is a duty—we have left legal bondage far behind—but because we cannot help it, our soul is inwardly constrained thereto. The nature within as naturally cries to God as a child cries after its mother. The hypocrite prays in his fashion because it is a task allotted to him: the Christian because it is a part of his very life. Herein is an ever-standing mark of distinction by which a man may discern himself. If your prayer is only for certain hours, and certain places, and certain times, beware lest it turn out to be an abomination before the Lord. The fungus forced by artificial heat is a far different thing from the rosy fruit of a healthy tree, and the unreal devotions of the unspiritual differ widely from the deep inward groanings of renewed hearts. If you pray by the almanack, observing days and weeks, you may well fear that your religion never came from the great Father of Lights, with whom are no changing moons. If you can pray by the clock, your religion is more mechanical than vital. The Christian does not fast because it is Lent; if his Lord reveals His face he cannot fast merely because a church commands him. Neither can he therefore feast because it happens to be a festival in the calendar. The Spirit of God might make his soul to be feasting on Ash-Wednesday, or his soul might be humbled within him at Easter; he cannot be regulated by the dominical letter, and the new moons and days of the month. He is a spiritual character, and he leaves those who have no spiritual life to yield a specious conformity to such ecclesiastical regulations, his new-born nature spurns such childish bonds. The living soul prays evermore with groanings that cannot be uttered, and believingly rejoices evermore with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

A second point in debate is that of CONTINUANCE. Will he always call upon God?" There are trying periods and sifting seasons; those who hold on through these are the true, but those who suspend prayer at these test intervals are the false. Now times of joy and sorrow are equally critical seasons. Let us look at them in turn. Will the hypocrite call upon God in times of *pleasure?* No; if he indulges himself in what he calls pleasure, he dares not pray at night when he comes home. He goes to places where he would think it a degradation of prayer to think of praying. The genuine Christian prays always, because if there be any spot where he dares not pray, just there he dares not be found; or if there be any engagement about which he could not pray, it is an engagement that shall never ensnare him. Some one once proposed to write a collect to be said by a pious young lady when attending a theatre, and another to be repeated by a Christian gentleman when shuffling a pack of cards. There might be another form of prayer to be offered by a pious burglar when he is breaking open a door, or by a religious assassin when he is about to commit murder. There are things about which you cannot pray: they have nothing to do with prayer. Many tolerated amusements lead to outrages upon the morals of earth, and are an insult to the holiness of heaven. Who could think of praying about them? Herein is the hypocrite discerned; he does that which he could not ask a blessing upon. Poor as is the conscience he owns, he knows it is ridiculous to offer prayer concerning certain actions which, notwithstanding, he has the hardihood to perform. The Christian avoids things which he could not pray about; and so he feels it a pleasure to pray always.

Equally trying is the opposite condition of depression and sorrow. There, too, we try the question, "Will he always call upon God?" No; the hypocrite will not pray when *in a desponding state.* He breathed awhile the atmosphere of enthusiasm. His passions were stirred by the preacher, and fermented by the contagious zeal of the solemn assembly. But now a damp cold mist obscures his view, chills his feelings, settles in his heart. Others are growing cold, and he is among the first to freeze. He is down-hearted and discouraged. Forthwith, like King Saul, he succumbs to the evil spirit. Were he a Christian indeed, he would follow in the wake of David, and say: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God;" but he has no heart to hope on in ill weather. He built up his hopes tastefully, and he admired the structure which was of his own piling; but the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and down it all went; and therefore, being a hypocrite, he said within himself: "Now I have no enjoyment of religion: it has lost its novelty; I have worn out its delights; I have now no comfort from it; I will give it up." Thus in the trying hour the deceiver is laid bare. Look at the real Christian when a storm bursts over him which shakes his confidence and spoils his joy: what does he do? He prays more than ever he did. When his mountain stood firm, and he said, "I shall not be moved," he perhaps grew too slack in prayer; but now, when all God's waves and billows are going over him, and he hardly knows whether he is a child of God or not, and questions whether he has any part or lot in the matter, he proves that all is right within, by crying unto God in the bitterness of his soul,

"O God, have mercy upon me, and deliver me from going down into the pit." A Christian's despair makes him pray; it is a despair of self. A worldling's despair makes him rave against God, and give up prayer. Mark then, how in the opposite seasons of joy and sorrow prayer is put into the crucible and tested. All our times of pleasure ought to be times of prayer; Job accounted his family festivities opportune for calling his children together for special devotion. No less should our periods of despondency become incentives to prayer; every funeral knell should ring us to our knees. The hypocrite cannot keep these statutes and ordinances, but the true Christian follows them out; for he is alike at home in seeking the Lord, calling upon His name, and asking counsel and guidance at His mercy-seat, in any variety of experience, and every diversity of circumstance.

"Will he always call upon God?" Here is the question of CONSTANCY. Will he pray constantly? It seems to most men a very difficult thing to be praying always, to continue in prayer, to pray without ceasing. Yes; and herein again is there a great distinction between the living child of God and the mere pretender. The living child of God soon finds that it is not so much his duty to pray, as his privilege, his joy, a necessity of his being. What moment is there when a Christian is safe without prayer? Where is there a place wherein he would find himself secure if he ceased to pray? Just think of it. Every moment of my life I am dependent upon the will of God as to whether I shall draw another breath or not. Nothing stands between me and death but the will of God. An angel's arm could not save me from the grave, if now the Lord willed me to depart. Solemn, then, is the Christian's position: ever standing by an open tomb. Should not dying men pray? We are always dying. As life is but a long dying, should it not be also a long praying? Should we not be incessantly acknowledging to God in prayer and praise the continuance of our being which is due to His grace? Brethren, every moment that we live we are receiving favours and benefits from God. There is never a minute in which we are not recipients of His bounty. We are wont to thank God for His mercies as if we thought they came at certain set times; so in truth they do: they are new every morning; great is His faithfulness; and they soothe us night by night, for His compassion faileth not, but there are mercies streaming on in one incessant flow. We never cease to need; He never ceases to supply. We want constant protection, and He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. Lest any hurt us, He keeps us night and day. The river of God rolls on with undiminished volume and unimpeded velocity. How greatly doth He enrich us thereby! Should we not be ever careful to secure His gifts, to reap the harvest He provides, and as His people to take these good things from His gracious hands? But, oh! let us take heed to mingle prayer with all our thanksgiving, lest He should curse the boon over which we have asked no blessing; blight the crops, of which we have dedicated to Him no first-fruits; or smite us with the rod of anger, while the food is yet in our mouth. Our cravings know no abatement, our dependence on God knows no limit; therefore our prayers should know no intermission. Speak of beggars, we are always beggars. Is it not better for us, then, to be regular pensioners than mere casuals? Whatever God has given us we are as needy still; we are always, if taken apart from Him, naked, and poor, and miserable, altogether dependent upon Him, as well for the soul as for the body; for good thoughts, for spiritual aspirations, for holy graces, aye, and for the breath of our nostrils and the bread of our mouths; always needing temporals, always needing spirituals. If we are always needing, we should be always pleading. Besides that, dear friends, we are always in danger; we are in an enemy's country, behind every bush there is a foe; we cannot reckon ourselves to be secure in any place. The world, the flesh, and the devil constantly assail us. Arrows are shot from beneath us, and from around us, while the poison of our own corruption rankles within us. At any moment temptation may get the mastery over us, or we ourselves may go astray and be our own tempters. Storms may drive us, whirlpools suck us down, quicksands engulf us, and if none of these accomplish our shipwreck we may founder of ourselves, or perish of spiritual dry-rot. We need, then, each hour to watch, and each separate moment to pray, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." Are ye wealthy? Pray God that your silver and your gold bring no spiritual plague with them! Do not let your money stick to your hand or your heart, for in proportion as it glues itself to you it poisons you. Pray God to sanctify your abundance, so that you may know how to abound; a difficult piece of knowledge to attain. Are ye poor? Then ask to be kept from envy, from discontent, and all the evils that haunt the narrow lanes of poverty. Pray that as you are each in danger one way or another, you may all be kept hour by hour by the constant grace of God. If we knew what poor, weak, helpless creatures we are, we should not want to be told always to pray; we should wonder how we could think of living without prayer. How can I, whose legs are so feeble, try to walk without leaning on my Father's hand? How can I, who am so sickly, wish to be a day without the Good Physician's care? The hypocrite does not see this; he does not discern these perpetual needs and perpetual gifts, these perpetual dangers and perpetual preservations—not he. He thinks he has prayed enough when he has had his few minutes in the morning and his few minutes at night. He trots through his form of morning devotion just as he takes his morning wash, and has he not settled the business for the day? If at evening he says his prayers with the same regularity with which he puts on his slippers, is it not all he needs? He almost thinks that little turn at his devotions to be a weariness. As to his heart going up in prayer to God, he does not understand it; if he be spoken to concerning it, it sounds like an idle tale, or mere cant.

Dear brethren, "we ought always to pray, and not to faint," because we are always sinning. If I were not evermore sinning, if I could pause in that constant aberration of mind from the pure, the unselfish, the holy, perhaps I might suspend confession, and relax supplication awhile; but if unholiness stains even my holy things—if in my best endeavours there is something of error, something of sin—ought I not to be continually crying to God for pardon, and invoking His grace? And are we not constantly liable to new temptations? May we not fall into grosser sins than we have hitherto committed, unless we are preserved by a power beyond our own? Oh pray perpetually, for you know not what temptations may assail you. Pray that ye enter not into temptation. If perchance in some

favoured moment we could imagine ourselves to have exhausted all the list of our needs, were we enjoying complete pardon and full assurance, did we stand upon the mountain's brow, bathing our foreheads in the sunlight of God's favour, if we had no fear, no care, no trouble of our own to harass us, yet we might not therefore cease to pray. The interests of others, our kindred, our neighbours, our fellow creatures might—ah! must—then start up before us, and claim that we should bear upon our breasts their memorial. Think of the sinners around you hardening in transgression, some of them dying, seared with guilt or frenzied with despair. O brethren, how could you cease to intercede for others, were it possible, which it is not, that you should have no further need to supplicate for yourselves? The grand old cause which we have espoused, and the Christ who hath espoused our cause—both these demand our prayers. By the truth whose banner waves above us, by the King who has ennobled us, love to whose person fires us this day with ardour for His cross, and zeal for His gospel, we are constrained to unwavering devotion. So spake the gospel of old, and so doth the Spirit of God prompt us now. "Prayer also shall be made for Him continually; and daily shall He be praised." Oh that in our case the prediction might be verified, the promise fulfilled! Not so the hypocrite: he will not have it on this fashion. Enough for him to have prayers on the Sunday; enough to get through family prayers at any rate, and if that does not please you, the morning prayer and the evening prayer shall be said by rote at the bedside; will not these suffice? Praying all day long, why he considers that it would be almost as bad as heaven, where they are singing without ceasing. So he turns on his heel, and saith he will have none of it. Nor shall he; for where God is he shall not come, but the Lord will tell him, "I never knew you: depart from Me, thou worker of iniquity."

"Will he always call upon God?" The question may be an enquiry as to IMPORTUNITY. Will the hypocrite pray importunately? He will do no such thing. I have heard farmers talk about the way to know a good horse. It will serve me to illustrate the way to tell a good Christian. Some horses when they get into the traces pull, and when they feel the load move they work with all their might, but if they tug and the load does not stir, they are not for drawing any longer. There is a breed of really good horses in Suffolk which will tug at a dead weight, and if they were harnessed to a post, they would pull till they dropped though nothing stirred. It is so with a lively Christian. If he is seeking a great favour from God, he prays, whether he gets it or not, right on: he cannot take a denial; if he knows his petition to be according to God's will and promise, he pleads the blood of Jesus about it; and if he does not get an answer at once, he says, "My soul, wait"—*wait!* a grand word—"wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him." As for the hypocrite, if he gets into a church, and there is a prayer-meeting, and he feels, "Well, there is a fire kindling, and an excitement getting up"—ah! how that man can pray, the waggon is moving behind him, and he is very willing to pull. But the sincere believer says, "I do not perceive any revival yet. I do not hear of many conversions. Never mind, we have prayed that God will glorify His dear Son: we will keep on praying. If the blessing does not come in one week, we will try three; if it does not come in three weeks, we will try three months; if it does not come in three months, we shall still keep on for three years; and if it does not come in three years, we will plead on for thirty years; and if it does not come then, we will say, 'Let Thy *work* appear unto Thy servants, and Thy *glory* unto their children.' We will plead on until we die, and mingle with those who beheld the promise afar off, were persuaded of it, prayed for it, and died believing it would be fulfilled." Such prayer would not be wasted breath. It is treasure put out to interest; seed sown for a future harvest; rather it is the aspiration of saints kindled by the inspiration of God. The genuine believer knows how to tug. Jacob, when he came to Jabbok, found that the angel was not easily to be conquered. He laid hold of him, but the angel did not yield the blessing: something more must be done. Had Jacob been a hypocrite he would have let the angel loose at once, but being one of the Lord's own, he said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." When the angel touched him in the hollow of his thigh, and made the sinew shrink, had he been a hypocrite he would have thought, "I have had enough of this already; I may be made to shrink all over; I cannot tell what may happen next. I will have no more of this midnight encounter with an unknown visitor. I will get me back to my tent." But no; he meant to prevail, and though he felt the pain, yet he said—

> "With Thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day."

He did so, and became a prince from that night. Will you take a denial from God, you shall have it; but if you will not be denied, neither shall you. O importunate Christian, you are he whom God loves! Alas for those who only give, as it were, runaway knocks at the door of heaven, like boys in the street that knock and run away—they shall never find the blessing. Oh, to continue in prayer! it is the very test of sincerity. Hence of the hypocrite it is said, "Will he always call upon God?" A hypocrite leaves off praying in either case; he leaves off if he does not get what he asks for, as I have shown you; and he leaves off if he does get what he asks for. Has he asked to be recovered from sickness when ill? If he gets well, what cares he for praying again? Did he pray that he might not die? Oh, what a long face he drew, and what drawling professions of repentance he groaned out! But when his health is regained, and his nerves braced, his spirits are cheered, and his manly vigour has come back to him; where are his prayers? where are the vows his soul in anguish made? He has forgotten them all. That he is a hypocrite is palpable, for he leaves off praying if he does not get heard, and if he does. There is no keeping this man up to God's statute or his own promise; he has not the heart for true devotion, and soon fails in the attempt to exercise it.

"Will he always call upon God?" Here is the trial of PERSEVERANCE. Will he always continue to pray in the future? Will he pray, in years to come, as he now professes to do? I call to see him, and he is very sick; the doctor gives a very poor account of him; his wife is weeping; all over the house there is great anxiety. I sit down by his bedside; I talk to him, and he says, "Oh, yes, yes, yes;" he agrees with all I say, and he tells me he believes in Jesus.

And when he can sit up, he cries, "God be merciful to me." His dear friends are godly people; they feel so pleased; they look forward to his recovery, and reckon upon seeing him a new creature, a disciple of Christ. Besides, he has told them, when he gets up, how earnest he will be in a life of faith and obedience to the Lord. He will not be a mere professor, he means, to throw his whole soul into the Master's service. Now mark him. He recovers; and when he breaks forth from that sick chamber, and can dispense with the ministry of those gentle patient women who nursed him and prayed for him, what does the hypocrite do? Oh, he says he was a fool to think and speak as he did. He admits he was frightened, but he disclaims every pious expression as an infirmity of his distracted brain, the delirium of his malady, not the utterance of his reason; and he recants all his confessions like the atheist in Addison's "Spectator." Addison tells us that certain sailors heard that an atheist was on board their vessel: they did not know what an atheist was, but they thought it must be some odd fish; and when told it was a man who did not believe in God, they said, "Captain, it would be an uncommonly good thing to pitch him overboard." Presently a storm comes on, and the atheist is dreadfully sick and very fearful; there, on the deck, he is seen crying to God for mercy, and whining like a child that he is afraid he will be lost and sink to hell. This is the usual courage of atheism! But when the coward reached the shore, he begged the gentlemen who heard him pray to think nothing of it, for indeed he did not know what he was saying, he had no doubt uttered a great deal of nonsense. There are plenty of that sort—who pray in danger, but brag when they get clear of the tempest. Hereby the hypocrite is discovered. Once take away from him the trouble and you do away with the motive for which he put on the cloak of religion. He is like a boy's top, which will spin so long as you whip it. The man will pray while he smarts, but not one whit longer. The hypocrite will pray to-day in society congenial for prayer, but he will discard prayer to-morrow when he gets laughed at for it in his business. Some old friend of his drops in, who has heard that he has been converted, and he begins to ridicule him. He asks him whether he has really turned a Methodist? The next thing he expects to hear is, that he is dipped. He makes some coarse remarks rather to the chagrin of our courageous friend, till he, who set out so boldly to heaven with his prayers, feels quite small in the presence of the sceptic. If he were right in heart, he would not only have a proper answer to give to the mocker, but in all probability he would carry the war into the enemy's country, and make his antagonist feel the folly of his sins and the insanity of his conduct in living without a God and without a Saviour. The meet object of ridicule and contempt is the godless, the Christless man. The Christian need never be ashamed or lower his colours. The hypocrite may well blush and hide his head, for if there is any creature that is contemptible, it is a man who has not his heart where he professes it to be.

Neither will such a one always call upon God if he gets into company where he is much flattered; he feels then that he has degraded himself somewhat by associating with such low, mean people as those who make up the church of God. And if he prosper in business, then he considers that the people he once worshipped with are rather inferior to himself: he must go to the world's church: he must find a fashionable place where he can hear a gospel that is not for the poor and needy, but for those who have the key of aristocratic drawing-rooms and the select assemblies. His principles—well, he is not very particular—he swallows them; probably his nonconformity was a mistake. The verities which his fathers suffered martyrdom to defend, for which they were mulcted of their possessions, driven as exiles from their country, or cast into prison, he flings away as though they were of no value whatever. Many have fallen from us through the temptations of prosperity who stood firmly enough under persecution and adversity. It is another form of the same test, "Will he always call upon God?"

Besides, if none of these things should occur the man who is not savingly converted and a genuine Christian, generally gives up his religion after a time because the novelty of it dies off. He is like the stony ground that received the seed, and because there was no depth of earth the sun could play upon it with great force, and up it sprang in great haste, but because there was no depth of earth, therefore it soon was scorched. So this man is easily impressible, feels quickly, and acts promptly under the influence of a highly emotional nature. Says he, "Yes, I will go to heaven," as he inwardly responds to the appeal of some earnest minister. He thinks he is converted, but we had better not be quite so sure as he is. "Wait a bit, wait a bit." He cools as fast as he was heated. Like thorns under a pot that crackle and blaze and die out, leaving but a handful of ashes, so is it with all his godliness. Ere long he gets tired of religion, he cannot away with it—what a weariness it is. If he perseveres awhile, it is no more pleasure to him than a pack is to a pack horse; he keeps on as a matter of formality: he has got into it and he does not see how to break away, but he likes it no better than an owl loves daylight. He holds on to his forms of prayer with no heart for prayer—and what a wretched thing that is! I have known people who felt bound to keep up their respectability when they had little or no income. Their debts were always increasing, their respectability was always tottering, and the strain upon their dignity was exhausting their utmost resources. Such persons I have considered to be the poorest of the poor. An unhappy life they lead, they never feel at ease. But what an awful thing it is to have to keep up a spiritual respectability with no spiritual income; to overflow with gracious talk when there is no well of living water springing up within the soul; to be under the obligation to pay court to the sanctuary while the heart is wandering on the mountain; to be bound to speak gracious words and yet possess no gracious thoughts to prompt their utterance. O man, thou art one of the devil's double martyrs, because thou hast to suffer for him here in the distaste and nausea of thy hypocritical profession, and then thou wilt be made to suffer hereafter also for having dared to insult God, and ruin thy soul by being insincere in thy profession of faith in Jesus Christ!

I may be coming very close home to some persons before me: I am certainly pressing my own conscience very severely. I suppose there is no one amongst us who does not feel that this is a very searching matter. Well, dear friends, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we peace towards God;

but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things. Let us confess to Him all past failures, and though we may not be conscious of hypocrisy (and I trust we are not so), yet, let us say, "Lord, search and try me, and know my ways; see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." I was speaking with a gentleman last night, and I said to him, "You are a director of such a Life Assurance Company, are you not?" "Yes," he said. "Well," I said, "yours is a poor society, is it not?" "It is a very good one," he replied; "a very good one." "But it is very low down in the list." "What list is that?" "Why, the list that has been sent round by certain persons to let the public see the condition of the life assurance companies." "Well," said he, "where is it to be seen?" "Oh, never mind where it is to be seen: is it true?" "No, it is not true; our society stands well—admirably well." "How so?" "Well, you know such a man, he is an excellent actuary and a man of honour." "Yes." "Well, when we employed him to go over our accounts, we said just this to him: 'Take the figures, examine them thoroughly, sift our accounts, and tell us where the figures land you; tell us just that, neither less nor more, do not shirk the truth in the slightest degree. If we are in a bankrupt state, tell us; if we are flourishing, tell us so.'" My friend has convinced me that his office is not what I feared it was. I have much confidence in any man's business when he wishes to know and to publish the unvarnished truth. I have great confidence in the sincerity of any Christian man who says habitually and truthfully, "Lord, let me know the very worst of my case whatever it is. Even if all my fair prospects and bright ideals should be but dreams—the fabric of a vision; if yonder prospect before me of green fields and flowing rills should be but an awful mirage, and on the morrow should change into the hot burning desert of an awful reality; so be it, only let me know the truth; lead me in a plain path; let me be sincere before Thee, O Thou heart-searching, rein-trying God!" Let us, with such frank candour, such ingenuous simplicity, come before the Lord. Let as many of us as fear the Lord and distrust ourselves, take refuge in His omniscience against the jealousies and suspicions which haunt our own breasts. And let us do better still, let us hasten anew to the cross of Jesus, and thus end our difficulties by accepting afresh the sinners' Saviour. When I have a knot to untie as to my evidence of being a child of God, and I cannot untie it, I usually follow Alexander's example with the Gordian knot, and cut it. How cut it? Why, in this way. Thou sayest, O conscience, this is wrong, and that is wrong. Thou sayest, O Satan, thy faith is a delusion, thy experience a fiction, thy profession a lie. Be it so then, I will not dispute it, I end that matter; if I am no saint, I am a sinner; there can be no doubt about that! The devil himself is defied to question that. Then it is written that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," and to sinners is the gospel preached, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned." I do believe on Him; if I never did before I will now, and all my transgressions are therefore blotted out. And now, Lord, grant me grace to begin again, and from this time forth let me live the life of faith, the life of prayer; let me be one of those who will pray always, let me be one of those who will pray when they are dying, having prayed all their lives. Prayer is our very life: ceasing prayer we cease to live. As long as we are here preserved in spiritual life we must pray. Lord, grant it may be so with each one here present, through the power of Thy Spirit, and the merit of Jesus' blood. Amen, and Amen.

JOB'S REGRET AND OUR OWN

"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when, by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle."—Job xxix. 2, 3, 4.

IF Job here refers to the temporal prosperity which he had lost, we cannot condemn him for his complaint, neither can we commend him. It is but the expression of a natural regret, which would be felt by any man who had experienced such great reverses. But there is everywhere in the expressions which he uses such a strain of spirituality, that we are inclined to believe that he had more reference to the condition of his heart than to the state of his property. His soul was depressed; he had lost the light of God's countenance; his inward comforts were declining, his joy in the Lord was at a low ebb, this he regretted far more than anything besides. No doubt he deplored the departure of those prosperous days when, as he words it, his root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon his branch; but, much more did he bemoan that the lamp of the Lord no more shone upon his head, and the secret of God was not upon his tabernacle. As his spiritual regrets are far more instructive to us than his natural ones, we will turn all our attention to them. We may, without violence, appropriate Job's words to ourselves; for I fear that many of us can with great propriety take up our wailing and mourn for the days of our espousals, the happy days of our first love. I shall have to trouble you with many divisions this morning; but I shall be brief upon each one, and I hope that our thoughts may be led onward, and rendered practically serviceable to us, by the blessing of God's Spirit.

I. Let us begin by saying, that regrets such as those expressed in the text are and ought to be VERY BITTER. If it be the loss of spiritual things that we regret, then may we say from the bottom of our hearts, "Oh, that I were as in months past."

It is a great thing for a man to be near to God; it is a very choice privilege to be admitted into the inner circle of communion, and to become God's familiar friend. Great as the privilege is, so great is the loss of it. No darkness is so dark as that which falls on eyes accustomed to the light

The poor man who was always poor is scarcely poor, but he who has fallen from the summit of greatness into the depths of poverty is poor indeed. The man who has never enjoyed communion with God knows nothing of what it must be to lose it; but he who has once been pressed upon the Saviour's bosom will mourn, as long as he liveth, if he be deprived of the sacred enjoyment. The mercies which Job deplored in our text are no little ones. First, he complains that he had lost the consciousness of divine *preservation*. He says, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me." There are days with Christians when they can see God's hand all around them, checking them in the first approaches of sin, and setting a hedge about all their ways. Their conscience is tender, and the Spirit of God is obeyed by them; they are, therefore, kept in all their ways, the angels of God watching over them, lest they dash their foot against a stone. But when they fall into laxity of spirit, and walk at a distance from God, they are not so preserved. Though kept from final and total apostasy, yet they are not kept from very grievous sin; for, like Peter who followed afar off, they may be left to deny their Master, even with oaths and cursings. If we have lost that conscious preservation of God, which once covered us from every fiery dart; if we no longer abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and feel no longer that His truth is our shield and buckler, we have lost a joy worth worlds, and we may well deplore it with anguish of heart.

Job had also lost divine *consolation*, for he looks back with lamentation to the time when God's candle shone upon his head, when the sun of God's love was as it were in the zenith, and cast no shadow; when he rejoiced without ceasing, and triumphed from morning to night in the God of his salvation. The joy of the Lord is our strength, the joy of the Lord is Israel's excellency; it is the heaven of heaven, it is heaven even upon earth; and, consequently, to lose it, is a calamity indeed. Who that has once been satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord, will be content to go into the dry and thirsty land, and live far off from God? Will he not rather cry out with David, "My soul thirsteth for God; when shall I come and appear before God?" Surely his agonising prayer will be, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit." Love to God will never be content if His face be hidden. Until the curtain be drawn aside and the King's face be seen through the lattices, the true spouse will spend her life in sighing; mourning like a dove bereaved of its mate.

Moreover Job deplored the loss of divine *illumination*. "By His light," he says, "I walked through darkness," that is to say, perplexity ceased to be perplexity; God shed such a light upon the mysteries of providence, that where others missed their path, Job, made wise by heaven, could find it. There have been times when, to our patient faith, all things have been plain. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine"; but, if we walk far off from God, then, straightway, even the precious truth of God is no more clear to us, and the dealings of God with us in providence appear to be like a maze. He is wise as Solomon who walks with God, but he is a very fool who trusts his own understanding. All the wit that we have gathered by observation and experience will not supply us with sufficiency of common sense, if we turn away from God. Israel, without consulting God, made a league with her enemies; she thought the case most plain when she entered into hasty alliance with the Gibeonites, but she was duped by cunning because she asked not counsel of the Lord. In the simplest business we shall err, if we seek not direction from the Lord; yet, where matters are most complicated, we shall walk wisely, if we wait for a voice from the oracle, and seek the good Shepherd's guidance. We may bitterly lament, therefore, if we have lost the Holy Spirit's light. If now the Lord answereth us not, neither by His word, nor by His providence, if we wander alone, crying "Oh that I knew where I might find Him," we are in an evil case, and may well sigh for the days, when by His light we walked through darkness.

Moreover, Job had lost divine *communion*: so it seems, for he mourned the days of his youth, when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle. Who shall tell to another what the secret of God is? Believing hearts know it, but they cannot frame to pronounce aright the words that could explain it, nor can they convey by language what the secret is. The Lord manifests Himself unto His people as He doth not unto the world. We could not tell the love passages that there are between believers and their Lord; even when they are set to such sweet music as the Song of Solomon, carnal minds cannot discern their delights. They cannot plough with our heifer, and therefore they read not our riddle. As Paul in heaven saw things which it were unlawful for a man to utter, so the believer sees and enjoys in communion with Christ what it would not only be unlawful but impossible for him to tell to carnal men. Such pearls are not for swine. The spiritual discerneth all things, but he himself is discerned of no man. Now, it is a high privilege, beyond all privileges to enter into familiar intercourse with the Most High, and the man who has once possessed it, and has lost it, has a bitterer cause for regret than if, being rich, he had lost his wealth; or being famous, he had lost esteem; or being in health, he were suddenly brought to the bed of languishing. No loss can equal the loss of Thee, my God! No eclipse is so black as the hiding of Thy face! No storm is so fierce as the letting forth of Thine indignation! It is grief upon grief to find that Thou art not with me as in the days of old. Wherever, then, these regrets do exist, if the men's hearts are as they should be, they are not mere hypocritical or superficial expressions, but they express the bitterest experiences of our human existence. "Oh, that I were as in months past" is no sentimental sigh, but the voice of the innermost spirit in anguish, as one who has lost his firstborn.

II. But, secondly, let me remind you that these regrets are NOT INEVITABLE; that is to say, it is not absolutely necessary that a Christian man should ever feel them, or be compelled to express them. It has grown to be a tradition among us, that every Christian must backslide in a measure, and that growth in grace cannot be unbrokenly sustained. It is regarded by many as a law of nature, that our first love must grow cold, and our early zeal must necessarily decline. I do not believe it for a moment. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day"; and, were we watchful and careful to live near to God, there is no reason why our spiritual life should not continuously make progress both in strength and beauty. There is no inherent necessity in the divine life itself compelling it to decline, for is it not written, "It shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life"; "out

of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Grace is a living and incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth for ever, and there is nowhere impressed upon the divine life a law of pining and decay. If we do falter and faint in the onward path, it is our sin, and it is doubly sinful to forge excuses for it. It is not to be laid upon the back of some mysterious necessity of the new nature that it should be so, but it is to be brought as a charge against ourselves. Nor do outward circumstances ever furnish a justification to us if we decline in grace; for, under the worst conditions, believers have grown in grace: deprived of the joys of Christian fellowship, and denied the comforts of the means of grace, believers have nevertheless been known to attain to a high degree of likeness to Christ Jesus: thrown into the midst of wicked companions, and forced to hear, like righteous Lot, the filthy conversation of the ungodly, yet Christian men have shone all the brighter for the surrounding darkness, and have been able to escape from a wicked and perverse generation. Certain is it, that a man may be an eminent Christian, and be among the poorest of the poor: poverty need not, therefore, make us depart from God; and, it is equally certain, that a man may be rich, and for all that may walk with God and be distinguished for great grace. There is no lawful position of which we may say, "It compels a man to decline in grace."

And, brethren, there is no period of our life in which it is necessary for us to go back. The young Christian, with all the strength of his natural passions, can by grace be strong and overcome the Wicked One; the Christian in middle life, surrounded with the world's cares, can prove that "this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith." The man immersed in business may still be baptised of the Holy Ghost. Assuredly, old age offers no excuse for decline: "they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright." No, brethren, as Christ said to His disciples, when they would fain have sent the multitude away to buy meat, "they need not depart"; so would He say to the whole company of the Lord's people, "ye need not depart"; there is no compulsion for decline in grace." Your sun need not stand still, your moon need not wane. If you cannot add a cubit to your spiritual stature, at any rate, it need not decrease. There are no reasons written in the book of your spiritual nature why you, as a believer, should lose fellowship with God, and, if you do so, take blame and shame to yourself, but do not ascribe it to necessity. Do not gratify your corruptions by supposing that they are licensed to prevail occasionally, neither vex your graces by conceiving that they are doomed to inevitable defeat at a certain season. The spirit that is in us lusteth to evil, but the Holy Spirit is able to subdue it, and will subdue it, if we yield ourselves to Him.

III. But, now, I am compelled to say that the regrets expressed in our text are exceedingly COMMON, and it is only here and there that we meet with a believer who has not had cause to use them. It ought not to be so, but it is so. How grievously often will the pastor hear this among the other bleatings of the sheep: "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me":

> "What peaceful hours I then enjoy'd,
> How sweet their memory still;
> But they have left an aching void
> The world can never fill."

The commonness of this lamentation may be somewhat accounted for, by the universal tendency to undervalue the present and exaggerate the excellence of the past. Have you never noticed this in natural things, we are prone to cast a partial eye upon some imaginary "good old times?" It is gone, and therefore it was good; it is here, and therefore it is dubious. In the middle of the summer, we feel that the heat is so relaxing that a frost would be the most delightful thing conceivable; we love, we say, the bracing air of winter; we are sure it is much healthier for us: yet, usually, when winter arrives, and the extreme cold sets in, we are all most anxious for the advent of spring, and we feel that somehow or other the frost is more trying to us than the heat. Personally, I met with an illustration of this tendency the other day. I went down a steep cliff to the sea shore, and during the descent every step tried my weak knees, and I felt that going down hill was the most difficult travelling in the world. Soon I had to return from the sands, and climb the steep path again; and, when I began to pant and puff with the difficult ascent, I changed my opinion, and felt that I would a great deal sooner go down than come up. The fact is, that whatever is with us we think to be the worse, and whatever was with us we conceive to be the better. We may, therefore, take some discount from our regrets; for, peradventure, were we more conscious of the benefit of the present state, and did we make less prominent the difficulty of it, we should not sigh to be as we were, in months past.

Then, again, regrets may in some cases arise from a holy jealousy. The Christian, in whatever state he is, feels his own imperfection much, and laments his conscious shortcomings. Looking back, he observes with joy the work of grace in his soul, and does not perhaps so readily recollect the then existing deficiencies of nature; hence, he comes to think that the past was better than the present. He is afraid of backsliding, and therefore he jealously fears that he is so; he is so anxious to live nearer to God, so dissatisfied with his present attainments, that he dares not believe that he advances, but fears that he has lost ground. I know this in my own experience, for when lying sick I have frequently lamented that pain has distracted my mind, and taken off my attention from the Word of God, and I have longed for those seasons of health when I could read, meditate, and study with pleasure; but, now that I have risen up from the sick bed, and am growing strong again, I frequently look back to the long nights and quiet days spent in my sick chamber, and think that it was better with me then than now, for now I am apt to be cumbered with much serving, and then I was shut in with God. Many a man is really strong in Christ; but, because he does not feel all the juvenile vivacity of his early days, he fears that spiritual decrepitude has come upon him. He is now far more solid and steadfast, if not quite so quick and impulsive; but, the good man in his holy jealousy marks most the excellencies of his juvenile piety, and forgets that there were grave deficiencies in it; while, in his present state, he notes the deficiencies, and fears to hope that he possesses any excellencies. We are poor judges of our own condition, and usually err on one side or the other. All graces may not flourish at the same time, and defalcations in one direction may be more than balanced by advantages in another. We may be deeper in humility if we are not higher in delight. We may not glitter so much, and yet there

may be more real gold in us. The leaf may not be so green, but the fruit may be more ripe. The way may be rougher, and yet be nearer heaven. Godly anxiety, then, may be the cause of many regrets which are, nevertheless, not warranted by any serious declension.

And, let me add that very often these regrets of ours about the past are not wise. It is impossible to draw a fair comparison between the various stages of Christian experience, so as to give a judicious preference to one above another. Consider, as in a parable, the seasons of the year. There are many persons who, in the midst of the beauties of spring, say, "Ah, but how fitful is the weather! These March winds and April showers come and go by such fits and starts, that nothing is to be depended upon. Give me the safer glories of summer." Yet, when they feel the heat of summer, and wipe the sweat from their brows, they say, "After all, with all the full-blow of beauty around us, we admire more the freshness, verdure, and vivacity of spring. The snowdrop and the crocus, coming forth as the advance guard of the army of flowers, have a superior charm about them." Now, it is idle to compare spring with summer; they differ, and have each its beauties. We are in autumn now, and very likely, instead of prizing the peculiar treasures of autumn, some will despise the peaceful Sabbath of the year, and mournfully compare yon fading leaves to funeral sermons replete with sadness. Such will contrast summer and autumn, and exalt one above another. Now, whoever shall claim precedence for any season, shall have me for an opponent. They are all beautiful in their season, and each excels after its kind. Even thus it is wrong to compare the early zeal of the young Christian with the mature and mellow experience of the older believer, and make preferences. Each is beautiful according to its time. You, dea young friend, with your intense zeal, are to be commended and imitated; but very much of your fire I am afraid arises from novelty, and you are not so strong as you are earnest; like a newborn river, you are swift in current, but neither deep nor broad. And you, my more advanced friend, who are much tried and buffeted, to you it is not easy to hold on your way under great inward struggles and severe depressions, but your deeper sense of weakness, your firmer grasp of truth, your more intense fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His sufferings, your patience, and your steadfastness, are all lovely in the eyes of the Lord your God. Be thankful each of you for what you have, for by the grace of God you are what you are.

After making all these deductions however, I cannot conceive that they altogether account for the prevalence of these regrets; I am afraid the fact arises from the sad truth that many of us have actually deteriorated in grace, have decayed in spirit, and degenerated in heart. Alas! in many cases, old corruptions have fought desperately, and for awhile caused a partial relapse. Grace has become weak, and sin has seized the occasion for attack; so that for a time the battle is turned, and Israel's banner is trailed in the mire. With many professors, I am afraid, prayer is neglected, worldliness is uppermost, sin has come to the front, nature leads the van, and grace and holiness are in the background. It should not be so, but I am afraid, ah, sadly afraid it is so.

IV. I will more fully speak upon this matter under the fourth head. Since these regrets are exceedingly common, it is to be feared that in some cases they are very sadly NEEDFUL. Now, let the blast of the winnowing fan be felt through the congregation. Behold, the Lord Himself winnows this heap. Are there not many among us who once walked humbly with God, and near to Him, who have fallen into carnal security? Have we not taken it for granted that all is well with us, and are we not settled upon our lees like Moab of old? How little of heart-searching and self-examination are practised now-a-days! How little enquiry as to whether the root of the matter is really in us! Woe unto those who take their safety for granted, and sit down in God's house and say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion. Of all enemies, one of the most to be dreaded is presumption. To be secure in Christ is a blessing; to be secure in ourselves is a curse. Where carnal security reigns, the Spirit of God withdraws. He is with the humble and contrite, but he is not with the proud and self-sufficient. My brethren, are we all clear in this respect? Do not many of God's people also need to bemoan their worldliness? Once Christ was all with you, brethren; is it so now? Once you despised the world, and condemned alike its pleasures and its frowns; but now, my brethren, are not the chains of worldly custom upon you? Are you not many of you enslaved by fashion, and eaten up with frivolity? Do you not, some of you, run as greedily as worldlings after the questionable enjoyments of this present life? Ought these things to be so? Can they remain so and your souls enjoy the Lord's smile? "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You cannot be Christ's disciples, and be in fellowship with the ungodly. Come ye out from among them; be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing; then shall ye know right joyfully that the Lord is a Father to you, and that you are His sons and daughters. But, brethren, have ye gone unto Jesus without the camp, and do ye abide there with him? Is the line of your separation visible—aye, is it existing? Is there any separation at all? Is it not often the case that the professed people of God are mixed up with the sons of men so that you cannot discern the one from the other? If it be so with anyone of us, let him humble himself, and let him cry in bitterness, "Oh, that I were as in months past."

Brethren and sisters, feel ye the breath of the winnowing fan again. How is it with you as to private prayer? Are there not believers, and we hope true believers too, who are lax in devotion? The morning prayer is brief, but alas! it is not fervent; the evening prayer is too often sleepy; ejaculations are few and far between; communion with heaven is distant, suspended, almost non-existent in many cases. Look ye to this, my brethren, let each man commune with his own heart, and be still. Think not of others just now, but let each one consider his ways. How is it with your love to the souls of sinners? There was a time when you would have done anything to bring a man to Christ, when any exertion you could have put forth would have been made spontaneously, without the need of incessant exhortations; are you as ready to speak for Jesus now as you once were? Do you watch to bring souls to Him? Does the tear tremble in your eye, now, as it once did for lost souls, perishing without Christ? Alas, upon how many has a hardening influence operated. Ah, and this is true even of us, ministers. We have grown professional in our service, and now we preach like automatons, wound up for a sermon, to run down when the discourse is over, and we have

little more care for the souls of men than if they were so much dirt. Trifles of criticism, fancies of speculation, or fopperies of oratory, fascinate too many who should be wise to win souls. God forgive us if we have fallen into so deplorable a state.

Ah, and how many of God's people must confess that their conscience is not so tender now as it used be. The time was when, if you said half a word amiss, you would hide away to weep over it; when, in business, if there had been a little mistake, and anything that might be construed into want of integrity, you would have felt ashamed for a week that such a thing had happened; but now—ah, professors hear ye this—some of you can be dishonest and speak words that border on lasciviousness, and be as others are, yet your heart does not smite you, but you come to the communion-table and feel you have a right to be there, and listen to the Word of God, and take comfort from it, when rather you should be ashamed and confounded.

Let me enquire whether there are not many of us whose zeal is almost gone? We once loved the Saviour intensely, and His cause we eagerly sought to serve, but now we take matters easily, and do not travail in birth for souls. Some rich men were wont to give most freely to the cause of God, but now covetuousness has palsied the hand of generosity. Even poor Christians are not always so ready with their two mites as they were in better days. You were wont to labour too, but that Sunday School class sees you no longer; no street preaching now; no tract distributing now; all forms of Christ's service you have renounced, for you fancy you have done enough. Alas, poor sluggard! Has the sun shone long enough? Has God given you your daily bread long enough? Oh, cease not working, brethren, till God ceases to be merciful to you. "On, on, on," "forward, forward, forward," is the very motto of the Christian life. Let none of us talk of finality, for we have not yet attained. Till life is over, our zeal should still glow, and our labours for Christ should multiply.

Are there not other signs of declension, that some of us might, with but a very slight examination, discover in ourselves? Is not brotherly love, in many Christians, very questionable? Have they not forgotten, altogether, the family ties which bind all Christians to one another? And, with brotherly love, has not love to the Gospel gone too, so that now with many, one doctrine is almost as good as another? If a man can talk well, and is an orator they enjoy his ministry whether he advocates truth or error. Once they could go to the little meeting-house, where Christianity was preached faithfully though in an uncouth style, but now they must have the help of organs or they cannot praise God; and there must be millinery and genuflexions, or else they cannot pray to Him; and they must listen to oratory and elocution, or else they cannot accept God's Word. He is sickly who cannot dine without made dishes and spiced meats, but he is a healthy man of God who can eat heaven's bread and heaven's meat, even when it is not served on a lordly dish. Might not many of us blush, if we were to think how low our graces are, how weak our faith, how few our good works, and our gracious words with which we should bear testimony to His name. Yes, in thousands of cases, Christians need not be stopped if they were to commence this mournful cry, "Oh that I were as in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle."

V. But, I must pass on to observe that these regrets BY THEMSELVES ARE USELESS. It is unprofitable to read these words of Job, and say, "Just so, that is how I feel," and then continue in the same way. If a man has neglected his business, and so has lost his trade, it may mark a turn in his affairs when he says, "I wish I had been more industrious"; but if he abides in the same sloth as before, of what use is his regret? If he shall fold his arms and say, "Oh that I had dug that plot of land; oh that I had sown that field"; no harvest will come because of his lamentations. Up, man, up and labour, or you will have the sluggard's reward, rags and poverty will still be your portion. If a man be in declining health, if drunkenness and riot have broken down his constitution, it may mark a salutary reform in his history if he confesses his former folly; but if his regrets end in mere expressions, will these heal him? I trow not. So neither will a man, affected by spiritual decline, be restored by the mere fact of his knowing himself to be so. Let him go to the beloved Physician, drink of the waters of life again, and receive the leaves of the tree which are for the healing of the nations. Inactive regrets are insincere. If a man really did lament that he had lost communion with God, he would seek to regain it. If he doth not seek to be restored, he is adding to all his former sins this of lying before God, in uttering regrets that he does not feel in his soul.

I have known some, I fear, who even satisfied themselves with expressions of regrets. "Ah," say they, "I am a deep experienced man, I can go where Job went; I can mourn and lament as Job did." Remember, many have been on Job's dunghill, who knew nothing of Job's God; many have imitated David in his sins, who never followed him in his repentance. They have gone from their sin into hell by the way of presumption, whereas David went from it to heaven by the road of repentance and forgiveness. Never let us, merely because we feel some uneasiness within, conclude that this suffices. If in the dead of the night you should hear thieves in your house, you would not congratulate yourself because you were awake to hear them. You would waive all such comfortable reflections till the rogues were driven out and your property was safe; and so, when you know things are amiss with you, do not say, "I am satisfied, because I know it is so." Up, man, and with all the strength that God's Holy Spirit can give you, strive to drive out these traitors from your bosom, for they are robbing your soul of her best treasures.

VI. Brethren, these regrets when they are necessary are very HUMBLING. Meditate now for a minute. Think, dear brother, what was thy position in thy happiest times, in those days that are now past. Had you any love to spare then? You were zealous; were you too zealous? You were gracious; were you too gracious? Nay, in our best estate, we were very far short of what we ought to be, and yet we have gone back from even that. It was a poor attainment at the best, have we fallen even from that. During the time we have been going back, we ought to have gone forward. What enjoyments we have lost by our wanderings! What progress we have missed! As John Bunyan well puts it, when Christian fell asleep and lost his roll, he had to go back for it, and he found it very hard going back, and, moreover, he had to go on again, so that he had to traverse three times the road he need only have travelled once, and then he came in late at the gates of the palace Beautiful, and was afraid of the lions, of which he would have had no fear

had not the darkness set in. We know not what we lose, when we lose growth in grace.

Alas, how much the church has lost through us, for if the Christian becomes poor in grace, he lessens the church's wealth of grace. We have a common exchequer as a church, and every one who takes away his proportion from it robs the whole. Dear brethren, how accountable are many of us for the low tone of religion in the world, especially those of us who occupy the foremost ranks. If grace be at a low ebb with us others say, "Well, look at so and so; I am as good as he." So much in the church do we take the cue from one another, that each one of us is in a measure responsible for the low state of the whole. Some of us are very quick to see the faults of others; may it not be that these faults are our own children? Those who have little love to others generally discover that there is little love in the church, and I notice that those who complain of the inconsistencies of others, are usually the most inconsistent persons themselves. Shall I be a robber of my fellow Christians? Shall I be an injury to the cause of Christ? Shall I be a comfort unto sinners in their sin? Shall I rob Christ of His glory,—I, who was saved from such depths of sin,—I, who have been favoured with such enjoyments of His presence,—I that have been on Tabor's top with Him, and seen Him transfigured,—I, that have been in His banqueting house, and have drunk out of the flagons of His love,—shall I be so devoid of grace, that I shall even injure His children, and make His enemies to blaspheme? Wretch that I am, to do this! Smite your breast, my brother, if such has been your sin; go home and smite your breast again, and ask God to smite it, till with a broken heart, you cry repentingly for restoration, and then again go forth as a burning and a shining light, to serve your Master better than before.

VII. These regrets, then, are humbling, and they may be made very PROFITABLE in many other ways. First, they shew us what human nature is. Have we gone back so far? O, brethren, we might have gone back to perdition: we should have done so, if it had not been for the grace of God. What a marvel it is that God has borne with our ill manners, when he might justly have laid the reins on our necks, and suffered us to rush on in the road which we so often hankered after. See you not, dear brethren, what a body of death we carry with us, and what a terrible power it possesses? When you see the mischief that corruption has already done, never trust yourself, but look for new grace every day.

Learn again to prize what spiritual blessings yet remain. If you have such bitter regrets for what you have lost, hold fast what is still yours. Slip back no further, for if these slips have cost you so much, take heed that they do not ruin you. To continue presumptuous may be a proof that our profession is rotten throughout: only a holy jealousy can remove the suspicion of insincerity. Let your previous failings teach you to walk cautiously for the future. Be jealous, for you serve a jealous God. Since grey hairs may come upon you, here and there, and you may not know it, search, watch, try yourself day by day, lest you relapse yet more.

This should teach us to live by faith, since our best attainments fail us. We rejoice to-day, but we may mourn to-morrow. What a mercy it is that our salvation does not depend on what we are or what we feel. Christ has finished our salvation; no man can destroy what he has completed. Our life is hid with Christ in God, and is safe there; none can pluck us out of Jehovah's hands. Since we so frequently run aground, it is clear that we should be wrecked altogether, if we went to sea in a legal vessel with self for our pilot; let us keep to the good ship of free grace, steered by immutable faithfulness, for none other can bring us to the desired haven. But oh, let that free grace fill us with ardent gratitude. Since Christ has kept us, though we could not keep ourselves, let us bless His name, and, overwhelmed with obligations, let us rise with a solemn determination that we will serve Him better than we have ever done before; and may His blessed Spirit help us to make the determination a fact.

VIII. So, to close; these regrets OUGHT NOT TO BE CONTINUAL: they ought to be removed, decidedly removed, by an earnest effort, made in God's strength, to get back to the position which we occupied before, and to attain something better still.

Dear brethren and sisters, if any of you desire now to come into the higher life, and to feel anew your first love, what shall I say to you? Go back to where you started. Do not stay discussing whether you are a Christian or not. Go to Christ as a poor guilty sinner. When the door to heaven seems shut to me as a saint, I will get through it as a sinner, trusting in the precious blood of Jesus. Come and stand again, as though all your sins were on you still, at the cross's foot, where still may be seen the dropping blood of the infinitely precious atonement. Saviour, I trust Thee again: guilty, more guilty than I was before, a sinful child of God, I trust Thee: "wash me throughly from mine iniquities, and purge me from my sin." You will never have your graces revived, unless you go to the cross. Begin life again. The best air for a man to breathe when he is sickly is said to be that of his birthplace: it was at Calvary we were born; it is only at Calvary we can be restored when we are declining. Do the first works. As a sinner, repair to the Saviour, and ask to be restored. Then, as a further means of health, search out the cause of your declension. Probably it was a neglect of private prayer. Where the disease began, there must the remedy be applied. Pray more earnestly, more frequently, more importunately. Or, was it a neglect of hearing the Word? Were you enticed by novelty or cleverness away from a really searching and instructive ministry? Go back, and feed on wholesome food again: perhaps that may cure the disease. Or, have you been too grasping after the world? Brother, you loved God when you had but one shop, you have two now, and are giving all your time and thoughts to business, and your soul is getting lean. Man alive, strike off some of that business, for it is a bad business that makes your soul poor. I would not check industry or enterprise for a single moment; let a man do all he can, but not at the expense of his soul. Push, but do not push down your soul. You may buy gold too dear, and may attain a high position in this world at a cost which you may have to rue all your days. Where the mischief began, there apply the remedy. And oh, I urge upon you, and most of all upon myself, do not make excuses for yourselves; do not palliate your faults; do not say it must be so; do not compare yourselves among yourselves, or you will be unwise; but to the perfect image of Christ let your hearts aspire, to the ardour of your divine Redeemer, who loved not Himself, but loved you; to the intense fervour of His apostles, who laid themselves upon the altar of God for His sake, for Christ's sake, and for yours. Aspire to this, and may

we as a church live near to God, and grow in grace, then shall the Lord add to us daily of such as shall be saved.

There are some here who will say, "I do not comprehend this sermon: I have no cause to look back with regret. I have always been much the same as I am. I know nothing of religion." The day shall come when you will envy the least and most trembling believer. To you careless, Christless sinners, the day shall come when you will cry to the rocks for mercy, and beg them to conceal you from the eyes of Him whom now you dare despise. I beseech you be not high minded, lift not up your horn on high, apeak not so exceedind proudly, bow before the Christ of God, and ask Him to give you the new life; for even if that new life has declined and become sickly, it is better than the death in which you dwell. Go and seek grace of Him who alone can give it, and He will grant it to you this day, for His infinite mercy's sake. Amen.

CONCERNING DEATH

"For I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."—Job xxx. 23.

JOB suffered from a terrible sickness, which filled him with pain both day and night. It is supposed that, in addition to his grievous eruptions upon the skin, he endured great difficulty in breathing. He says in the eighteenth verse, "By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me about as the collar of my coat." His clothes were sodden, and clung to him: his skin was blackened, and seemed to be tightened. He was like a man whose tunic strangles him; the collar of his garment seemed to be fast bound about his throat. Those who have suffered from it know what distress is occasioned by this complaint, especially when they are also compelled to cry, "My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest." At such a time Job thought of death, and surely if at any period in our lives we should consider our latter end, it is when the frail tent of our body begins to tremble, because the cords are loosened and the curtain is rent. It is the general custom with sick people to talk about "getting well"; and those who visit them, even when they are gracious people, will see the tokens of death upon them and yet will speak as if they were hopeful of their recovery. I remember a father asking me when I prayed with a consumptive girl to be sure not to mention death. In such cases it would be far more sensible for the sick man to turn his thoughts towards eternity, and stand prepared for the great change. When our God by our affliction calls upon us to number our days, let us not refuse to do so. I admire the wisdom of Job, that he does not shirk the subject of death, but dwells upon it as an appropriate topic, saying, "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

Yet Job made a mistake in the hasty conclusion which he drew from his grievous affliction. Under depression of spirit he felt sure that he must very soon die: he feared that God would not relax the blows of His hand until his body became a ruin, and then he would have rest. But he did not die at that time. He was fully recovered, and God gave him twice as much as he had before. A life of usefulness, and happiness, and honour lay before him; and yet he had set up his own tombstone, and reckoned himself a dead man. It is a pity for us to pretend to predict the future, for we certainly cannot see an inch before us. As it is idle with day-dreams to fascinate the heart into a groundless expectation, so is it equally foolish to increase the evil of the day by forebodings of to-morrow. Who knoweth what is to be? Wherefore should I wish to uplift the corner of the curtain, and peer into what God has hidden? Some of those who have been most sure that they would die soon, have lived longer than others. A prophet once prayed to die, and yet he never saw death. From the lip of Elias, who was to be caught up by a whirlwind into heaven, it was a strange prayer—"Take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

It is the part of a brave man, and especially of a believing man, neither to dread death nor to sigh for it; neither to fear it nor to court it. In patience possessing his soul, he should not despair of life when hardly pressed; and he should be always more eager to run his race well than to reach its end. It is no work of men of faith to predict their own deaths. These things are with God. How long we shall live on earth we know not, and need not wish to know. We have not the choosing of short or long life; and if we had such choice, it would be wise to refer it back to our God. "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," is an admirable prayer for living as well as for dying saints. To wish to pry between the folded leaves of the book of destiny is to desire a questionable privilege: doubtless we live the better because we cannot foresee the moment when this life shall reach its *finis*.

Job made a mistake as to the date of his death, but he made no mistake as to the fact itself. He spake truly when he said: "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death." Some day or other the Lord will call us from our home above ground to the house appointed for all living. I invite you this morning to consider this unquestionable truth. Do you start back? Why do you do so? Is it not greatly wise to talk with our last hours? "We want a cheerful theme." Do you? Is not this a cheerful theme to you? It is solemn, but it ought also to be welcome to you. You say that you cannot abide the thought of death. Then you greatly need it. Your shrinking from it proves that you are not in a right state of mind, or else you would take it into due consideration without reluctance. That is a poor happiness which overlooks the most important of facts. I would not endure a peace which could only be maintained by thoughtlessness. You have something yet to learn if you are a Christian, and yet are not prepared to die. You need to reach a higher state of grace, and attain to a firmer and more forceful faith. That

you are as yet a babe in grace is clear from your admission that to depart and be with Christ does not seem to be a better thing for you than to abide in the flesh.

Should it not be the happiness of this life to prepare for the next life, and, in that respect, to prepare to die? But how can a man be prepared for that which he never thinks of? Do you mean to take a leap in the dark? If so, you are in an unhappy condition, and I beseech you as you love your own soul to escape from such peril by the help of God's Holy Spirit.

"Oh," saith one, "but I do not feel called upon to think of it." Why, the very season of the year calls you to it. Each fading leaf admonishes you. You will most surely have to die; why not think upon the inevitable? It is said that the ostrich buries its head in the sand, and fancies itself secure when it can no longer see the hunter. I can hardly fancy that even a bird can be quite so foolish, and I beseech you do not enact such madness. If I do not think of death, yet death will think of me. If I will not go to death by meditation and consideration, death will come to me. Let me, then, meet it like a man, and to that end let me look it in the face. Death comes into our houses, and steals away our beloved ones. Seldom do I enter this pulpit without missing some accustomed face from its place. Never a week passes over this church without some of our happy fellowship being caught away to the still happier fellowship above. This week a youthful member has melted away, and her mourning parents are in our midst. We as a congregation are continually being summoned to remember our mortality; and so, whether we will hear him or not, death is preaching to us each time we assemble in this house. Does he come so often with God's message, and shall we refuse to hear? Nay, let us lend a willing ear and heart, and hear what God the Lord would say to us at this time.

Oh! you that are youngest, you that are fullest of health and strength, I lovingly invite you not to put away this subject from you. Remember, the youngest may be taken away. Early in the life of my boys I took them to the old churchyard of Wimbledon and bade them measure some of the little graves within that enclosure, and they found several green hillocks which were shorter than themselves. I tried thus to impress upon their young minds the uncertainty of life. I would have every child remember that he is not too young to die. Let others know that they are not too strong to die. The stoutest trees of the forest are often the first to fall beneath the destroyer's axe. Paracelsus, the renowned physician of old time, prepared a medicine of which he said that if a man took it regularly he could never die, except it were of extreme old age; yet Paracelsus himself died a young man. Those who think they have found the secret of immortality will yet learn that they are under a strong delusion. None of us can discover a spot where we are out of bow-shot of the last enemy, and therefore it would be idiotic to refuse to think of it. A certain vainglorious French Duke forbade his attendants ever to mention death in his hearing; and when his secretary read to him the words, "The late King of Spain," he turned upon him with contemptuous indignation, and asked him what he meant by it. The poor secretary could only stammer out, "It is a title which they take." Yes, indeed, it is a title we shall all take, and it will be well to note how it will befit us. The King of Terrors comes to kings, nor does he disdain to strip the pauper of his scanty flesh: to you, to me, to all he comes; let us all make ready for his sure approach.

I. First, then, very solemnly under the teaching of God's Spirit, I call your attention to a piece of PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE: "I *know* that Thou wilt bring *me* to death, and to the house appointed for all living." A general truth here receives a personal application.

Job knew that he should be brought to the grave, because he perceived *the universality of that fact in reference to others.* He lived on the verge of an age when life was longer than now; and yet the patriarch had never known a person who had not after a certain age quitted this earthly stage. Cast your eye over every land, glance from the pole to the equator, and along to the other pole, and see if this be not the universal law, that man must be dissolved in death. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Two men alone entered the next world without seeing death, but those two exceptions prove the rule. Another great exception is yet to come, which I would never overlook. Peradventure the Lord Jesus Christ may personally come before we see death, and when He cometh we that are alive and remain shall not fall asleep; but even then "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." This is the great exception to the rule, and we cheerfully allow it to dwell upon our minds; but if the Master tarries, we ourselves shall not be exempt from the common rule. Die all we must. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, must be the last word for us among the sons of men. I hope nobody here is so foolish as to suppose that he shall live on, and never be gathered with the great assembly in the house appointed for all living. Last week one poor fanatic who taught that she herself would never see corruption, was taken from the midst of her dupes to be laid in the sepulchre. A clergyman whom I well knew lectured upon his having found the means of living here for ever; but he, too, has gone over to the great majority. That we can avoid the grave is a dream, an idle dream, not worthy of a moment's controversy. All flesh shall see corruption in due time, if it be not changed at the Lord's coming. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" In their myriads the races of the past have subsided into the earth. In one endless harvest death has reaped down all of woman born. Job knew that he himself should be brought to death because all others had been brought there.

He knew it also because *he had considered the origin of mankind.* In our text the Hebrew expression would run somewhat thus: "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death." He had never died before; yet the expression is constantly used, as in the following passage—"Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men." We were never in the grave before; how then can we return? Was it not said to Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"? We were taken out of the earth, and it is only by a prolonged miracle that this dust of ours is kept from going back to its kindred: the day will come when our earth shall embrace its mother, and so the body shall return to its original.

If we had come from heaven we might dream that we should not die; if we had been cast in some celestial mould, as angels are, we might fancy that the grave would never encase us; but being of the earth earthy, we must go back to earth. Job says, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister." Thus we have affinities which call us back to the dust. Job knew this, and therefore seeing whence men came, he inferred, and inferred correctly, that he himself would return to the earth.

Further, *Job had a recollection of man's sin*, and knew that all men are under condemnation on account of it. Does he not say that the grave is a "house appointed for all living"? It is appointed simply because of the penal sentence passed upon our first parent, and in him upon the whole race. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," was not for father Adam only, but for all the innumerable sons that come of his loins. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." "In Adam all die." Our babes, who have not personally sinned, yet feel the blight of Adam's sin, and wither in the bud; our dear children who are nearing manhood and womanhood are cut down and gathered in their beauty; we also, in the prime and flower of life, bow our heads before the killing wind of death. As for our sires, bending each man upon his staff, their posture salutes the tomb towards which they bend. A common fall, and a common sin, have brought on us universal death. Look on our vast cemeteries, and say, "Who slew all these?" The only answer is, "Death came by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

Once more, *Job arrived at this personal knowledge through his own bodily feebleness.* Perhaps he had not always said, "I know that Thou wilt bring *me* to death"; but now, as he sits upon the dunghill, and scrapes himself with the potsherd, and writhes in anguish, and is depressed in spirit, he realizes his own mortality. When the tent-pole quivers in the storm, and the covering thereof flaps to and fro in the wind, and the whole structure threatens to dissolve in the tempest, then the tenant of the habitation, chilled to his marrow, needs not to be instructed that his tabernacle is frail: he knows it well enough. We need many touches of the rod of affliction before we really learn the undeniable truth of our mortality. Every man, woman, and child in this place would unite with me in saying, "I know that Thou wilt bring *me* to death"; and yet it is highly probable that a large number of us do not know this to be so. "It is a common-place matter of fact which we all admit," cries one. I know it is so; and yet in the very commonness of the truth there lies a temptation to overlook its personal application. We know this as though we knew it not. To many it is not taken into the reckoning, and it is not a factor in their being. They do not number their days so as to apply their hearts unto wisdom. That poet was half inspired who said, "All men count all men mortal but themselves." Is it not so with us? We do not really expect to die. We reckon that we shall live a very considerable time yet. Even those who are very aged still think that as a few others have lived to an extreme old age, so may they. I am afraid there are few who could say with a gracious soldier, "I thank God I fear not death. These thirty years together I never rose from my bed in the morning and reckoned upon living till night."

Those who die daily will die easily. Those who make themselves familiar with the tomb will find it transfigured into a bed: the charnel will become a couch. The man who rejoices in the covenant of grace is cheered by the fact that even death itself is comprehended among the things which belong to the believer. I would to God we had learned this lesson. We should not then put death aside amongst the lumber, nor set it upon the shelf among the things which we never intend to use. Let us live as dying men among dying men, and then we shall truly live. This will not make us unhappy; for surely no heir of heaven will fret because he is not doomed to live here for ever. It were a sad sentence if we were bound over to dwell in this poor world for ever. Who among us would wish to realize in his own person the fabled life of the Wandering Jew, or even of Prester John? Who desires to go up and down among the sons of men for twice a thousand years? If the Supreme should say, "Live here for ever," it were a malediction rather than a benediction. To grow ripe and to be carried home like shocks of corn in their season, is not this a fit and fair thing? To labour through a blessed day, and then at nightfall to go home and to receive the wages of grace—is there anything dark and dismal about that? God forgive you that you ever thought so! If you are the Lord's own child, I invite you to look this home-going in the face until you change your thought and see no more in it of gloom and dread, but a very heaven of hope and glory.

Suffer not my text to be a dirge, but turn it into a golden psalm, as you say, "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

II. Having thus discoursed upon a piece of personal knowledge, I now beg you to see in my text the shining of HOLY INTELLIGENCE. Peradventure, when I read the words in your hearing, you did not notice all they contain. Let me then point out to you certain hidden jewels. Job, even in his anguish, does not for a moment forget his God. He speaks of Him here: "I know that *Thou* wilt bring me to death." *He perceives that he will not die apart from God.* He does not say his sore boils or his strangulation will bring him to death; but "THOU wilt bring me to death." He does not trace his approaching death to chance, or to fate, or to second causes; no, he sees only the hand of the Lord. To Him belong both life and death. Say not that the wasting consumption took away your darling; complain not that a fierce fever slew your father; but feel that the Lord Himself hath done it. "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." Blame not the accident, neither complain of the pestilence; for Jehovah Himself gathereth home His own. He only will remove you and me. "I know that *Thou* wilt bring me to death." There is to my heart much delicious comfort in the language before us. I love that old-fashioned verse—

> "Plagues and deaths around me fly,
> Till He bids I cannot die;
> Not a single shaft can hit
> Till the God of Love thinks fit."

In the midst of malaria and pest we are safe with God. "Because Thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, Thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." Beneath the shadow

of Jehovah's wing we need not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness. We are immortal till our work is done. Be ye therefore quiet in the day of evil; rest you peaceful in the day of destruction: all things are ordered by wisdom, and precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. , No forces in the world are outside of His control. God suffers no foes to trespass on the domain of Providence. All things are ordained of God, and specially are our deaths under the peculiar oversight of our exalted Lord and Saviour. He liveth and was dead, and beareth the keys of death at His girdle. He Himself shall guide us through death's iron gate. Surely what the Lord wills and what He Himself works cannot be otherwise than acceptable to His chosen! Let us rejoice that in life and death we are in the Lord's hands.

The text seems to me to cover another sweet and comforting thought, namely, that *God will be with us in death.* "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death." He will bring us on our journey till He brings us to the journey's end: Himself our convoy and our leader. We shall have the Lord's company even to our dying hour: "Thou wilt bring me to death." He leadeth me even to those still waters which men so much fear. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Beloved, we live with God, do we not? Shall we not die with Him? Our life is one long holiday when the Lord Jesus keeps us company: will He leave us at the end? Because God is with us we go forth with joy, and are led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field do clap their hands. Will they not be equally glad when we rise to our eternal reward? It is not living that is happiness, but living with God: it is not dying that will be wretchedness, but dying without God. The child has to go to bed, but it does not cry if mother is going upstairs with it. It is quite dark; but what of that? The mother's eyes are lamps to the child. It is very lonely and still. Not so; the mother's arms are the child's company, and her voice is its music. O Lord, when the hour comes for me to go to bed, I know that Thou wilt take me there, and speak lovingly into my ear; therefore I cannot fear, but will even look forward to that hour of Thy manifested love. You had not thought of that, had you? You have been afraid of death: but you cannot be so any longer if your Lord will bring you there in His arms of love. Dismiss all fear, and calmly proceed on your way, though the shades thicken around you; for the Lord is thy light and thy salvation.

It may not be in the text, but it naturally follows from it, that *if God brings us to death, He will bring us up again.* Job, in another passage, declared that he was sure that God would vindicate his cause—"I know," saith he, "that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Certain wise men who would expunge the very idea of a resurrection out of the Old Testament have tried to make out that Job expected to be restored and vindicated in this life; but he evidently did not expect any such thing, for, according to the text, it is clear that he feared he should die at once. We gather from this verse, by a negative process of reasoning, that the living Redeemer, and the vindication which was to be brought to him by that living Redeemer, were matters of hope in another life after death. O beloved, you and I know this truth from many declarations of our Lord in His divine book. Though we die in one sense, yet in another we shall not die, but live. Though our bodies shall for a little while sleep in their lowly resting-places, our souls shall be for ever with the Lord. We shall spend an interval as unclothed spirits in the company of Him to whom we are united by vital bonds, and then the trump of the archangel shall summon our bodies from their sleeping places to be reunited with our souls. These bodies, the comrades of our warfare, shall be companions of our victory. "This mortal must put on immortality." He who raised up Jesus shall also raise us up. We shall come forth from the land of the enemy in fulness of joy. Wherefore we ought to take great comfort from the words of our text, and be of good courage. We shall die: there is no discharge in this war. We shall die: let us not sit down like cowards, and weep tears bitter with despair. We sorrow not as those that are without hope. Let us view our departure in the soft and mellow light which is shed upon it by the words, "Thou shalt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

III. I pass on to notice the QUIET EXPECTATION which breathes in this text. It is my prayer that we may enjoy the same restfulness. My dear brothers and sisters, the text is full of a calm stillness of hope. Job speaks of his death as a certainty, but speaks of it without regret; nay, more, if you read the connection, it is with a smile of desire, with a flush of expectancy—"I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Many men are unable to regard death with composure: they are disturbed and alarmed by the very hint of it. I want to reason with those disciples of our Lord Jesus who are in bondage from fear of death. What are the times when men are able to speak of death quietly and happily? Sometimes they do so *in periods of great bodily suffering.* I have on several occasions felt everything like fear of dying taken from me simply by the process of weariness; for I could not wish to live any longer in such pain as I then endured; and I have no doubt that such an experience is common among sufferers from acute disorders. The sons and daughters of affliction are not only trained to wait the Lord's will, but they are even driven to desire to depart: they would sooner rest from so stern a struggle than continue the fierce conflict. It is well that pain and anguish should cut the ropes which moor us to these earthly shores, that we may spread our sails for a voyage to the Better Land. Oh, what a place heaven must be to those whose bones have worn through their skin through long lying upon the bed of anguish! What a change from the workhouse or the infirmary to the New Jerusalem! I have stood at the bedside of suffering saints where I could not but weep at the sight of their pains: what a transition from such agony to bliss! Track the glorious flight of the chosen one from yon weary couch to the crown, the harp, the palm-branch, and the King in His beauty. The bitter suffering of the body helps the believer to look upon his translation as a thing to be desired.

The growing infirmities of age work in the same way.

Yonder venerable sister has at length become quite deaf. Her great delight was to attend the house of God, and she comes now; but the service is dumb show to her; she cannot hear her pastor's voice which was once so sweet in her ear. Her eyes, after being helped with more powerful glasses, are at length unable to read that dear old Bible, which remained her sole solace when she could not hear. Her existence now is but half life: she cannot walk far; even in crossing the room her limbs tremble. She is already half gone. Do you not think that she will now feel happy to quit life, even as a ripe apple easily leaves the tree? At any rate, there will be little strength with which to resist the plucking of death's hand. It will be well when the spirit breaks away from the dilapidated hovel of the time-worn body, and rises to the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Many of God's aged servants who have been spared to advanced years, have come to look out for the setting of earth's sun without a fear of darkness. While they have seemed to have one foot in the grave, they have really had one foot in heaven.

Beloved, without either falling into sickness, or aging into infirmity, we can reach this state of mind in another way—*by being filled with an entire submission to the will of God.* When the decree of God is our delight, we feel no abhorrence to anything which He appoints either in life or in death. If we are living as Christians ought to live, we have denied our self-will, and we have accepted the Lord to be the arbiter of all events, the absolute ruler of our being. If your soul is truly married to Christ, you find your supreme bliss in the Bridegroom's will. Your cry is, "Thy will be done." This should be our ordinary condition in daily life; and it is an admirable preparation for thinking of death with composure. Let me live, if God will be with me in life; let me die, if He will be with me in death. So long as we are "for ever with the Lord," what matters where else we are? We will not further ask when or where: our *when* is "for ever," our *where* is "with the Lord." Delight in God is the cure for dread of death.

Next, I believe that *great holiness* sets us free from the love of this world, and makes us ready to depart. By great holiness I mean great horror of sin, and great longing after perfect purity. When a man feels sin within him he hates it, and longs to be delivered from it. He loathes the sin that is around him, and cries, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" Have you ever been cast in the midst of blasphemers? I am sure you have then sighed to be in heaven. If you have been sickened by the drunkenness and debauchery of this city, you have cried, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." Did you not wish as much last year when the lid was being lifted from the reeking caldron of London's unnatural lust? I am sure I did. I sighed for a lodge in some vast wilderness where rumour of such villainy might never reach me more. In the midst of human sin if the trumpet were sounded "up and away," you would be glad to hear it, that you might speed to the fair land where sin and sorrow will never assail you again.

Another thing that will make us look at death with complacency is *when we have a full assurance that we are in Christ,* and that, come what may, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Doubt your salvation and you may well be afraid to die. Let even a shadow of doubt fall athwart the clear mirror in which you see your loving Lord, and you will be disquieted. If you can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day," you cannot fear. What reason can you have for alarm? A Christian man should go to his bed at night without an anxious care as to whether he shall wake up in this world or in the next. He should so live that nothing would need to be altered if his last hour should strike.

Let us imitate Mr. Wesley's calm anticipation of his end. A lady once asked Mr. Wesley, "Suppose that you knew you were to die at twelve o'clock to-morrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?" "How, madam?" he replied, "why just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this evening at Gloucester, and again at five to-morrow morning; after that I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the society in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house, who expects to entertain me; converse and pray with the family as usual; retire to my room at ten o'clock; commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory."

Live in such a way that any day would make a suitable topstone for life. Live so that you need not change your mode of living, even if your sudden departure were immediately predicted to you. When you so live you will look upon death without fear. We usually fear because we have cause for fear; when all is right we shall bid farewell to terror.

Let me add that there are times *when our joys run high,* when the big waves come rolling in from the Pacific of eternal bliss; then we see the King in His beauty by the eye of faith, and though it be but a dim vision, we are so charmed with it that our love of Him makes us impatient to behold Him face to face. Have you not sometimes felt that you could sit in this congregation and sing yourself away to everlasting bliss? These high-days and holidays are not always with us. All the days of the week are not Sabbaths, and all our halting-places are not Elims. Brethren, when we do play upon the high-sounding cymbals then we are for joining the angelic chorus. When we feel heaven within us, and stand like the cherubim above the mercy-seat with outstretched wings, then we do not dread the thought of speedy flight. "Now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee." Yea, we even cry with Simeon, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word." Brethren, we shall soon be on the wing. Then will we rise and sing, and sing as we rise. We will ascend yon azure sky, and within the jewelled portal we will spend eternity in praise.

I hope some of you are getting up a bit out of your notion that to think of death is gloomy work. I trust you will begin to view it with hope and confidence.

IV. I conclude by saying that this subject affords us SACRED INSTRUCTION. "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Brethren and sisters, I shall not always have the privilege of coming here upon the Sabbath, to speak with you. Perhaps, ere long, another voice will invite your attention, and I shall be silent in the grave. Neither will you mingle in this throng which so happily gathers here: not much longer will you

sit among those who frequent these lower courts. What then?

Let us prepare for death. Let us cleave to the Lord Jesus, who is our all. Make your calling and election sure. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe intensely. Repent of sin and fly from it earnestly and with your whole heart.

Live diligently. Live while you live. Let every moment be spent as you will wish to have spent it when you survey life from your last pillow. Let us live unto God in Christ by the Holy Ghost. May the Lord quicken our pace by the thought that it is but a little while! A short day will not allow of loitering. Do we not live too much as if we played at living? A man will preach a poor sermon if he thinks, "I shall preach for another twenty years." We must preach as though we ne'er might preach again. You will teach that class very badly this afternoon if you have a notion that you can afford to be a little slovenly, since you can make up in the future for the neglects of the present. Drop no stitches. Do all your work at your best. Do a day's work in a day, and have no balance of debt to carry over to to-morrow's account. Soon shall you and I stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of the things done in the body: therefore let us live as in the light of that day of days, doing work which may bear that fierce light which beats about the great white throne.

Next to that, let us learn from the general assembly in the house appointed for all living to *walk very humbly.* A common caravansary must accommodate us all in the end; wherefore let us despise all pride of birth, rank, or wealth. There are no distinctions in the last meeting-house: the rich and the poor meet together, and the slave is free from his master. I hate that pride which makes persons carry themselves as if they were more than mortal. "I have said, Ye are gods; but ye shall die like men." A voice from the tombs proclaims a grim equality in death—

> "Princes, this clay must be your bed,
> In spite of all your towers;
> The tall, the wise, the reverend head
> Must lie as low as ours."

Therefore speak no more so exceeding proudly. It is madness for dying men to boast. When Saladin lay a-dying he bade them take his winding-sheet and carry it upon a lance through the camp, with the proclamation, "This is all that remains of the mighty Saladin, the conqueror of nations." A lingerer in the graveyard will take up your skull one day and moralize upon it, little knowing how wise a man you were. None will then do you reverence. Therefore, be humble.

Be prompt, for life is brief. If your children are to be trained up in God's fear, begin with them to-day; if you are to win souls, continue at the holy labour without pause. You will soon be gone from all opportunity of doing good; therefore, whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. When the Eastern emperors were crowned at Constantinople, it is said to have been a custom for the royal mason to set before his majesty a certain number of marble slabs, one of which he was to choose to be his tombstone. It was well for him to remember his funeral at his coronation. I bring before you now the unwritten marbles of life: which will you have, holiness or sin, Christ or self? When you have chosen, you will begin to write the inscription upon it; for your life's works will be your memorial. God help us to be diligent in His business, for it is not long that we can be at it!

Men and women, *project yourselves into eternity;* get away from time, for you must soon be driven away from it. You are birds with wings; sit not on these boughs for ever blinking in the dark like owls; bestir yourselves, and mount like eagles. Rise to the heights above the present. Life is a short day at its longest, and when its sun goes down it leaves you in eternity. Eternal woe or eternal joy will fill your undying spirit. Your indestructible self must swim in endless bliss or sink in fathomless misery. If you mean to be lost count the cost, and know what you are doing. If you have set your mind on sin and its consequences, do the deed deliberately, and do not make a sport of it. Oh, sirs, some of you will one of these days wake up as from an awful dream. Oh that you could foresee the scene which awaits you! Those were strong words, but they were the words of Jesus—"And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." These words reveal none of that pretty nonsense which some prattle about—"a larger hope": yet Jesus spake them, and His hope was of the largest. He that loved you better than these philosophers love you also said, "Beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." Our Lord put it very strongly. If you mean to dare the infernal terrors, I can do no less than ask you to know what you are at. If you have chosen sin you have chosen ruin. Begin to consider it, and see whether it is worth while.

But if you have chosen Christ, mercy, and eternal life, and if by faith these are yours, begin to enjoy them now. Rehearse the music of the skies. Taste the delights of fellowship with God even here! Rejoice in the victory which now overcometh the world, even our faith. You will be in the glory land ere long, and some of you much sooner than you think. So, as the sermon ends, under a sense of my own frailty I bid you a sincere adieu. Until the day break and the shadows flee away—*fare you well.*

FOOTSTEPS OF MERCY

" If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto men His uprightness: then He is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."—Job xxxiii. 23, 24.

WHEN God has distinct and definite purposes of mercy towards an individual, He often begins with stern discipline, and brings him low by affliction and sorrow. As the good husbandman cuts down the trees and makes a clearance of the soil before he sows the grain and prepares for a harvest, so does our God cut down all our goodly cedars, our pleasures, and our pride, in order that the heart may be afterwards ploughed, broken, harrowed, and made ready to receive the good seed of the word. Elihu describes this preparatory breaking-up process as being brought about by sickness. It is often so: I doubt not, that a sick-bed is one of God's best orators to the sons of men. But God is by no means restricted to any uniform method; nor is the experience of the redeemed precisely similar in its details, though notwithstanding all its diversities, it leads to one and the same result. Sometimes a storm at sea has brought men to their senses, and aroused their conscience, and so they have cried to the Lord in their trouble. At other times serious losses in business have brought men into such distress of mind, that they have been driven to seek riches more enduring than silver and gold; a competence more to be relied on than the profits of trade or the stability of banks; and comfort more genuine and lasting than wealth, though it be the accumulation of years, can afford. Yea, and without either of these, the Holy Ghost has not unfrequently been pleased to convince men of their sin, and reduce them to utter self-despondency and abject self-abhorrence. This He has effected in such a way as neither sickness nor poverty could have done of themselves. He has brought the man very low, even to the gates of hell. In his own apprehension the man has been lost, and then it is that mercy has commenced her work, her blessed work that shall open to him the gates of righteousness, and bring the soul up to heaven itself.

Now, I hope there are some here present whom God has been preparing for His grace—to such there will be good tidings in the sermon. I shall not delay you, but proceed at once to deal with the text in the natural order it suggests, as the welcome facts are marshalled before us. Does it not tell of *a messenger—a message—a gracious disposition—a great deliverance—and an amazing ransom?*

I. When God has thus, in the way of providence, prepared any human heart for a work of grace, one of the first means of blessing the chosen man is TO SEND HIM A MESSENGER.

I suppose the passage before us may be primarily referred to Christian ministers, who become, through God the Holy Ghost, interpreters to men's souls. They should be men of a thousand, well taught; they should have high moral and spiritual qualifications; in fact, they should be the pick and cull of mankind. When God sends a faithful gospel-messenger to a man, it is a sign of great love to that man's soul. I ask no honour for ministers as men, but this I do ask, that when they preach to you the gospel of Jesus Christ, they shall be accepted as God's messengers, and that their message at least shall be treated with the respect which God's word demands.

But I prefer to believe, with many expositors, that the full meaning of these words will never be found in ministers of mortal race; we must rather refer it to the Great Messenger of the covenant, the Great Interpreter between God and man, whose presence to the sin-sick soul is a sure prophecy of mercy. Where God the Father sends His beloved Son to a man, where Christ comes to the man's conscience and talks with him, showing the credentials of a Saviour, and constraining the faith of the sinner, there it is that salvation is obviously intended by the Lord, and will be effectually perfected in that man unto everlasting life. With this view I proceed, regarding our Lord Jesus Christ as the herald of mercy. Mark well the titles, a Messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand. Is there any other than Jesus to whom they so fitly belong? Let us contemplate Him as a messenger. That is just what Jesus Christ is. Now, a messenger cometh not in his own name, he must be sent, and it is a great comfort to know that Jesus Christ did not come to save men merely on His own account, but He came commissioned by the Father, He was sent of God. God has appointed Christ to be the Saviour. Those who accept Christ, and trust in Him, accept the very person God Himself has ordained. Christ is no amateur Saviour, who comes without a commission. In His hands He bears the royal stamp of the divine authority. O trembling sinner, trust Him whom God has trusted. Lay hold of Him whom God has appointed.

Another description that belongs to Him, as I believe, is an Interpreter. Jesus Christ is indeed a blessed Interpreter. An Interpreter must understand two languages. Our Lord Jesus understands the language of God. Whatever are the great truths of divine intelligence and infinite wisdom, too high and mysterious for us to comprehend or even to discern, Christ fully understands them all. He knows how to speak with God as the fellow of God, co-equal and co-eternal with Him. His prayers are in God's language. He speaks to God's heart. He can make out the sighs, and cries, and tears of a poor sinner, and He can take up the meaning, and interpret them all to God. He understands the divine language, and thus He can communicate with God. Moreover, Jesus understands our language, for He is a man like ourselves, touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and smarting under our sicknesses. He can read whatever is in the heart of man, and so He can tell to God the language of man, and speak to man in the language of man what God would say to him. How happy we ought to be that there is so blessed a Daysman to put His hand upon us both, that He can be equal with God, and yet can be brother with poor simple men! The best of it is that our Lord is such an interpreter that He can not only interpret to the ear but also to the heart, and this is a great point. I, perhaps, might be enabled to interpret a Scripture to your ears, but, O beloved, when you have heard

the letter you may miss the right, heavenly, and spiritual meaning. But our Lord can bring the word home to your soul. He can tell you of God's mercy, not in words only, but with a sweet sense of mercy shed abroad in your heart. He can make the sinner feel the way of salvation, as well as know it; He can make him rejoice in it as well as listen to it; He can lead him to accept it as well as to understand it. Oh, blessed Interpreter! mighty with God, so that the heart of God is affected with the woes and griefs of men; mighty with men so that the great love of God, which is an ocean without a bottom or a shore, is made intelligible to us, and even our poor stony hearts are softened, and the adamant is made to run like wax, while the Divine Interpreter talks to our inmost souls.

This Messenger, then, this Interpreter, is He not "*one among a thousand*"? O peerless Jesus! who among the sons of the mighty can be compared with Thee? Elihu may well be supposed to use a definite number when an indefinite is intended. What is one of a thousand, or one of ten thousand, when surely there is never the like of Christ between heaven and hell? All the range of the universe cannot find His equal, His equal as a Saviour, as a Messenger, as an Interpreter. Oh! but those who know Him will tell you that no words can ever set forth His worth. Disciples of Jesus who have followed Him and held communion with Him for the space of twenty years and more, will tell you that His preciousness grows upon them by acquaintance Whereas they thought Him sweet at first, they think Him sweetest and best of all now, the loveliest of all the lovely, the fariest of all the fair, the chief among ten thousand, yea, and the altogether lovely. I tell you that if there were a thousand saviours, I would have none but Christ. If the gods of the heathen, and the saints of the papists could help them, if the ceremonies of our modern papists could deliver their souls instead of enthralling them, yet would we repudiate them, we would have nothing to do with them in whole or in part; but we would still cling to Him who is the One Mediator between God and men, for He is the chief among ten thousand to our souls. He is such a Saviour that there is no other can vie with Him: all rivalry must prove abortive, seeing that other foundation can no man lay. He is the door of heaven, all the rest is hard wall, and there is no passing through—a light from God, and all other lights are darkness—very God come down to us in our flesh to save us, and where shall you find the match of this? O cherubim and seraphim, what Saviour could ye devise that should emulate the only-begotten Son of God? O ye angels, fairest among the goodly throng that salute Jehovah day and night with your ceaseless music, whom will ye laud and magnify but Jesus in your jubilant worshipful songs? As ye survey the glorious company of the apostles, the noble army of the martyrs, and the radiant fellowship of the Church redeemed, will ye chant any other name? Is He not in your esteem the chief among a thousand, the sole heritor of all blessing and praise? Accept Him, sinner; receive Him joyfully into thy spirit, for such a one will never woo thee as this precious One, the chosen of God. Who, save Jesus, then, should be chosen and precious to thy soul?

It is a great sign of mercy whenever Christ comes to any sinner. But how, say you, can He come to a sinner? I will tell you. He has come to you now, to every one of you. Jesus comes in the preaching of the gospel. There is never a gospel sermon preached but it is, in fact, Jesus coming with open arms of love to receive the sinner. He comes to you in these Bibles and New Testaments of yours. Every one of those volumes that lies in your house is a standing token of Christ's mission, whispering to him that hath ears to hear that He is still ready to receive the sinner. And I trust He comes to some of you now, in the motions of the Holy Ghost upon your heart, saying to you, "Close in with Him; reject Him no longer, bow down thine ear and listen to Him, lift up thine eye and look to Him, concerning whom we sang so truly just now:—

> "There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
> There is life at this moment for thee."

This is the first stage.

II. Now, secondly, wherever this divine Messenger comes, according to the text, HE REVEALS GOD'S UPRIGHTNESS.

A lesson, let me assure you, of deep interest and paramount importance; the occasion on which it is taught is peculiarly impressive. You remember Elihu has been describing a man greatly afflicted, chastened with pain, wasted with disease, reduced to a skeleton, and brought nigh to death. We have shown you that ere the Lord Jesus Christ comes in mercy to deal with a soul, such tribulation is dealt out by God to break up the fallow ground of the heart. No marvel that the sufferer is appalled with tokens of judgment. What message, then, can the divine Messenger bring more suitable or more refreshing than that which reveals to man the uprightness of God in having afflicted him? You think, perhaps, that God has been very hard with you. In your distraction you say, "How long I have been ill! how long I have been out of work! how long my wife has been afflicted! how many of my dear children have died! what strokes God has laid upon me without intermission!" Now shall new views spring up, and comfortable thoughts arise. But who shall bridge the interval? When Christ comes to you as an Interpreter He will make you discern the wisdom, and the love, and cause you to feel the pity and the tenderness of Him, who as a father rebukes you, not in anger, but in His dear covenant love. Instead of kicking against the pricks, you will say, "Ah! Lord, it is of Thy mercy I am not consumed; I can see there is a hand of love in this; God would not let me go on in sin, and wander into endless woe; He is blocking up my road, He is putting massive chains across the broad way to stop me; He is digging pits in my path that I may come to a pause, and so I will turn back from this." Depend upon it, there is nothing more dreadful in the conclusion than a life that is happy in the commission of sin. If you have prosperity, and all that heart can wish, while pursuing an evil course, tremble, for it is likely enough that God will give you up; you are having your portion in this life. O ye unconverted! are any of you tried and troubled, vexed and disquieted? while I am sorry for your troubles, I hope God has designs of love towards you; if you look to Christ He will explain to you the heavenly moral of these earthly trials, and show you the uprightness of God in dealing thus severely with His rebellious child.

Further than this, the gospel of Christ explains to the sinner the uprightness of God in the doom of the impenitent, *even if He send him down to hell.* Oh! a man may find fault with hell, and say, "Will

God consign men to the devouring fire? Will He destroy their souls? Will He damn men for their offences?" but if once the Great Interpreter comes to you, you will wonder, not that God should destroy men for sin, but that He has not destroyed you long ago. Oh! I could have argued with a bold front against eternal punishment till I knew what sin meant, and then I gave in at once, and I wish that some of my brethren who seem to speak dubiously about the wrath of God, could feel, as some of us have felt, the horror of great darkness that sin brings across a soul when it is made to feel the righteous ire that encompasses and impends it; there is no cavilling then, the only cry is, "O my God, deliver me, for I deserve all Thy wrath can bring upon me, and if Thou shouldst smite me to destruction Thou wilt be justified when Thou judgest, and clear when Thou condemnest." Mark you, it is a blessed thing when Christ brings a sinner to plead guilty, when he is quite willing to plead guilty, and when, instead of railing at the justice of the sentence, he stands dumb with silence, feeling that God is upright, and would not be upright even, if He did not thus condemn. There is hope, there is more than hope, there is confidence in our heart towards any sinner who is convinced of the uprightness of God in his present affliction or in any other that God may please to send upon him, either in this life or in the life to come. Ah! but this is learning to some profit for a man to see the uprightness of God in everything, and then by contrast to bewail his own ignorance and foolishness. Mercy is surely come to you when you can think of God's holiness with reverence, and upbraid yourself with bitter reproach for what an unholy creature you have been. It is a rough wind, that north wind, but, O my brethren, what a healthy wind it is! It sweeps away the fevers of our pride, and drives away the mists of our self-righteousness. Self-righteous, indeed! such wretches as we are, such offenders against God and truth as we have been, for us to talk of goodness when we are altogether vile, for us to boast of something hopeful in us when the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint—this is sheer insanity. When the blessed Interpreter comes and deals graciously with the spirit, we confess that God is upright, but as for ourselves we have gone astray like lost sheep; we have done the things which we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us. Oh, those visions of God, how humiliating they are! So Job himself made confession, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." This supplies us with the second stage in the experience of divine mercy—Christ is recognised, the uprightness of God is revealed and understood.

III. The third stage is this—"THEN HE IS GRACIOUS UNTO HIM."

God deals with convinced sinners in a way of grace. Every word here is weighty. "Then He is gracious unto him." *Mark the time—then!* God is gracious to a man *when*, Christ having come to him as a Messenger and an Interpreter, he is led to discern his own sin and God's uprightness. When he is humble, then God shows Himself to be gracious. No debts are pronounced forgiven by the Great Master of all till they are owned, and no release from the pains of bankruptcy are granted until we feel that we have nought with which to pay. When a soul pleads total insolvency and is truly penniless, then there is free forgiveness. When men admit the justice of God if He should punish them, *then*, not till then, mercy comes in and the punishment is put away. It is not consistent with the holiness of God to pardon a sinner while he denies his guilt, or invents excuses to palliate his crimes; nor is it reasonable for a sinner to expect remission while he vaunts his self-righteousness. How shall the hardness of a man's heart move the compassion of his judge? Come, poor soul, fall on thy knees, confess that God is upright, and then He will be gracious to thee.

The *way* as well as the time demands your notice. It is through the messenger that God is gracious. *Then*—that is when the messenger comes. When Jesus interposes then God is gracious. You shall never taste of grace except out of the golden cup of Christ's atonement. It is into that golden cup that God has poured the infinity of His grace. Drink of it, sinner, by simply trusting in Christ. Drink of it in any other way thou never canst. Narrowly observe what the text says, "Then *He is gracious* unto him." All salvation comes by way of grace. The word "grace" as used by us in its Latin form explains its own meaning. We speak of "gratis"—a thing free from cost; like the prescription of a physician if given without fee; or the medicine supplied at the dispensary without charge. All God's mercy to a sinner is gratis. He never sells, He always gives. He asks no payment, He acts from no motives raised or suggested by anything in us, but because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. Dear heart, it is a blessing for thee when thou canst see that nothing but Christ can serve thy turn, when thou hast done with appealing to justice, and all thy knocks are at mercy's door. O sinner, you cannot be saved except by grace in the beginning, grace in the middle, and grace in the end. What but grace can pardon sins such as yours and mine? What but grace could take such as we are and make us God's children? what but grace could snatch us from hell, and lift us up to heaven? When the man is humbled, and Christ is revealed to him, then it is that God deals graciously with the man, and then it is that he knows he has found grace in the eyes of the Lord. And I like the thought, that it does not say God ever leaves off being gracious to that man. Where we do not read that God ceases, we may believe that he continues. Does He once deal graciously with a sinner? He will always be gracious to that sinner. Never will He change. That sinner once blessed, shall be blessed through life, and blessed in death, and blessed in eternity, through the sovereign overflowing, immutable grace which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Well, we have come a long way. We have found the sinner sick and near to die; the Interpreter has come; He has shown him the uprightness of God, and given him an assurance of God's gracious disposition—now the sinner knows that Christ alone can save him.

IV. Let us proceed to the next stage—GOD DELIVERS THE SINNER. "He saith, Deliver him from going down into the pit." What shall we understand by this? Does it refer to "*the grave*" which is dug like a pit? Well, such an interpretation may harmonise with Elihu's discourse as he describes the man whose soul draweth near to the grave and his life to the destroyers; but when delivered from going down into the pit, his flesh shall be fresher than a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth.

So the psalmist celebrates the loving-kindness of the Lord—" O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave ; Thou hast kept me that I should not go down into the pit." What more shall we understand by the pit from which the soul is delivered ? The pit is often used in Scripture as the emblem of great distress and misery. Captives in the East were frequently shut up in pits all night. So Isaiah says, " They shall be gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison." (Isaiah xxiv, 22.) And again in another place, " The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail." (Isaiah li. 14.) There is a bondage of soul, which involves depression of spirits and failing of heart that may well be likened to confinement in a pit from which there appears no way of escape. But may we not understand still more by the pit ? Alas ! then, dear friends, we sometimes read of the pit, when the word is pregnant with deeper meaning, even of the pit that is bottomless, that place of torment prepared for devils and lost souls. Oh, if there were time, what a picture we have before us ! The pit, the bottomless pit—an awful representation, a horrible vision of the future wrath of God ! The pit, black dark, descending, adown which the soul slips and slides, and falls headlong ! Going down into the pit—what a dreadful expression ! Not going down as miners do to seek for ore, but being hurled by the strong hand of the avenging angel downwards into the abyss ! There on the verge of the precipice you are ; though not falling down that abyss yet, your feet have almost gone, your steps have well nigh slipped. At such a crisis the mercy of God comes to the sinner's aid, and cries in thrilling tones, " Deliver him ! " It is not a mere shout of warning, it is a voice that hath power in it, it is the clear silvery note of rescue, and the man is delivered just as he is about to sink to rise no more. Kings and emperors, when they have condemned men to die, can exercise the prerogative of mercy. Let the royal mandate issue concerning a prisoner, " Deliver him," then the prison doors are opened, for the king's pardon has been given. Just such a thing doth God with condemned sinners, when they bow down before Him and confess the righteousness of the sentence. Through Jesus Christ, the heavenly Messenger, He saith, " Deliver him ! deliver him ! " There is a legal pardon. The man is set free from the bonds of the jailer, instead of being given over to the hands of the executioner. Henceforth he shall live in peace and joy. " Deliver him ! " Perhaps the three significations of the pit I have alluded to may be combined in one dark picture. Sickness brings the sinner to the immediate prospect, not of death only, but of his endless doom. The sorrows and remorse of his soul produce, as it were, a foretaste of that anguish which knows no abatement. And anon ! Hell doth yawn at his feet " a universe of death "—" worse than fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived."

How many witnesses we might call to speak to the truth of all this ! Why, Elihu said, " Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man." The anguish is real, and the joy of rescue is real likewise. Did not Hezekiah feel them both ? The message came to him, " Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." Then he prayed vehemently, and he wept sore. Afterwards the word of the Lord came to him that his prayer was heard, that his tears were seen, and that his life should be spared. And this is what he said : " Behold, for peace I had great bitterness ; but Thou hast in love to my soul *delivered it from the pit of corruption* ; for Thou hast cast all my sins behind my back." What a shout of joy is that of David when he says, " He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings " ! In like manner Jonah speaks, " Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God." Very memorable too is the sweet promise of God to the daughter of Zion, by the mouth of the prophet Zechariah, " As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." Yes, my dear friends, and I feel bound to say, for myself, to the praise of my God—

> " Thy love was great, Thy mercy free,
> Which from the pit delivered me."

Well do I remember when the sentence went forth to my soul, " Deliver him ! " The time did indeed, seem long first. I was years and years upon the brink of hell—I mean in my own feeling. I was unhappy I was desponding, I was despairing. I dreamed of hell, my life was full of sorrow and wretchedness, believing that I was lost. But oh ! the blessed gospel of the God of grace came to me at length with that soft voice, " Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth ! " With it came a sovereign word " Deliver him ! " and I who was but a minute before as wretched as a soul could be, could have danced for very merriment of heart, and as the snow fell on my road home from the little house of prayer I thought every snow-flake talked with me, and told of the pardon I had found ; for I was white as the driven snow through the grace of God. Oh ! that word " Deliver him ! " It so restrains the temptations of Satan, and quells the strivings of conscience, that the poor soul has instantaneous liberty, and rejoices with joy unspeakable. Mark you, my dear friend, if ever you should look to Christ by simple faith, and God should say, " Deliver him " ; that " Deliver him " will last you for ever. God does not play fast and loose with sinners. If He pardons to-day He will not condemn to-morrow. He does not loose and then bind again. He openeth, and no man shutteth. Once He says, " Deliver him," you may walk through all the earth, and who shall lay anything to your charge : for who is he that can arrest you and cast you into prison against this " Deliver him " ? There may have come into this place some great offender. It is impossible for me to discriminate among you, or single out any one of these thousands, but there may be here some one of the very blackest class of sinners. To you Christ's gospel has come. I hope you have been led to feel that you are guilty, to confess your sin, and to own that you can only be saved through God's grace and mercy. Well now, if you will but trust my Saviour, the Lord Jesus who once died on Calvary's cross, and now lives enthroned in glory ; if you will but trust Him now, the sentence shall come from the throne, " Deliver him," or " Deliver her, from going down into the pit." Oh ! there have been many outcasts in these very aisles, who have found grace and obtained remission of their sins. The harlot has heard the word, " Deliver her from going down to the pit." The thief and the drunkard too, though in their own conscience on the very brink of hell, and all but sliding in, have heard it, and they are here among the happy worshippers that praise God. Some of

us who never fell into those fouler vices, though depraved in our hearts as they, have heard that blessed sound, and we are here to express our soul's desire that you all knew it. Oh that you all trusted Christ. Oh that you were all saved by that blessed mandate, "Deliver him from going down into the pit."

V. The last thing is that GOD EXPLAINS TO THE SINNER WHOM HE DELIVERS THE REASON OF HIS DELIVERANCE. "Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom."

"I have found a ransom"—a covering. Catch the thought. There are your sins like a fœtid slough, reeking with corruption, they are black; like a huge pool of blood, they are scarlet. It is abhorrent to the pure eyes of God to look upon the heart that is a very reservoir of pollution. He must smite you if He look at it. Listen—"I have found a covering." Christ comes in and covers it all. "Blessed is that man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." As the mercy-seat covered the law, and was called a covering, so does the atonement of Christ cover the perfect law of God, and it puts out of God's sight every sin of all those who trust in Christ.

But take the word as we get it in the English version—a ransom, that means a price. When a man was in debt, he used to be, according to the old law, put into prison. Well, how did he get his discharge? He came out if the debt was paid, of course, at once. So God saith, "Deliver him; I have found a price, I have found a recompense, I have found a substitute, I have found a ransom." The Lord Jesus Christ has suffered for us what God's wrath demanded of us.

> "He bore, that we might never bear,
> His Father's righteous ire."

Christ stood in our stead that we might go free. I have told you this grand old tale so many times in this house, that sometimes as I am coming here I think to myself—"I can find no new metaphor to illustrate it, and no new words to rouse the languid attention; they will tell me that I am always harping on the same string." Still, still, I must continue to expound and enforce this substitutionary suffering of Christ. I cannot help it. It is as much as my soul is worth to keep it back, for I am persuaded that it is the very essence of the gospel—the vicarious suffering of Christ. At any rate, I have no gospel to preach to you but this, that God has punished Christ instead of you that will believe on Christ, and therefore He cannot punish you; you are clear. Christ has paid your debts; the receipt is given; you are liberated. God has no claims upon you from His justice now; they are all discharged. Christ has discharged all your liabilities. "By Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Never listen, I entreat you, my dear hearers, to the derisive sneer of the scorner, as he attempts to cast discredit upon the righteousness of God in the imputation of our sins to the great Redeemer. I know that it is not in the power of sceptic, rationalist, socinian, or infidel to bring forth one argument that can refute the plain testimony which abounds in the Scriptures. But they can and they do ask if our moral sense of rectitude is not shocked at inflicting punishment on the innocent, and bestowing rewards as well as pardon on the guilty. Do they object to you that it were unjust on the part of God to make one man suffer personally for another man's sin? Tell them, if they better understood the doctrine, they would see that instead of outraging the morality of men, it manifests the righteousness of God. Tell them, as one of our most famous Puritans did, that the Redeemer and redeemed have such an intimate relation, that what one doeth or suffereth, the other may be accounted to do or suffer; it is no unrighteousness, if the hand offend for the head to be smitten; Christ is our Head, and we are His members. Tell them that He who suffered, the Just for the unjust, had power to lay down His life and power to take it again: His submission therefore was voluntary. Tell them that He who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, agreed and stipulated to bear our iniquities; the whole matter was settled in covenant between the Father and the Son. Tell them once more that our Lord Jesus Christ counted the cost and estimated the recompense, when He for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross; He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied; with honour and glory shall He be crowned. Because He humbled Himself, therefore God also hath highly exalted Him: and because He made Himself of no reputation, to Him is given a name which is above every name. Tell them His mediatorial glory surpasseth thought. Bid them cease their pitiless clamour and leave us to our joys. It is the sweetest music out of heaven, and it is the source of the music of heaven. "I have found a ransom." Christ's ransom for enslaved sinners is the world's good news. Tell it, then, and as you hear it, let your hearts rejoice.

You notice these words, "I have found a ransom." You do not find it for yourselves. You could not ever have discovered it, much less have brought it into the world. But God found it out. The infinite wisdom of God was needed to find out the way of salvation by a substitute. "I have found a ransom." Now, since God has found it, and God is satisfied with it, let me, chief of sinners though I be, find rest in this divine satisfaction. Conscience says to me, "Well, but how can your sins be forgiven?" Again conscience thunders, "Recollect such a day, such a night, such an act, such blasphemy. Dost thou think Christ can wash such a devil as thou art?" I answer, "Well, if God is satisfied, I am sure I will be." If you owe a debt, and your creditor takes the money of another, and he is quite easy about it, wist, man, do not you be uneasy about it; if he is satisfied you may be, and if God is content with Christ, so, poor sinner, let you and I be satisfied, and let us begin to sing—

> "I will praise Thee every day!
> Now Thine anger's turn'd away,
> Comfortable thoughts arise
> From the bleeding sacrifice.
>
> Jesus is become at length
> My salvation and my strength;
> And His praises shall prolong,
> While I live, my pleasant song."

Oh bless the dear name of Him who suffered in your stead. Oh take His ransom-price; look at it; turn over every sacred drop of it in your memory and your gratitude. Be satisfied, and more than satisfied; rejoice and be exceeding glad to be delivered from going down into the pit. God has found an all-sufficient and a most blessed ransom for your souls, and therefore you are delivered.

What more can I say to you, my dear hearers? I have told you the way of mercy, and I have described to you the footsteps of mercy in the experience of those who have proved its saving efficacy; but I

cannot bring Christ to your souls, or when Christ comes nigh unto you, as He doth now in the ministry of His gospel, I cannot make you open the doors of your hearts to receive Him. O ye who do not believe and yet are in your sins, what more can I do for you than thus to cry aloud in your ears, and proclaim to you the path of life? This one thing I can do: I can stand here and break my heart to think that you refuse Him. But no; I cannot take leave of you thus. I must again beseech, and entreat, and implore you as you love your souls, turn not away from the Divine Messenger, from Jesus Christ the Friend of sinners. He asks no great thing of you; He bids you not pass through ceremonies that will take you days and months, but now, one believing glance at yonder cross, one glance at Him who died there for sinners, and it is done. Christ is honoured; God is satisfied; you are saved. Go your way and tell your friends what great things He has done for you, and God bless you. Amen.

AN OLD-FASHIONED CONVERSION

"Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with men, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living."—Job xxxiii. 29, 30.

SOME people are wonderfully enamoured of anything that is old. An old coin, an old picture, an old book, or even a piece of antique rubbish, they will almost worship. The jingle of a rusty medal is music to them, and "auld nick-nackets" are as precious as diamonds. It is wonderful what a little mouldiness and a few worm-holes will do in the way of increasing values. I confess I do not very greatly share in the feeling, at least it is no craze of mine; but, nevertheless, all things being equal, antiquity has its charms. Old, old stories of the days far past, when time was young, have a special interest; they are as windows which permit us to gaze down the dim aisles of ages long gone by—we look through them with mingled curiosity and awe. I am about this morning to speak to you concerning an old conversion. We shall rehearse an ancient story of the renewal and salvation of a soul. In our day we meet with professors who cry down everything of the present, and cry up everything of the former days, which they call the good old times. Such persons talk much about old-fashioned conversions and hold in great admiration the lives of believers of the old school. I shall this morning introduce you to an old-fashioned conversion, and explain the way in which men were brought to God not only hundreds, but thousands of years ago. I suppose that Elihu delivered this description of conversion about the time of Moses, or at the period when Israel was in Egypt, for almost general consent appropriates one of those dates to the Book of Job. The record we shall read this morning, and study carefully, refers to the very, very oldest times. Let this fact give additional interest to our meditation: and if it does I am sure that we shall not lack for earnest attention, for the subject is of great intrinsic value.

Kindly keep your Bibles open; we have already read the chapter, but it will be needful to refer to it verse by verse.

I. The matter in hand is to compare an old-fashioned conversion with those of the present time, and the first note we shall strike is this: it is quite certain from the description given in this thirty-third chapter of Job that THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSION WERE SIMILAR, and men in the far gone ages were precisely like men in these times. The passage tells us nothing about the stature of men's bodies, but as far as they were spiritually concerned the photograph which Elihu took is the portrait of many of those who are brought to Jesus now. Reading the passage over, we find that men in those times needed converting; for they were deaf to God's voice (verse 14); they were obstinate in evil purposes (verse 17), and puffed up with pride. They needed chastening to arouse them to thought, and required sore distress to make them cry out for mercy (verses 19—22). They were very loth to say, "I have sinned," and were not at all inclined to prayer. Nothing but sharp discipline could bring them to their senses, and even then they needed to be born again. Men in those days were sinful and yet proud; sinful self and righteous self were both in power; it was one part of conversion to withdraw them from their purposes of sin, and another part of their conversion to "hide pride" from them. Though they were sinful they thought that they were righteous, and though they were condemned by the law of God they still entertained the fond hope that they should by their own merits obtain the favour of the Most High. They were then, as they are now, poor as poverty and yet proud of their wealth, Publicans in sin, and yet Pharisees in boasting.

It appears that in those days God was accustomed to speak to men and to be disregarded by them; we are told that God spake "once, yea, twice," and men perceived Him not. Their presumptuous slumbers were too deep to be broken by the call of love. Samuel said, "Here am I, for Thou didst call me," but they slept on in defiance of the Lord. Oh, how frequently doth the Lord speak now to deaf ears! He calls, and men refuse, He stretches out His hands, and men do not regard Him; but they are desperately set upon their sins, and sodden in carnal security, therefore they do despite to His grace, and ruin their own souls.

In those ancient times, when a man was converted, the Lord Himself must needs turn him, omnipotence itself was necessary to divide man from his folly. God's speaking to the ear was not enough unless he followed it up with a powerful application to the heart. Man was too far gone to be healed by remedies less than divine—he was utterly past hope unless Almighty love would come to the rescue; verily the case is the same at this day, and each man repeats his fellow. As the fish still bites at the bait, as the bird still flies into the snare, as the beast is still taken in the pit, so is man still the dupe of his sins, and only

the Lord can save him. Salvation was only wrought by the gracious influences of God's Spirit in the days of Job, and it is only so accomplished at this present hour. Men were lost then as now; men thought they were not lost then, and they are equally conceited now. Into the house of the divine Physician the same class of persons enter as were welcomed and healed by Him ages ago; He has the same blind eyes and deaf ears to open, hearts still require to be transformed from stone to flesh, and leprosies to be exchanged for health by His Sovereign touch. The Spirit from the four winds breathed on a valley covered with dry bones in the days of the fathers, and He comes forth still to work upon the like scene of death. Man has not outgrown his sins. As it was in the beginning it is now, and so it ever will be while that which is born of the flesh is flesh; as were the sires such are their sons, and such will our sons be in their turn; so that the process of conversion needs to be the same, and "all these things God worketh oftentimes with man."

II. The second note we shall strike is this, that in these olden times THE WORKER OF CONVERSION WAS THE SAME,—"*all these things God worketh.*" The whole process is by Elihu ascribed to God, and every Christian can bear witness that the Lord is the great worker now; He turns us, and we are turned. We read in verse fourteen, that at first the Lord wrought upon men by speaking to them, once, yea, twice; He also brought truth home to their minds and instructed them; and so changed their purposes and humbled their hearts. In the same manner the Lord worketh now. Conversion is a change which concerns the mind, the affections, the spirit; it is not a physical manipulation as some foolish persons fancy, who appear to think that God converts men by force, and turns them over as a man would roll a stone. The Lord operates upon men as men, not as blocks of wood; God speaks to them, instructs them, reveals truth to them, encourages them to hope, and graciously influences them for good. Man is left free, for "God speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not," and yet in God's own wise and suitable manner, he is at length led to cry, "I have sinned and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not."

But in those times, as now, it was necessary that God should do more than speak to the outer ear, He therefore came nearer still, and by His Holy Spirit led men really to hear what He spake. He did not leave men to their wills, neither did He trust their conversion to the eloquence of preachers, or to the cogency of arguments, but He Himself came and opened men's ears, and pressed the truth home upon their understandings, and made it operative upon their entire nature. Man was so proud that no one else could humble him but God; and he was so wilful, that no one could withdraw him from his purpose but the Lord alone; but the Lord in condescension did the deed, and made the man obedient and humble. Indeed, the Lord is described in this chapter as the main cause of all the work accomplished. Whereas, a ransom was needed to deliver men from going down to the pit, it is the Lord's voice which cried, "I have found a ransom." Whereas, even when the Ransom was found, men did not know it, and would not receive it; it was God who sent a messenger, one of a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, and to proclaim the great provision made for restoring man to his primeval state. It is the Lord who delivers the soul from the pit, that man's life may see the light. In this chapter it is God that visits, that speaks, chastens, instructs, enlightens, consoles, renews and saves, from first to last. God worketh all in all. Salvation is of the Lord, it is not of man, neither by man; neither is it of the will of man, nor of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of birth, but of the will of God. The purpose of God and the power of God work salvation from first to last. What a blessing this is for us, for if salvation were of ourselves, who among us would be saved? But He hath "laid help upon One that is mighty"; God also is our strength and our song, for He Himself has become our salvation. He who has begun the good work will carry it on. Christ is the Alpha, and Christ is the Omega, the "Author and the Finisher of our faith." So we have two points in this ancient conversion in which it was just like our own, the same men to be operated upon, and the same God to work the miracles of grace.

III. The most interesting point to you will probably be the third: THE MEANS USED TO WORK CONVERSION IN THOSE DISTANT AGES WERE VERY MUCH THE SAME AS THOSE EMPLOYED NOW. There were differences in outward agencies, but the inward *modus operandi* was the same. There was a difference in the instruments, but the way of working was the same. Kindly turn to the chapter, at the fifteenth verse; you find there that God first of all spoke to men, but they regarded Him not, and then He spoke to them effectually by means of a dream: "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed." Now this was an extraordinary means of grace, seldom used now. In this the distant ages differ from the present. A dream, though it be in itself but the phantasm of sleep, may be employed by God to arouse the mind towards eternal things. Dreams of death and judgment to come have frequently had a very alarming effect upon the conscience, while visions of celestial glory have impressed the heart with desires after infinite bliss. As Dryden says of some men—

> "In sleep they fearful precipices tread;
> Or, shipwreck'd, labour to some distant shore."

so others have in their slumbers shivered at the gates of hell, or even been tossed upon its fiery waves, and the thoughts consequent upon such dreams have, by God's grace, occasionally been rendered permanently useful, though I fear it is not often so. In the days of Elihu, however, dreams were much more frequently the way in which God spake, for there were few messengers from God to interpret His mind, no openly declared gospel, and few assemblies for instruction by hearing the word; and what is more, there was then no written Word of God. In those early times they had no inspired books at all, so that, lacking the Bible, and lacking the frequent ministrations of God's servants, the Lord was pleased to supply their deficiencies by speaking to men in the visions of the night. I say again, we must not expect the Lord to return to the general use of so feeble an agency now that He employs others which are far more effectual. It is much more profitable for you to have the Word in your houses which you can read at all times, and to have God's ministers to proclaim clearly the gospel of Jesus, than it would be to be dependent upon visions of the night.

The means, therefore, outwardly, may have changed, but still, whether it be by the dream at night, or by the sermon on the Sabbath, the power is just the same; namely, in the word of God. God speaks to men in dreams, if so, He speaks to them all nothing more, and nothing different from what He speaks in the written word. If any come to you and say, "I have dreamed this or that," and it be not in the Scriptures, away with their dreams! If anything should occur in your own mind in vision which is not already revealed in the Book of God, put it away, it is an idle fancy not to be regarded. Woe to that man whose religion is the baseless fabric of dreams, he will one day wake up to find that nothing short of realities could save him. We have the more sure word of testimony, unto which we do well if we take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. Conversions, then, in the old time, used to be by the word of God; it came in a different way, but it was the same word and the same truth. At this time faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, and at bottom that was precisely the way in which faith came to men in those distant periods.

Now, observe, that in addition to the external coming of the word, it seems from the chapter before us in the sixteenth verse, that men were converted by having their ears opened by God. Alas, men's ears are still stopped up! An old Puritan has mentioned seven forms of what he calls "ear stoppers," which need to be taken out of the human ear. They are frequently blocked up by ignorance; they know not the importance and value of the truth, and, therefore they refuse to give earnest heed to it; judging it to be an idle tale, they go their ways to their farms and to their merchandise. Some ears are stopped up by unbelief; they have heard the glad tidings of salvation, but they have not received it as an infallible revelation from heaven, a message backed by divine authority. Scepticism and philosophy, falsely so called, barricade Ear-gate against the assaults of Emmanuel's captains, so that even the great battering-rams of the gospel prove powerless to force an entrance, "He could not do many mighty works then because of their unbelief!" Others ears are stopped up by impenitence: the hardness of the heart causes a deadness of the ear. You may discharge the great cannons of the law in the ears of some men, but they will not stir; the thunders of God startle the wild beasts of the wood, but impenitence is not moved thereby. The gospel itself soundeth upon such ears with no more effect than upon a marble statue; the groans of Calvary are nothing to them. Some ears are stopped by prejudice; they have made up their minds as to what the gospel ought to be, and they will not hear it as it is; they have set up for themselves a standard of what the truth should be, and that standard is a false one, for they have put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness. Prejudices against the preacher, or against the denomination are but forms of the same evil; they make men to be as Ulysses was when his ears were sealed with wax, for they are even as deaf men. The entrance into many ears is also effectually barred by the love of sin. He who loves vice will not hear of repentance; the lover of pleasure detests holy mourning; the licentious think holiness to be another name for slavery. The man who finds delight in sin is a deaf adder whom the wisest charmer cannot charm; the poison of asps is under his tongue, and he cannot renounce his deadly hate of a gospel which rebukes his evil ways. It would be vain to teach cleanliness to the sow which wallows in the mire—it loves uncleanness, and after uncleanness will it go. Some ears are stopped through pride; the plain, unflattering, humbling gospel of the sinner's Saviour is not to their taste. The gospel for lost sinners, they think, is not addressed to them, for they are almost good enough, and are by no means worthy of any great blame, or in danger of any great punishment. When they acknowledge their sinnership in words they feel it not in their hearts, therefore they hear not the truth in the love of it. If the gospel-pipe could be tuned to notes of flattery, to praise the dignity of man, they would attend to its music, but a gospel for vulgar sinners! How can their noble souls endure it? With their fine feathers all ruffled in disdain, they turn away in a rage. Alas! how many ears are stopped through worldliness! If you stand in a street where the traffic is abundant—where the constant thunder of rumbling wheels creates a din—it would be difficult to preach so as to command an audience, for the abundant sound would prevent all hearing; and, to a great extent, the mass of mankind are just in that position as to the joyful sound of the gospel; the rumbling of the wheels of commerce, the noise of trade and the cries of competition, the whirl of cares and the riot of pleasures—all these drown the persuasive voice of heavenly love, so that men hear no more of it than they would hear a pin fall in the midst of a hurricane at sea. Only when God unstops the ear is the still small voice of truth heard in the chambers of the heart.

Now it is clear to every thoughtful person that all these ear-stoppers existed in the olden times as well as now, and therefore the same work of opening the passage to the heart was necessarily performed. Dreams did not convert sinners of the patriarchal age, however vivid they might be, nor did prophetic warnings by themselves arouse them,—the hand of Him who created the ear was needed to cleanse and circumcise it, ere the truth could find admission.

Note the next sentence, He "sealeth their instruction." That was the means of conversion in the olden times. God brought the truth down upon the soul as you press a seal upon the wax: you bear upon the seal to make the impress, and even thus the power of God pressed home the word. Truth is heard by men, but they forget it unless the Holy Spirit takes the truth and puts it home, and lays his force upon it, and then it makes a stamp upon the conscience, upon the memory, and upon the entire manhood. Perhaps, also, by sealing here is meant confirming. A thing is sealed when it is established by testimony and witness: under hand and seal as we say. Now the Holy Spirit has a way of making truth to become manifest to men, and cogent upon their minds by bearing His witness with it; so that they cannot help feeling that it is true. He sets it in such a light, that they cannot dispute it, but yield full consent to it, their conscience being overwhelmingly convinced.

Dear friends, I pray God the Holy Spirit in this sense to seal home the word we speak to each one of you, that from hearers you may grow into believers. I know you will remain hearers only unless that sacred sealing shall take place; but let that come upon you and your soul will bear the gospel stamped into its very texture, never more to be effaced. If the Spirit of God thus seals you, you will be sealed indeed.

By sealing is also sometimes meant preserving and setting apart, as we seal up documents or treasures of great value, that they may be secure. In this sense the gospel needs sealing up in our hearts. We forget what we hear till God the Holy Ghost seals it in the soul, and then it is pondered and treasured up in the heart: it becomes to us a goodly pearl, a divine secret, a peculiar heritage. This sealing is a main point in conversion. What thousands of sermons many of you have heard, but the instruction has never been sealed to you, and therefore, you remain unsaved. I cannot bear to think of your unhappy case, and I beseech those who love the Lord to pray that our discourses, or the sermons of some one else, or the Bible itself, may be sealed of the Lord upon these my unhappy hearers, that they may be converted and saved. Oh for the Lord's sealing hand upon men's hearts! Send, Lord, by whomsoever Thou wilt send, and by Thy servant also. Give the hearing ear, and then engrave Thy gospel upon an understanding heart. Thou art able to do this, and in faith we seek it at Thy hands, O Lord God of our salvation. In this manner men were converted in the olden times: ears were opened and hearts were sealed.

It appears, also, that the Lord, in those days, employed providence as a help towards conversion—and that providence was often of a very gentle kind, for it preserved men from death. Read the eighteenth verse: "He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." Many a man has had the current of his life entirely changed by an escape from imminent peril; solemn thoughts have taken possession of his formerly careless mind, and he has said to himself, "Has God preserved me from this danger, then let me be grateful to Him. He must have had a purpose in my preservation, let me find out what it is, and thankfully endeavour to answer to it." Have any of you, my hearers, escaped from shipwreck? Is there one here who has escaped from accident upon the iron way? Are you one of a handful who were snatched from between the very jaws of death? Have you risen up from a fever which laid you very low? Are you now almost the only survivor of a family, all the members of which, except yourself, have been taken away by consumption, or some other hereditary disease? Are you a remarkable monument of sparing mercy? Then, I pray you, let the long-suffering of God lead you to repentance, for it has led many before you, and it is intended that it should do the like for you. Yield to the gentle pressure of loving-kindness, even as the flowers yield their perfumes to the sunshine: do not need to be crushed and bruised like Oriental spice beneath the pestle. Tenderly doth the Lord call you to Himself, and say, "I have spared thee from the grave, I have also kept thy guilty soul from going down to hell, I have placed thee to-day under the sound of the gospel; I am, by My servant, calling upon thee to turn unto Me and live. Wilt thou not hear Me? Thou art still on praying ground and pleading terms with Me—wilt thou not consider all this?" Thus God speaketh now by actions, which speak more loudly than words, and it seems that in the same way He was wont to speak to men in the days gone by, so that providential circumstances were often the means of conversion.

But, further, it seems that, as Elihu puts it, sickness was a yet more effectual awakener in the common run of cases. Observe the nineteenth verse, "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat." Severe pain destroyed appetite and brought on extreme lassitude and distaste of life: but all this was sent in mercy to fetch the wanderer home. Yes, men get space for thought when they are shut up in the chamber of sickness. While the mill-wheel went on and on and on, they could not hear God speak, but when its hum is hushed the warning voice sounds forth clearly. There in silence the patient tosses on the bed, wakeful at night, and fearful by day, and then conscience lifts up its clamour and will be heard: then, too, the Spirit of God seizes the opportunity to speak to an awakened conscience, and He convinces the man of sin. How much some of us owe to a bed of sickness! I do not desire for any unconverted person here that he should be ill, but if that would be the way to make him think, repent, and believe, I could earnestly pray for it. I believe the Lord has often preached to men in hospitals who never heard Him in churches or chapels; fever and cholera have been heard by those whom ministers could not reach. If we could banish pain and sickness from the world, it may be we should be robbing righteousness of two of her most impressive evangelists. What Jonah was to Nineveh, sickness has been to many a man. Like Elijah also, it has cried in the soul, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Disease has been a grim orator for God, and with an eloquence not to be resisted, it has made the hearts of men to bow before its message. If there are any here who have lately been thus afflicted, I would ask them whether God has blessed it to their souls. I earnestly pray that they may not be hardened by it, for in that case there is fear that God will say, "Why should ye be smitten any more, ye will revolt more and more!" and He may add, "I will let them alone, they are given unto idols. I have smitten them till their whole head is sick, and their whole heart is faint. I have made them to be so near death's door, that from the crown of the head even to the foot they are all wounds and bruises through the chastenings of My rod. I will give them up, and no more will I deal with them in a way of grace." Great God have pity still, and make Thy chastisements effectual to their souls. Now, note well that we do not assert that all persons who are saved are awakened by sickness; far from it, all that we are now taught is that many are so aroused, and that such was the case in the instance described by Elihu.

In addition to this sickness, the person whom God saved was even brought to be apprehensive of death—"Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers." When a man is made to lie upon his bed on the brink of hell and look into another world, that sight may be sacredly blessed to him. Oh, it is no small thing to peer into eternity, and to make out, amid the horrid gloom, no shapes of hope but ghastly forms of hideous woe. To have behind one the memory of a mis-spent life, to have above one an angry God, to have within one the aches of the body and the pangs of remorse, and to have beneath one the bottomless pit, yawning with its lurid fires! What can be worse? This side of hell, what can be worse than the tortures of an awakened conscience? This has sometimes made men wake up from a life-slumber and compelled them to cry, "What must we do to be saved?" I could wish that every man here, who has remained unmoved by gentler means, might have some such an experience.

It were better for you to be saved so, as by fire, than not to be saved at all.

But, now, notice that all this did not lead the person into comfort; although he was impressed by the dream and sickness, and so on, yet the ministry of some God-sent ambassador was wanted. "If there be a messenger with him," that is a man sent of God—"an interpreter," one who can open up obscure things and translate God's mind into man's language—"one among a thousand," for a true preacher, expert in dealing with souls, is a rare person "to show unto man His uprightness, then He is gracious unto him." God could save souls without ministers, but He does not often do it; He could bring men to Jesus without the call from the lip of His sent servants, but as a general rule conversion in the olden times needed the messenger and the interpreter, and it needs them still: "How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent." I pray that many of you, dear brethren, who know the Lord, may become preachers to others; that you may be such successful messengers of mercy to poor broken hearts, that you may be to them picked and choice men like one out of a thousand. I entreat you to pray for me also, that I may have a share, and a large share, in this blessed employment, and that to many God may say through me, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom."

IV. Fourthly, and with too much brevity, THE OBJECTS AIMED AT IN THE OLD CONVERSIONS WERE JUST THE SAME as those that are aimed at now-a-days. Will you kindly look at the seventeenth verse. The first thing that God had to do with the man was to withdraw him from his purpose. He finds him set upon sin, upon rebellion, upon carnal pleasure, upon everything that is selfish and worldly; and conversion turns him away from such evil purposes: it was so then, it is so now. This turning of an obstinate will towards God and holiness is, however, no easy matter: to stay the sun in his course, or reverse the marches of the moon, would not be a harder task.

The next object of the divine work was to hide pride from man, for man will stick to self-righteousness as long as he can. Never does limpet adhere to its rock more firmly than a sinner to his own merits, although indeed he has none. Like the old Greek hero in the mythology, the natural man sits down upon the stone of self-esteem, and Hercules himself cannot tear him from it. When he is even in outward character vile, he still fancies that there is some good thing in him, and to that fancy he will tenaciously cling; so that it is a work of divine power, an effort of the august omnipotence of heaven, to get a man away from his innate and desperate pride.

Beloved, another great object of conversion is to lead man to a confession of his sin. Hence we find it said in the twenty-seventh verse, "He looketh upon man, and if any say I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, He will deliver his soul from going into the pit." Man hates confession to his God, I mean humble, personal, hearty confession. He will go to a priest and answer all his filthy questions, but he will not confess to the Lord. He will gabble over words which he calls a "general confession," but true, heart-felt confession he shrinks from—he will not come to the publican's cry if he can help it. He will not say, frankly from his heart, "I have sinned." He will not own or confess the perverseness of his nature and say, "I have perverted that which is right"; nor can you get him to own the folly and stupidity of his sin, so as to say, "it profited me not." But conversion brings him to his knees, conversion pulls up the sluices of his soul, and makes him pour out his confessions before the Most High; and when this is done, then salvation has come to the man's soul, for God desires man to put himself into the place of condemnation in order that he may He able to say to him, "I forgive thee freely." The Lord shuts us up to hopelessness and helplessness in order that He may come, as a God of grace, and display His abounding mercy. All our hope lies in Him, and all other hopes are delusions. The great work in conversion is not to make people better, so that they may come to God on a good footing, it is to strip them completely and lay them low, so that God may come to them when they are on a bad footing, or rather on no footing at all, but down in the dust at His feet. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost, but it wants God Himself to convince men that they are lost; and the Spirit's work of soul-humbling is just this,—to get man to feel so diseased that he will accept the physician; to get him to feel so poor that he will accept the charity of heaven; to get him to know that he is so stripped, that he will no longer be proud of his fig leaves, but will be willing to take the robe of righteousness which Christ has wrought out. Conviction is sent to kill the man, to break him in pieces, to bury him, to let him know his own corruption; and all this as a preliminary to his quickening and restoration. We must see the bones in the valley to be dead and dry, or we shall not hear the voice out of the excellent glory, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Ye dry bones live!'" May God in His mercy teach us what all this means; and may we all experience an old-fashioned conversion.

V. Fifthly, the process of conversion in days of yore exactly resembled that which is wrought in us now as to ITS SHADES. The shadowy side wore the same sombre hues as now. First of all, the man refused to hear; God spake once, yea twice, and man regarded Him not: here was obstinate rebellion. His heart was as an adamant stone. How true is that to-day! Then came the chastening till the man's bones were made to ache, and he was full of misery. It is often the same now. I acknowledge that I was brought to God by agony of soul. I have often said from this pulpit that no man ever steers his barque towards the port of peace till he is driven there by stress of weather. We never come to Christ till we feel we cannot do without Him. We must feel our poverty before we shall ever come and beg at the door of His mercy for help. The shades are the same, for the same imminence of danger which Elihu spoke of comes upon every sinner's consciousness, more or less before he resorts to Jesus for refuge. The same bitter sense of sin comes over men still, and the same wonder at their own folly in having continued in it. The same darkness still covers the sinner's pathway, and the same inability to procure the light for himself; the same need of light from above, the same need of help from Him who is mighty to save. If any of you are passing just now through great darkness of soul, because you have not yet come to the light, but God is revealing yourselves to yourselves, be comforted, for the same dark road has been traversed by many of the saints before you, and it is a safe pathway, leading to comfort in Jesus Christ.

VI. But now, sixthly and very briefly, THE LIGHTS ARE THE SAME, even as the shades were the same. You will note in Elihu's description, that the great source of all the light was this: "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom." There is not a gleam of light in the case till you come to that divine word,— and is it not so now? Did you ever get any comfort for your troubled souls till you were led to see the ransom found by God in Jesus Christ? Did you ever know the value of the ransom for yourselves till God spoke it home to you—"Deliver *him* from going down to the pit, for *I* have found a ransom!" This is the central point of the sinner's hope—a bleeding Saviour paying our ransom price in drops of blood, the dying Son of God achieving our redemption by His own death. Oh, dear souls, who are in the dark, if you want light, there is light nowhere but at the cross. Do not look within for light; the only benefit of looking within is to be more and more convinced that all is dark, as midnight apart from Jesus. Look within if you want to despair, but if you wish for hope, look yonder to Calvary's mountain, where the Son of God lays down His life that sinners may not die. Hear you from heaven the Voice which saith, "I have found a ransom." That is the only reason why God delivers you, not because He has seen any good thing in you, but because He has found a ransom for you. Look where God looks, and your comfort will begin.

Then this precious gospel being announced to the sinner, the comfort of it enters his soul in the exercise of prayer: "He shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him." Oh, you can pray when you get to the cross, our prayers, before we see Christ, are poor, poor things, but when we get to Calvary, and see the utmost ransom paid, and the full atonement made, then prayer becomes the utterance of a child to a father, and we feel quite sure it will speed.

Next, it appears, that the soul obtains comfort because God gave it His righteousness—"for He will render unto man His righteousness." That righteousness which God expected God bestows; that righteousness which man ought to have wrought out but could not, Christ works out; and God treats the believing man as if he were righteous, making him righteous in the righteousness of Christ. Here is another source of joy.

And then the man being led to a full confession of his sin in the twenty-seventh verse, the last cloud upon his spirit is blown away and he is at perfect peace. God was gracious to the man described by Elihu. God Himself became His light and His salvation, and He came forth into joy and liberty. There is nothing more full of freshness and surprise than the joy of a new convert. Though thousands have felt it, yet each one as he feels it is himself amazed. I did really think when God forgave me that I was the most extraordinary instance of His sovereign love that ever lived, and that I should be bound even in heaven itself to tell to others how God's infinite mercy had pardoned in my case the biggest sinner that ever was forgiven. Now, every saved soul is led to feel just that, and to exult and rejoice, and magnify the Lord with extreme surprise, because of His goodness. It seems it was so in Job's day, and it is so now; the old conversions are the conversations of the period: the shades are the same and the lights are the same.

VII. And last of all, which is the seventh point, THE RESULTS ARE THE SAME, for I think I hardly know a better description of the result of regeneration than that which is given in the twenty-fifth verse: "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth." He who was an old wrinkled man in sin, and looked yet older through his sorrow, becomes born again, starts upon a new career with a new life within him; the health which had departed from his soul comes back, the spring of spiritual juvenility wells up in him, because God has begotten him afresh and made him a new creature: "Old things have passed away, behold all things are become new!"

And with this change comes back joy. See the twenty-sixth verse: "He shall see His face with joy; for He will render unto man His righteousness"; and the thirtieth verse: "To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." So that the new spirit finds itself in a new world, in which it goeth forth with joy and is led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills break forth before it into singing, and all the trees of the wood do clap their hands. It was so then; it is just the same now. Oh that the same blessed thing may happen to many here present at this time!

I have endeavoured to give a description of conversion, that you may see what it is to be renewed in heart, but I shall have failed of my intention unless many a knee shall be bent to God with this prayer, "O Spirit of God, renew my nature, change my heart: make my flesh to be fresher than a child's, make me a new creature in Christ Jesus." Time is passing: we are getting now almost one-fourth through another year, and the year itself will soon fly away. I would speak to careless and thoughtless ones again, and ask them will it never be time to think upon these things? Will it never be time to consider your ways? Will it never be time to seek unto the Lord? Ye know not how near ye are to the grave's brink. Do consider, I beseech you, and remember that the Lord waiteth to be gracious, that He delighteth in mercy, and if you seek Him He will be found of you; and this great conversion and regeneration, of which we have spoken at such length, shall be yours, and you shall see the face of God with joy even as they did of old. The Lord grant it to you for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

FOR THE SICK AND AFFLICTED

" Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not teach Thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."—Job xxxiv. 31, 32.

EVEN when addressing our fellow-men there should be a fitness about our speech; therefore Solomon represents the preacher as seeking out acceptable words, or words meet for the occasion. When we approach those who are high in authority this necessity becomes conspicuous, and therefore men who are petitioners in the courts of princes are very careful to order their language aright. Much more, then, when we speak before the Lord ought we to consider, as the text does, the meetness of our words. Some language must never be uttered in the divine presence, and even that which is allowed must be well weighed, and set forth with solemn humbleness. Hence Elihu does well to suggest in the text language that is " meet to be said unto God," May our lips ever be kept as by a watchful sentinel, lest they suffer anything to pass through them dishonourable to the Most High. In the divine presence—and we are always there—it is incumbent upon us to set a double watch over every word that comes from our mouth.

Remember that thought is speech before God. Thought is not speech to man, for men cannot read one another's thoughts until they are set forth by words or other outward signs, but God who reads the heart regards that as being speech which was never spoken, and He hears us say in our souls many things which were never uttered by our tongues. Beloved, there are thoughts which are not meet to be thought before the Lord; and it is well for us, especially those of us who are afflicted, to be very watchful over those thoughts, lest the Lord hear us say in our hearts things which will grieve His Spirit, and provoke Him to jealousy. O saints of God, since you never think except in the immediate presence of your heavenly Father, make a conscience of your every thought, lest you sin in the secret chambers of your being, and charge God foolishly. Elihu tells us what it would be proper for us to think and say, " It is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not teach Thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

We will use the text mainly at this time *in reference to those who are being chastened*; and afterwards we shall see if there is not teaching in it, even *to those who, at present, are not smarting under the rod.* Thirdly, *we shall find a word in our text to those who are not the children of God, and, therefore, know nothing of the smarting rod of fatherly correction.* Perhaps to them, also, God may speak through this text. O that His Holy Spirit may deign to do so.

I. But first, dear friends, let us commune together upon the text in its more natural application as addressed TO THE AFFLICTED. The instruction of the wise man is for them especially; and there are three duties here prescribed for them, or rather three privileges suggested, which they should pray the Holy Spirit to enable them to enjoy.

The first lesson is, *it is meet for them to accept the affliction which the Lord sends*, and to say unto God, " I have borne chastisement." We notice that the word " chastisement " is not actually in the Hebrew, though the Hebrew could not be well interpreted without supplying the word. It might exactly and literally be translated " I bear," or " I have borne." It is the softened heart saying to God, " I bear whatever Thou wilt put upon me; I have borne it, I still bear it, and I will bear it, whatever Thou mayest ordain it to be. I submit myself entirely to Thee, and accept the load with which Thou art pleased to weight me." Now, we ought to do this, dear friends, and we shall do it if we are right at heart. We should cheerfully submit, because no affliction from which we suffer has come to us by chance. We are not left to the misery of believing that things happen of themselves, and are independent of a divinely controlling power. We know that not a drop of bitter ever falls into our cup unless the wisdom of our heavenly Father has placed it there. We are not even left in a world governed by angels, or ruled by cherubim; we dwell where everything is ordered by God Himself. Shall we rebel against the Most High? Shall we not let Him do as seemeth good in His sight? Shall we not cover our lip in silence when we know that the evil is of the Lord? Shame upon us, if we be His children, if this be not the prevalent spirit of our mind —" It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." Moreover, we should not only bear all things because the Lord ordains them, but because He orders all things for a wise, kind, beneficent purpose. He doth not afflict willingly. He takes no delight in the sufferings of His children. Whenever adversity must come it is always with a purpose; and, if a purpose of God is to be subserved by my suffering, would I wish to escape from it? If His glory will come of it, shall I not even crave the honour of being the agent of His glory, even though it be by lying passive and enduring in anguish. Yes, beloved, since we know that God can only grieve His regenerated creatures for some purpose of love, we should willingly accept whatever sorrow He pleases to put upon us. And we have His assurance, besides, that all things work together for our good. Our trials are not merely sent with a good object, but with an object good towards ourselves, a design which is being answered by every twig of our heavenly Father's rod. " The cup which our Father hath given us, shall we not drink it? " It is healing medicine and not deadly poison, therefore let us put it to our lips without a murmur, aye, quaff it to its very dregs, and say, " Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

A constant submission to the divine will should be the very atmosphere in which a Christian lives. He should put an earnest negative upon his self-will by crying, " *Not* my will," and then he should with holy warmth beseech the Lord to execute His purpose, saying, " The will of the Lord be done." He should throw the whole vigour of his soul into the Lord's will, and exhibit more than submission, namely, a devout acquiescence in whatever the Lord appoints.

Beloved friends, we must not be content with bearing what the Lord sends, with the coolness which says, " It must be, and, therefore, I *must* put up with it." Such forced submission is far below a Christian grace, for many a heathen has attained it. The stolid stoic accepted what predestination handed out to him,

and the Mahometan still does the same. We must go beyond unfeeling submission. We must not so harden our hearts against affliction as not to be affected by it. That chastisement which does not make us smart has failed of its end. It is by the blueness of the wound, says Solomon, that the heart is made better; and if there is no real blueness—if it be merely a surface bruise—little good will come of it. "For a season we are in heaviness," says the apostle, "through manifold trials," and not only the trial, but the heaviness which comes of it, is needful to us. God would not have His children become like the ox or the ass, which present hard skins to hard blows, but He would have us tender and sensitive. There is such a thing as despising the chastening of the Lord, by a defiant attitude which seems to challenge the Lord to draw a tear or fetch a sigh from us. Against this let us be on our guard.

Neither, on the other hand, are we to receive affliction with a rebellious spirit. It is hard for us to kick against the pricks, like the ox which, when goaded is irritated, and strikes out and drives the iron into itself deeper than it went before. We can easily do this by complaining that God is too severe with us. In this spirit we may "take arms against a sea of troubles"; but by opposing we shall not end them, but increase their raging. By a proud murmuring spirit we only bring upon ourselves trial upon trial; "the Lord resisteth the proud," and a high spirit challenges His opposition.

Neither, dear friends, as believers in God are we to despair under trouble, for that is not bearing the cross, but lying down under it. We are to take up our appointed burden, and carry it, and not sit down in wicked sullenness and murmur that we can do no more. Some are in a very naughty frame of mind, their moody spirits mutter that if God will be so severe with them they must yield to it, but they have lost all heart, and all faith, and all they ask for is leave to die. A child of God must not repine. He has not yet "resisted unto blood, striving against sin"; and, if he had, still he should say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in Him." Since Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, never murmured, it ill becomes any of His followers to do so. We must in patience possess our souls. Perhaps you think it easier for me to say this than it would be to practise it; and yet, by Almighty grace, a saint can bear to the utmost of bearing, to the utmost of suffering he can suffer, to the utmost of loss he can lose, and even to the uttermost of death itself he can die daily, and yet triumph through the divine life, for God, that worketh in us to will and to do, is almighty, and makes our weakness strong.

The Christian, then, is not to treat the cross which God puts upon him in any such way as I have described, but he is to accept it *humbly*, looking up to God, and saying, "Much worse than this I might reckon to receive even as Thy child; for the discipline of Thine house requireth the rod, and well might I expect to be chastened every morning." The child of God should feel that it is in very faithfulness that the Lord afflicts him, and that every stroke has love in it. Anything over and above the lowest abyss of hell is a great mercy to us. If we had to lie ill for fifty years and scarcely have a minute free from pain, yet since the Lord has pardoned our sins, and accepted us in Christ Jesus, and made us His children, we should be grateful for every pang, and still continue to bless the Lord upon our beds, and sing His high praises in the midst of the fires. Humbly therefore, as sinners deserving divine wrath, we are bound to accept the chastenings of the Lord.

We should receive chastisement *with meek submission*, presenting ourselves to God that He may do with us as He has dealt with us—not wishing to start aside to the right hand or to the left: asking Him, if it may be His will to remove the load, to heal the pain, to deliver us from the bereavement, and the like, but still always leaving ample margin for full resignation of spirit. The gold is not to rebel against the goldsmith, but should at once yield to be placed in the crucible and thrust into the fire. The wheat as it lies upon the threshing-floor is not to have a will of its own, but to be willing to endure the strokes of the flail that the chaff may be separated from the precious corn. We are not far off being purged from dross and cleansed from chaff when we are perfectly willing to undergo any process which the divine wisdom may appoint us. Self and sin are married, and will never be divorced, and till our self-hood is crushed the seed of sin will still have abundant vitality in it; but when it is "not I" but "Christ that liveth in me," then have we come near to that mark to which God has called us, and to which by His Spirit, He is leading us.

But we ought to go farther than this. We should accept chastisement *cheerfully*. It is a hard lesson, but a lesson which the Comforter is able to teach us—to be glad that God should have His way. Do you know what it is sometimes to be very pleased to do what you do not like to do? I mean you would not have liked to do it, but you find that it pleases some one you love, and straightway the irksome task becomes a pleasure. Have you not felt, sometimes, when one whom you very much esteem is sick and ill, that you would be glad enough to bear the pain, at least for a day or two, that you might give the suffering one a little rest? Would you not find a pleasure in being an invalid for a while to let your beloved one enjoy a season of health? Let the same motive, in a higher degree, sway your spirit! Try to feel, "If it pleases God it pleases me. If, Lord, it is *thy* will, it shall be *my* will. Let the lashes of the scourge be multiplied, if so Thou shalt be the more honoured, and I shall be permitted to bring Thee some degree of glory." The cross becomes sweet when our heart is so sweetened by the Spirit that our will runs parallel with the will of God. We should learn to say, in the language of Elihu, "I have borne, I do bear, I accept it all." To be as plastic clay on the potter's wheel, or as wax in the modeller's hand, should be our great desire. That is the first business of the sufferer.

The next duty is to forsake the sin which may have occasioned the chastisement. "It is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement; *I will not offend any more.*" There is a connection between sin and suffering in every case. It would be very wrong for us to suppose that every man who suffers is therefore more guilty than others: that was the mistake of Job's friends—a mistake too commonly made every day: but it is right for the sufferer himself to judge his own case, by a standard which *we* may not use toward him. He should say, "Is there not some connection between this chastisement and sin that dwelleth in me?" And here he must not judge himself unrighteously, even for God, lest he plunge himself into unnecessary sorrow. There are afflictions which come from God, not on account of past sin, but to prevent sin in the future. There are also sharp prunings which are intended to make us bring forth more fruit: they are not sent because we have

brought forth no fruit, but because we are fruitful boughs, and are worth pruning. "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." There are also afflictions which are sent by way of test, and trial, and proof, both for God's glory and the manifestation of His power; as also for the comforting of others, that trembling saints may see how weak and feeble men can carry the heaviest cross for Christ's sake, and can triumph under it. We are not to be sure that every sorrow comes to us because of any sin actually committed; yet it will be best for us to be more severe with ourselves than we should think of being with others, and always to ask, "Is there not some cause for this chastisement? May there not be something of which God would rid me, or something which has grieved *Him*, which has caused Him to grieve *me*?" Brothers and sisters, I charge you never be lenient with yourselves. The best of us are men at the best, and at our best we have much to mourn over in the presence of the Most High. It is good to be always dissatisfied with ourselves, and pressing forward to a something yet beyond; always praying that in us Christ's likeness may be completely formed. Thorns are often put in the nest that we may search for hidden evils. "Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?" Has there been a defeat at Ai? May there not be an Achan in the camp? Has not a traitor concealed in some secret place a goodly Babylonish garment and a wedge of gold? Does not trial give a hint that there may be something amiss? Beloved, I ask myself and I ask you to look now, not only to your outward character, but to your more private life and to your walk before God, and see if there be not some flaw. Is there trouble in the family? Have you always acted toward the children and the servants as you should have done as a master and a father? Question yourself. The child is grieving you. Have you, good mother, always been as prayerful about that child as you should have been? May not your child's conduct to you be a fair reflection of your own conduct towards your heavenly Father? I do not mention any of these things to increase your grief, but in order that you may put your finger on the evil which provokes the Lord God, and may put it away. Have there been losses in business? Are you sure, brother, that when you were making money you always used it for God as you should? Were you a good steward? Did you give the Lord His full portion—the sacred tithe of all that you had? Or may you not have been too selfish—and may not that be the cause why you must now be reduced from wealth to comparative poverty? Is that so? Does the affliction scourge your body? Then has there been anything wrong with your habits? Has the flesh predominated over the spirit? Has there been a failure of the entire consecration of the vessel unto the Lord? Does the trial occur in the person of some dear one? You may not be conscious of any wrong there, but still look, dear friends! Search the whole of your conduct as the spies searched Canaan of old. If your sin be glaring, there is little need of a chastisement to point it out to you, for you ought to see it without that: but there may be a secret sin between you and your Lord for which He has sent you chastisement, and after this you must raise a hue and cry. You know I do not mean that the Lord is punishing you for sin as a judge punishes a criminal, for He will not do that; since He has laid the punishment of sin upon Christ, and Christ has borne it as a matter of punitive justice. He, as a father, chasteneth His child, but never without a cause: I am urging you to see whether there may not be some cause for the present painful discipline. Never fall into the mistake of some who suppose that sin in God's children is a trifle. Why, if there is any place where sin is horrible it is in a child of God. Hence the text puts it, "I will not *offend* any more." Sin is an offensive thing to God, He cannot bear it. I should dislike a plague spot on anybody's face, but I should tremble to see it most of all upon my own child's face. Sin is more visible in a good man than in any other. I may drop a spot of ink upon a black handkerchief and never see it, but on a white one you will perceive it directly, and see it the more because of the whiteness of the linen which it defiles. You, child of God, know that just in proportion as you are sanctified—in proportion as you live near to God—sin will be grievous to the Most High It is gloriously terrible to live near to God. I wonder if you understand me, all of you. To walk as a favoured courtier with a monarch is a very delicate matter. Favourites have to pick their steps; for though they stand near a king, they well know how soon they may fall from their high position. We serve a jealous God. That is a wonderful question, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" God is that consuming fire. God is the everlasting burnings. Who among us shall dwell with Him? The answer is, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, he shall dwell on high. His place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks": but it is only the man who is very jealous of himself who will be able to bear that fierce light which beats around the throne of God.—that devouring flame which God Himself is, as saith the apostle—"Even our God is a consuming fire." Cæsar's wife must not only be without fault, but she must be above suspicion, and such must be the character of the child of God who, like Moses, lives in the inner circle—who stands on the mountain top—who knows what the peaks of Sinai mean, and what it is to be forty days in fellowship with the Most High.

Beloved friends, I urge upon you a very close search into what the transgression may be which has brought correction upon you, for it may be in you an offence which would scarcely be sin in anybody else. Another person might fall into your fault as a sin of ignorance, but since you know better the sin is all the blacker in you. The Lord will be sanctified in them that draw near unto Him, and woe to them if they defile themselves.

The third lesson in the text to the afflicted clearly teaches them that *it is their duty and privilege to ask for more light.* The text says, "That which I see not teach Thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Do you see the drift of this? It is the child of God awakened to look after the sin which the chastisement indicates; and since he cannot see all the evil that may be in himself, he turns to his God with this prayer, "What I see not teach Thou me."

Beloved friends, it may be that, in looking over your past life and searching through your heart, you do not see your sin, for perhaps it is where you do not suspect. You have been looking in another quarter. Your own opinion is that you are weak in one point, but possibly you are far weaker in the opposite direction. In nothing do men make more mistakes than concerning their own characters. I have known

a brother confess that he was deficient in firmness, when, in my opinion, he was about as obstinate as any man I knew. Another man has said that he was always wanting in coolness, and yet I thought that if I needed to fill an ice-well, I had only to put him into it. Persons misjudge themselves. Unfeeling people say they are too sensitive, and selfish persons imagine themselves to be victims to the good of others. So, it may be, you have been looking in one quarter for the sin, while your fault lies in the opposite point of the compass. Pray, then, "Lord, search me and try me, and that which I see not teach Thou me." Remember, brethren, that our worst sins may lurk under our holiest things. Oh, how these evils will hide away—not under the docks and nettles of the dung-heap—not they, but under the lilies and the roses of the garden. In the cups of the flowers they lurk. They do not flit through our souls like devils with dragons' wings; they fly as angels of light, with wings tinted as the rainbow. They come as sheep, and a very fat sort they seem to be, but they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Watch, therefore, very carefully against the sins of your holy things. In our holy things we are nearer to God than at any other time, and hence such defilement soonest brings upon us the stroke of our Heavenly Father's rod. Perhaps your sin is hidden away under something very dear to you. Jacob made a great search for the images—the teraphs which Laban worshipped. He could not find them. No; he did not like to disturb Rachel, and Laban did not like to disturb her either—a favourite wife and daughter must not be inconvenienced. She may sit still on the camel's furniture, but she hides the images there. Even thus you do not like to search in a certain quarter of your nature; it is a very tender subject—something you feel very grieved about when anybody even hints at it: it is just there that the sin is harboured. My brethren and sisters, let us be honest with the Lord. Let us really wish to know where we are wrong, and heartily long to be set right. Do you think we all honestly want to know our errors? Are there not chapters of the Bible which we do not like to read? If there are—if any text has a quarrel with you, quarrel with yourself; but yield wholly to the word of God. Is there any doctrine which you almost think is a truth, but your friends do not believe it, and they might, perhaps, think you heretical if you were to accept it, and therefore you dare not investigate any further? Oh, dear friends, let us be rid of all such dishonesty. So much of it has got into the Church that many will not see things that are plain as a pikestaff. They will not see, for truth might cost them too dear. They cover up and hide away some parts of Scripture which it might be awkward for them to understand, because of their connection with a church, or their standing in a certain circle. This is hateful, and we need not wonder if God smites the man who allows himself in it. Be true, brother! You cannot deceive God. Do not try it. Ask Him to search you through and through. Let your desire be, "Refining fire go through my heart with a mighty flame that shall devour everything like a lie, everything that is unholy, selfish, earthly, that I may be fully consecrated unto the Lord my God." This is the right way in which to treat our chastisements. "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more. That which I see not, teach Thou me."

"Alas," says somebody, "we cannot say that we will do no more iniquity." Yes, we can *say* it a great deal more easily than we can practise it, and therefore it is a pity to say it except in the evangelical spirit, leaning entirely on the divine strength. He who says, "I will do no more iniquity" has there and then perpetrated iniquity if he has vowed in his own strength, for he has exalted himself into the place of God by self-confidence. Yet we must feel in our inmost hearts that we desire to depart from all iniquities. There must be an earnest and hearty intent that, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire, so will we, as God helps us, shake off the sin, whatever it may be, which brings us the trial, or that causes the Lord to take away the light of His countenance from us. Oh, how earnestly would I urge my dear tried brothers and sisters to seek after this excellent fruit of affliction. May it come to every one of us according as the affliction comes, that we may never miss the sweet fruit of this bitter tree. God bless you who are tried, and support you under your griefs; but, above all, may He sanctify you through tribulation, for that is the main point, and it little matters how sharp the flames if you are purified by the fire.

II. And now, briefly I am going to use the text for THOSE OF US WHO MAY NOT HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED. What does the text say to us if we are not afflicted? Does it not say this—"If the afflicted man is to say 'I bear,' and to take up his yoke cheerfully, *how cheerfully ought you and I to take up the daily yoke of our Christian labour*?" Brother, sister, do you ever grow weary? Does the Sunday-school tax you too much? Is that Bible-class becoming somewhat a heaviness? That house-to-house visitation—has it become a drudgery? That distribution of tracts—is there a great sameness and tedium about it? Now look, my brother, look at yonder dear saint of God who has been for months upon his bed till the feathers have grown hard beneath him. He shifts from side to side but finds no ease—no sleep at night, no respite by day. Would you like to change places with him? Yet hear how he praises God amidst his many pains and abundant weaknesses, and poverty. Do you prefer your lot to his? Well, then, in the name of everything that is good, accept your portion with joy, and throw your soul into the Lord's service. The great Captain might say to you, "What! tired of marching! I will send you back to the trenches, and let you lie there till you feel sick at heart of your inactivity. What! weary of fighting! You shall be put into the hospital with broken bones and made to lie there and pine, and see what you think of enforced inactivity." If I have any message to give from my own bed of sickness it would be this—if you do not wish to be full of regrets when you are obliged to lie still, work while you can. If you desire to make a sick bed as soft as it can be, do not stuff it with the mournful reflection that you wasted time while you were in health and strength. People said to me years ago, "You will break your constitution down with preaching ten times a week," and the like. Well, if I have done so, I am glad of it. I would do the same again. If I had fifty constitutions I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. You young men that are strong, overcome the wicked one and fight for the Lord while you can. You will never regret having done all that lies in you for our blessed Lord and Master. Crowd as much as you can into every day, and postpone no work till to-morrow. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

We have yet another remark for those that are strong. *Should not the favours of God lead us to search*

out our sins? Chastisement acts like a black finger to point out our failures: ought not the love of God to do the same with its hand glittering with jewels? Lord, dost Thou give me good health? Lord, dost Thou spare my wife and my children to me? Dost Thou give me of substance enough and to spare? Then, Lord, is there anything about me that might grieve thee? Do I harbour anything in my soul that might vex Thy Spirit? Let Thy love guide me that I may escape from these evils. It is a sweet text—"I will guide thee with Mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." Your child only needs a glance of the eye, and he runs to you; but your horse and mule will not do that, you must put a bit into their mouths, and some of them must have very hard bits, and their mouths must be made very tender before they can be guided. You are men, do not be as the beasts are. Yet some of God's own children are very brutish. They will not obey His words, and so their God has to give them blows, for He will have His children obey Him: if they will be drawn with cords of love so they shall be, but if they will not, they shall be driven with the rod. If you make yourselves horses and mules He will treat you like horses and mules, or you will have reason to think so; perhaps the best way to prevent you becoming altogether mulish is to treat you as if you were a mule, and so drive you out of it, by letting you see the effect of your folly. Let our mercies act as a sweet medicine, and then we shall not need bitter potions.

Once again. Do you not think that while enjoying God's mercy we should be anxious to be searched by the light of the love of God? Should we not wish to use the light of the divine countenance that we may discover all our sin and overcome it. I know some Christians who will not come to this point. They have an ugly temper, and they say, "Well, you know, that is constitutional." Away for ever with such wicked self-excusing. It is idle to say, "I cannot help it, it is my temperament." Your temperament will destroy you, as surely as you live, if the grace of God does not destroy your temperament. If such excuses were permitted there is no crime, however abominable, for which temperament might not be pleaded. Thieves, harlots, drunkards, murderers might all set up this justification, for they all have their evil temperaments. Do you find in the law that any sin is excused upon the ground that it is "constitutional?" Do you find anything in the example of Christ, or in the precepts of the gospel, to justify a man in saying, "I must be treated with indulgence, for my nature is so inclined to a certain sin that I cannot help yielding to it?" My brother, you must not talk such nonsense. Your first business is to conquer the sin you love best; against it all your efforts, and all the grace you can get must be levelled. Jericho must be first besieged, for it is the strongest fort of the enemy, and until it is taken nothing can be done. I have generally noticed in conversion that the most complete change takes place in that very point which the man was constitutionally most weak. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. "Well," cries one, "suppose I have a besetting sin, how can I help it?" I reply, if I knew that four fellows were going to beset me to-night on Clapham Common, I should take with me sufficient policemen to lock the fellows up. When a man knows that he has a besetting sin it is not for him to say, "It is a besetting sin and I cannot help it"; he must, on the other hand, call for heavenly assistance against these besetments. If you have besetting sins, and you know it, fight with them, and overcome them by the blood of the Lamb. By faith in Jesus Christ, besetting sins go to be led captive, and they must be led captive, for the child of God must overcome even to the end. He is to be more than conqueror through Him that has loved him. Let the love of God, then, lead you to search yourselves and say, "That which I see not teach Thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

III. The last remark I have to make is to THE UNCONVERTED. Perhaps there are some here who are not the people of God, and yet they are very happy and prosperous. They have all that heart can wish, and as they hear me talk about God's children being chastened, they say, "I do not want to be one of them if such is their portion." You would rather be what you are, would you? "Yes," say you. Hearken! We will suppose that we have before us a prince of the blood who will one day be a king. He has been doing something wrong, and his father has chastened him with the rod. There stands the young prince with the tears running down his cheeks; and over yonder is a street arab, who has no father that he knows of—certainly none that ever chastened him for his good. He may do what he likes—use any sort of language—steal, lie, swear, if he likes, and no one will chasten him. He stands on his head, or makes wheels in the streets, or rolls in the dirt, but no father ever holds a rod over him. He sees this little prince crying, and he laughs at him, "You don't have the liberty I do. You are not allowed to stand on your head as I do. Your father wouldn't let you beg for coppers by the side of the omnibuses as I do. You don't sleep under an arch all night as I do. I would not be you to catch that thrashing! I would sooner be a street-boy than a prince!" Your little prince very soon wipes his eyes, and answers, "Go along with you. Why, I would rather be chastened every day and be a prince and heir to a kingdom, than I would be you with all your fine liberty!" He looks down upon the ragged urchin with the greatest conceivable pity,, even though he himself is smarting from the rod. Now, sinners, that is just what we think of you and your freedom from heavenly discipline. When you are merriest and happiest, and fullest of your joy, we would not be you for the world; when you have been electrified by that splendid spectacle at the theatre, or have enjoyed yourself so much in a licentious dance, or, perhaps, in something worse, we would not be as you are. Take us at our worst—when we are most sick, most desponding, most tried, most penitent before God, we would not exchange with you at your best. Would we change with you, for all your mirth and sinful hilarity? No, *that* we would not! Ask the old woman in the winter time, who has only a couple of sticks to make a fire with, and has nothing to live upon but what the tender mercy of the parish allows her, ask her if she would change with Dives in his purple and fine linen. Look at her. She puts on an old red cloak to shelter her poor limbs, which are as full of rheumatism as they can be; the cupboard is bare, her poor husband lies in the churchyard, and she has not a child to come and see her. Ah, there she is. You say, "She is a miserable object." Here is the young squire in his top-boots, coming home from the hunt. He is standing in front of her. He might say to her, with all his large possessions and broad acres, "You would change with me, mother, would you

not ?" She knows his character, and she knows that he has no love to God, and no union to Christ, and therefore she replies, "Change with you? no, that I would not, for a thousand worlds."

"Go you that boast of all your stores,
And tell how bright they shine;
Your heaps of glittering dust are yours,
But my Redeemer's mine."

I have yet another word for you that fear not God. I wish you would reflect for a moment what will become of you one of these days. God loves His dear children very much: He loves them so much that Jesus died to save them, and yet He does not spare them when they sin, but He chastens them with the rod of men. Now, if He does so with His children, what will He do with you who are His enemies? If judgment begins at the house of God—if when his anger does but gently smoke it is so hot—what will it be when the winds of justice fan it to a furious flame? As when the fire sets the forests of the mountains burning, or as when the vast prairie becomes one sheet of fire, so shall it be in that dread day when God shall launch out all His vengeance against the sins of the ungodly. I beseech you, think of this. He spared not His own Son, but put Him to a cruel death upon the tree for the sins of others: will He spare His enemies, think you, who have rebelled against Him, and rejected His mercy, when He visits them for their own personal sins? "Beware, ye that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you."

One only thought, for I must not send you away with that terrible warning and no gospel encouragement. Learn a lesson from the Lord's children. When His children are chastened they submit, and when they submit they obtain peace. Sinner, I pray you, learn wisdom; and if you have been troubled of late, if you have had trials from God, yield to Him. Old Master Quarles gives a quaint picture of a man who is striking at an enemy with a flail. The person assaulted runs right into the striker's arms, and so escapes the force of the stroke, and Quarles adds the remark, "The farther off the heavier the blow." Sinner, run in, run into God's bosom to-night. Say "I will arise and go unto my Father." God will not smite you if you come there. How can He? The Lord says, "Let him take hold of My strength." When that arm is lifted to scourge you, lay hold of it. Lay hold upon that arm of strength as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, for in Him God hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the people. Hang on the arm that else might smite you. Trust in the Lord, sinner, through Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice, and you shall find peace with Him. Ask Him with humble submission to put away the sin that has made you suffer, and has nearly cost you your soul. Pray Him to search you, and find out the sin. Repent and believe the gospel. Forsake evil and cling to the Saviour, the great Physician who heals the disease of sin, and you shall live. Come now to your Father's home. Those rags, that hungry belly, those swine and filthy troughs, those citizens that would not help you, that blandest of all citizens whose only kindness lay in degrading you lower than you were before—all these are sent to fetch you home. Believe it, soul, and say, "I will arise and go unto my Father, and will say unto Him, Father I have sinned"; and while you are yet saying it you shall have the kiss of His love, the embraces of His affection, the robe of His righteousness, and the fatted calf of spiritual food, and there shall be merriment concerning you, both on earth and in heaven. The Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

CONCEIT REBUKED

"Should it be according to thy mind?"—Job xxxiv. 33.

ELIHU thought that Job had spoken too boastfully, and that there was too much of self about him, and, therefore, he reproved him by asking this question, "Should it be according to thy mind?" It is a question which, in the original, has a great wealth of meaning in it; and as the language of the Book of Job is extremely ancient, and very sententious, it is not easy to get the fulness of Elihu's meaning. But it has been said that, upon the whole, our translation not only gives the meaning of his enquiry, but also more of the meaning that can be conveyed in any other words, so than we may be perfectly satisfied with it, and may pray God the Holy Spirit to apply it to us; and if we have grown to be high and mighty, and have begun to criticize the way of God in dealing with us, this question may come to us very sharply, "'Should it be according to thy mind?' Should everything be arranged just to suit thy whims and wishes? Should everything in the world be fashioned according to thy taste, and the whole globe revolve just to serve thy turn, and please thy fancy? 'Should it be according to thy mind?'"

There are four things I am going to say concerning our text; and first, I shall ask, *Are there really any people in the world who think that everything should be according to their mind?* Then, secondly, I shall enquire, *what leads them to that notion?* Thirdly, I shall try to show you *what a mercy it is that they cannot have everything according to their mind;* and then, fourthly, I shall urge you *to keep this evil spirit in check,* so that, henceforth, you will not wish that things should be according to your mind.

I. Our first question has a measure of astonishment about it. ARE THERE REALLY ANY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO WOULD HAVE EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO THEIR MIND? Oh, yes, there are such people! I should not wonder if there are some of them here now; in fact, I question whether we have not, all of us, at times, drunk very deeply into this naughty, haughty spirit. If we have done so, may we be speedily delivered from it!

First, *there are some people who would have God Himself according to their mind.* Now, as a matter of fact, all that I can know of God I must learn from God revealing Himself to me. I cannot discover Him

by myself; He must unveil Himself to me, and that He has done in Holy Scripture. All that He intends us to know about Himself He has revealed in the written Word and in the Incarnate Word, His ever-blessed Son. But there are some people who get their idea of God out of themselves. You may have heard of the German philosopher who evolved the idea of a camel out of his own consciousness; at least, so he said. I do not think it was much like a camel when he had evolved it; but there are many persons who try to evolve the idea of God out of their own consciousness. It cannot be, they say, that certain statements in the Bible are true, because there is something or other, in their inner consciousness, that contradicts the Scriptural declarations. God, as they believe in Him, is what they think He ought to be, not what He really is. And there are some, in these days, who have even gone so far as to reject the Old Testament altogether because its teaching concerning God does not meet the approval of their very marvellous minds. Practically, these people are idolaters, for an idolater is one who makes a god unto himself. The true worshipper of God—the accepted worshipper—is one who worships God as He is, and as He reveals Himself in His Word; but there are many persons, who make a god out of their own thoughts. The teachers of the modern school of theology work in a kind of god-factory. The people in some heathen lands make their gods out of mud, but these men make their gods out of their own thought, their imagination, their "intellect." That is what they call it, though I am not sure that it is that organ which is at work in this instance. But when a man makes a god of thought, he is just as much an idolater as if he had made a god of wood or of gold. The true God—the God of Scripture—thus revealed Himself to His ancient people, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This God is our God, "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," "the God of the whole earth shall He be called." Many a man refuses to accept this God as his; but I should like to ask him, "Should God be according to thy mind?" That would be a strange god indeed. Should He have no other attributes but such as thou wouldst give to Him? Should His character and conduct be only such as thou canst comprehend and justify? Must there be nothing in Him that shall puzzle thee? Are there to be no divine deeps that shall be beyond the reach of thy finite mind? Are there to be no heigths beyond thy power to soar? That is what seems to be thy notion; and if there is anything that staggers thee a little, thou sayest, "I cannot believe it." If it were possible, thou wouldst eliminate from the character of God everything that is stern and terrible; though these attributes clearly appertain to the Most High as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in Scripture. I beg you, dear friends, never to attempt to mould the character of God with the fingers of your own fancy. Worship Him just as He is, though thou canst not comprehend Him. Believe in Him as He reveals Himself, and never imagine that thou couldst, by making any change in Him, effect an improvement in Him. By toning down His justice thou thinkest that thou art increasing His love; and by denying His righteous vengeance, thou dost imagine that thou art honouring His goodness; but, instead of doing so, by the removal of these things which alarm and annoy thee,—if thou couldst do so,—thou wouldst take away part of God's grandeur and strength which make His goodness and His mercy to shine so brightly as they now do. Leave God just as He is, remembering how He has said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." The infinite God must be past finding out by the creatures whom He hath made. I confess that it is one of my greatest joys to find myself completely baffled when I am trying to comprehend the character of God. Sometimes, when I have tried to preach upon the Deity of Christ, I have been fairly staggered under the burden of that stupendous truth, and I have felt the utter uselessness and poverty of human language to describe our great and terrible yet loving Lord; and I have been glad to have it so; for, verily, God is altogether above our comprehension, and none of us can speak of Him as He deserves to be spoken of; but never let us try in any way to diminish His glorious perfections.

A more common way of offending against God, and setting up our self-will, is *by quarrelling with His providential dealings*. If anyone here is doing so, let me ask, "Should it be according to thy mind?" You look, sometimes, upon the arrangements of providence on a great scale in reference to the nations of the earth,—you see them at war with one another and you note how slow is the progress of civil and religious liberty, and how few there are to rally in defence of right principles. Sometimes, you get greatly distressed about the general state of affairs, and you wish you could alter it; but the Lord looks down from His eternal throne, and He seems to say to you, "Should it be according to thy mind?" The world was wisely ordered by God before we were born, and it will be equally well ordered by Him after we are dead. When Alexander Peden, the Covenanter, was dying, he sent for one of his brethren, a fellow-minister of the Word,—James Renwick; and he bade him stand out in the room, and turn his back to his departing friend. When he had done so, Peden said to him, "I have looked at thee, and I perceive that thou art only a little man, and thou hast but feeble shoulders and weak legs." "Yes," replied Renwick, "that is true, but wherefore hast thou made that observation?" "Because," said Peden, "I perceive that thou canst not, after all, carry the whole world upon thy back; thou art not made for any such work as that"; and I may say of all of us who are here that we were not made to carry the world on our backs. Yet some of us attempt to play the part of Atlas, and not only try to carry the world, but seek to set the Church right as well. We fancy that we can do that, poor worms that we are, but the Lord knows that we can do nothing of the kind. "He remembereth that we are dust," though we are apt to forget it ourselves. Well, beloved, after all, "should it be according to thy mind?" Wilt thou, like Jonah, sit pining, and mourning, and complaining? Does not the Eternal Ruler understand the politics of nations, and the best way of governing the world, infinitely better than thou dost? Do not thou attempt to drive the horses of the sun; thy puny hands are unfit for so tremendous a task as that. Leave all things with God; they are ordered well so long as they are ordered by Him.

Probably, however, it is with the minor providences that we more often quarrel when we are in an ill state of heart. You think that you would like to be rich, yet you are poor. "Should it be

according to thy mind?" You would have liked to be healthy and strong, but you are weak and sickly, or you have a suffering limb that troubles you, and you sometimes think, "Mine is a very hard lot; I wish it could be altered." "Should it be according to thy mind?" Should the fashioning of thyself and thy circumstances have been left to thee? What thinkest thou? Possibly, you have recently sustained a great loss in business, and you cannot quite get over it. "Should it be according to thy mind?" Should providential circumstances have been arranged otherwise so as to suit thee? Should God have stopped the great machinery of the universe, and put it out of gear in order to prevent thee from losing a few pounds? "Should it be according to thy mind?"

Perhaps it is worse than that; a dear child has been taken away just when he had become most closely entwined around thy heart. Thou wouldst fain have kept him with thee; but was it right that he should go, or right that he should stay? Come now, there is a difference of opinion between thee and God, who is in the right? Should it be according to His mind, or according to thy mind? "Ah!" says someone else, "it is the mainstay of the home who has been taken away from us,—the husband, the father of the family." Well, though it is so, again I ask, concerning this bereavement, or any other trial that comes to you, "Should it be according to thy mind?" It should be sufficient for you to know that the Lord has permitted it, or actually performed it.

Should it be according to thy mind, or according to His mind? It is not easy, I know, to submit without murmuring to all that happens to us. I am probably touching very tender places in many who, at divers times and seasons, have really felt that God, in His providential dealings with them, had been unkind to them, or that, at least, He had been showing His kindness in a very strange way.

There are some, who carry this difference between them and God into another sphere; for *they do not approve of the gospel as it is taught in the Bible.* You know that the gospel, as revealed in the New Testament, is so simple that a child can understand it; and you may go and teach it to the poorest and the most illiterate, and many of them will leap at it, and grasp it at once. But there are others who think that it should be something which is much more difficult to understand, something which would need a higher order of intellect than the common people possess. Do you really think so, my dear sir? Should it be according to thy mind?" Wouldst thou shut out the poor, and the needy, and the illiterate, from the privileges of the gospel, and keep them to thyself, and to a few others who have been highly educated? Surely not. O brethren, if it were possible for us to preach a gospel that we had made obscure, or which could only be comprehended by the *élite* of society, we should soon have cause sadly to deplore before God that we had lost that simple, blessed, plain way of instruction which the wayfaring man, though a fool, can understand, and in which he need not err.

Many try to trim down the doctrines of grace. They would get rid of election if they could. Anything like the speciality of the atonement of Christ they cannot bear. The sweet and blessed doctrine of effectual calling they abhor, and they would fain make a gospel of their own. But should they want to do so? Is it not your duty and mine, brother, rather to try to find out what the gospel really is than to seek to make it what we consider it ought to be? "Should it be according to thy mind?" We have known some people take a text of Scripture, and because it did not square with the system in which they were brought up, they tried to cut it down to make it fit in with their notions; but, sirs, is not the gospel grander than any of our comprehensions of it? Are there not in it great truths that cannot be cut down to fit any system that the human mind can make? And ought we not to be thoroughly glad that it is so? For, surely, it is better that the gospel should be according to God's mind than that it should be according to the mind of Toplady, or the mind of Wesley, or the mind of Calvin, or the mind of Arminius? The mind of God is greater than all the minds of men, so let all men leave the gospel just as God has delivered it unto us.

Sometimes, this difference comes up *concerning the Church of Christ.* Some people do not like God's order of church-membership and church-government; they would like to see the world welcomed inside the Church. They do not approve of the ordinances as they were instituted and observed by our Lord Jesus Christ; believers' baptism is peculiarly objectionable to them. Sometimes, they disapprove of God's ministers; they pick holes in the most useful of them; this man ought to be so-and-so, and that other man ought to be something else. I can only ask again, with regard to the whole matter, "Should it be according to thy mind?" Are you to make the ministers, and to teach them what they are to preach? Are they your servants or God's servants, and are they to deliver their message in your way or in God's way? Let the question be honestly considered, and then, perhaps, much of the murmuring that is sometimes heard, and much of the discord that often arises among professing Christians would be cleared away. For, surely, these things should not be according to our mind; but we should let God appoint, and equip, and send forth His own servants just as He pleases, and not as we please. Christ must decide everything concerning His own Church; He must be free to choose whom He likes to be members of it, and to fashion His Church after His own model.

II. Now, secondly, we are to enquire—WHAT LEADS PEOPLE TO THINK THAT EVERYTHING SHOULD BE ACCORDING TO THEIR MIND?

My answer is, first, that *there is a great deal of self-importance in such a notion.* There are some people who seem to fancy that they are the centre of the whole universe. The times are always bad if they do not prosper. If the earth does not so revolve as to bring grist to their mill, then the times must be out of joint. But who are you, dear friend, that you should suppose that for you suns rise and set, that for you seasons change, and that God is to have respect to you, and to nobody else? "Should it be according to thy mind?" Then, if so, why not according to my mind also? And why not according to the mind of another brother? And why not according to the mind of yet another? But no, it is according to thy mind that thou wouldst have it. Ah, does not this show that overweening importance we attach to ourselves? We are mere ephemera, creeping insects upon the bay-leaf of existence,—here to-day, and gone to-morrow,—yet we suppose that all things are to be ordered for our special benefit, and we quarrel with God if we suffer even a little inconvenience.

This notion also arises from *self-conceit.* We really seem to fancy that we could arrange things much better than they now are; we would not dare plainly to say so, much less would we be willing to write it; but we talk and feel as if it were really so. If we only had had the ordering of things, we are quite sure that they would not have happened as they have done; but then, depend upon it, they would have happened wrongly if they had been other than they have been. "Should it be according to thy mind?" No; unless thou art self-conceited enough to put thy folly in comparison with the wisdom of God, thou knowest that it should not be according to thy mind.

Then there is *the spirit of murmuring* that so easily comes upon us; we have known some who really became slaves to that evil spirit. They complained of everything, nothing was right in their eyes; it was not possible, it seemed, even for God Himself to please them. "Should it be according to thy mind?" How would it be possible to please one who is so changeable, so whimsical, so fanciful, as thou art? Poor simpleton; surely thou canst not think that such a thing should be.

But, oftentimes, this quarrel arises from *want of faith in God.* If we did but believe in Him, we should see that all things are ordered well. If we did but trust in God as a loving child trusts in its father, we should feel safe enough at all times, and we should not want to have anything different from what it is. Have you never heard of the woman, who was in a great storm at sea, and terribly frightened? She saw her husband, who was the captain of the ship, perfectly composed even while the vessel was tossed about by the mighty billows, but he could not calm her troubled heart. So he drew a sword from its scabbard, and held it close to her breast. As he did so, he said to her, "Do you not tremble, my wife?" "No," she replied, "I am not in the least afraid." "But this sword is close to you." "I am not afraid of that," said she, "because it is in my husband's hand." "Well," said he, "is it not even so with this storm? Is it not in the hand of God; and if it be in His hand, why should we be alarmed?" So, if we have true faith in God, we shall accept whatever God sends us, and we shall not want to have things arranged according to our mind, but we shall quite agree with what His mind ordains.

So would it be, too, if you had *more love to God,* for love always agrees with that which its object delights in. So, dear friends, when we come to love God with a perfect heart, we are glad for God to have His way with us. If He wills that we should be sick, we would not wish to be otherwise. If He wills that we should be poor, we are willing to be poor; and if He wills that we should pass through a sea of trial, we would not wish to have a drop less than His blessed will appoints.

III. But now, thirdly, WHAT A MERCY IT IS THAT THINGS ARE NOT ACCORDING TO OUR MIND! If they were, I wonder what sort of world we should live in.

If things were according to our mind, *God's glory would be obscured.* He knows what will best glorify Him, and He has been pleased to so arrange His providential dealings with men that all shall glorify Him to the highest possible degree. And, beloved, if we were to alter anything of this, if we could alter anything, it is evident that the glory of God would not be so well promoted; so, "should it be according to thy mind" that God should lose a measure of the glory that is due unto His name? God forbid!

If it were according to our mind, *others would often have to suffer.* At any rate, if things were arranged according to the mind of some people, they would grind the poor in the dust, and utterly crush them. If things were settled according to the mind of man, we should often be in a terrible plight. Did not David say to God, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man"? When God is most grieved with His people, He never deals with them in so harsh a manner as the ungodly would deal with them if they had them in their power. Let us trust in the Lord, my brethren, and thank Him that He does not allow things to be according to the mind of man, for it would be terrible indeed for us then.

Here is another reflection. If things were according to our mind, *we should have an awful responsibility resting upon us,* because we should feel that, if anything went amiss, we should be the cause of it. If we had the choosing of our circumstances, and the details of all that happened to us, we should straightway feel that we should be called to account for everything by our fellow-men and by our own conscience. But now that it is according to the mind of God, you have no responsibility concerning it. If it be according to His will, it must be that which is right, and that which is best; so let us bless His name that all things are left at His disposal.

If things were according to our mind, I am afraid *our temptations would soon be greatly increased;* for many who are poor would speedily become rich, and they do not know what the temptation of riches might be, nor the grace they would need to resist it. And some, who are sick now, and are praising God upon their sick-beds, if they were well, might find much of their spirituality departing, and they might be thrown into a thousand troubles which they now escape in the quiet of their own room. Some of you are in a condition of life where you may not have many comforts; but, on the other hand, you are not subject to those trials which come to us who are prominent in public life. Be sure that you are in your right place if God put you there. "Should it be according to thy mind?" If so, thou wouldst have more temptations, and less grace;—more of the world, but less of thy Lord. So, thank Him that it is not according to thy mind.

If it were according to our mind, *we should seldom know our own mind.* If a man could manage everything as he liked, he would not long like his own management. Unrenewed men, especially, are never satisfied. The way for a man to be happy is not to have his own will, but to sink his will in the will of God. Look at Solomon when he had his own way. At one time, he gave all his thoughts to grand buildings; and when he had built his palaces, he got quite tired, so he took to making gardens, and aqueducts, and fountains of water. When he had made them, he did not get much satisfaction out of them, so he gat him instruments of music, and singing men and singing women, but he was soon tired of them. Then he took to study, but he said, "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." He had whatever he chose to have, yet it was all vanity and vexation of spirit to him; and he never had what filled his

soul till he came to rest alone in his God, which, we trust, he did in his old age. I do not know a more horrible endowment that a man could have than for God to say to him, "Everything shall be as you like to have it." He would probably be the most miserable and most dissatisfied person under heaven. "Should it be according to thy mind?" Ah, then, sin would go uncorrected in thee, for thou wouldst never have a mind to use the rod! Then thy dross would remain, for thou wouldst never have a mind to be put into the furnace. Should all things go with thee according to thine own will, then thy flesh would get the mastery over thee, and be pampered and indulged; thou wouldst be settled on thy lees, and not emptied from vessel to vessel, and thou wouldst bring upon thyself unutterable woe. O beloved, for this reason also it is a thousand mercies that things are not arranged according to the mind of even the best saint out of heaven except when his mind is brought into full subjection to the will of God.

"Should it be according to thy mind?" Then *there would be universal strife.* If this were the case, think what a terrible condition the Church of God, and the world, too, would soon be brought into, because, as I have already hinted, if it were according to your mind, why should it not be according to my mind, or according to the mind of every other body? Then, what chaos, what confusion there would be! How would the world be managed if you, and I, and fifty others, each one with a different mind from all the rest, must have it according to our minds? It would mean that the King of heaven must resign His throne, and give place to universal anarchy. It could not be; it would be impossible that such an arrangement should continue for an hour. We should have to go, in tears, before the Lord, and cry to Him, "O Lord, come back, and reign over us, for we cannot get on without Thee! Everything is going to destruction for want of an Almighty will to manage it." "Should it be according to thy mind?" No, Lord; never let it be so except when Thou hast made my mind to be filled with Thy mind, and then it shall be well. "I always have my way," said a holy man. "How is that?" asked one who heard him, and the good man replied, "Because God's way is my way." "I always have my will," said another, and he gave a similar explanation, "because it is my will that God should have His will." When God's will gets to be your will, then it may be according to your mind; but not till then, thank God, not till then.

IV. So now, in the last place, dear friends, I am going to say to you, let us try, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, to CHECK THAT SPIRIT WHICH LEADS MEN TO THINK THAT ALL THINGS SHOULD BE ACCORDING TO THEIR MIND.

First, *because it is impracticable.* As I have already shown you, it is quite impossible that all things should be according to the mind of men so long as their mind is in its natural carnal state.

Again, *it is unreasonable* that it should be so. In a well-ordered house, whose will ought to be supreme? Should it not be the father's? Do you expect everything in your home to be ordered according to the will of your little boy? No, you know that you take a comprehensive view of all who are in the house, and all their concerns, and you are better able to judge than he is what is right. It would be very unreasonable for your child to say, "Everything is to be managed according to my will." If he were to talk like that, you would soon teach him better, I warrant you; and it is unreasonable to imagine that the Lord should make your will to be the rule of His dispensations. Do not cultivate a spirit which you cannot justify by any sensible and reasonable arguments.

In the next place, *it is un-Christlike.* "Should it be according to thy mind?" Why, if ever there was a Son of the great Father, according to whose mind things should be, it was our blessed Lord Jesus Christ; yet what did He say? "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." And as Jesus said, "Not as I will," is there one among us who shall dare to say, "Let it be as I will"? Will you not join your Elder Brother in that sweet resignation of all desire to be the ruler, in order that the great Father, who filleth all things, may have His way? If you wish to have all things according to your mind, you are not like Christ; for in all things He did the Father's will, and suffered the Father's will, too, and rejoiced in it. Let us pray the Holy Spirit to help us to do the same.

Once more, if we desire to have our own mind, *it is atheistic;* for a god without a controlling mind is no god, and a god, whose will was not carried out, would be no god. If you were to have your way in all things, you would be taking the place of God; do you not tremble at the very thought of it? His throne ill beseems you. Would you—

> "Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,
> Rejudge His judgments, be the God of God"?

If you are truly converted, you shudder at the bare mention of such a thing as that. Yet, dear sister, was not that the spirit in which you came into this house? Did you not feel, "The Lord has dealt very hardly with me; I can scarcely be reconciled to Him"? Oh, drop that rebellious spirit! Thou art but a poor, helpless creature, and He is God over all. Let His supreme will sweetly rule thy heart at this hour; and labour to get rid of that waywardness and that revolting from the Most High. I knew one, who was in mourning many, many years for a child; and a good Quaker said to her, "Friend, hast thou not forgiven God yet?" There are some to whom we might put the same question; and we have heard of some, who professed to be Christians, who, when they met with a very terrible reverse, said they never should understand it,—meaning really that they should never acquiesce in the divine will about that loss. It must not be so with us. Whenever a child falls out with his father, the best thing he can do is to fall in again; for a sullen child, who is angry with his father, will have to come round if he has a wise father. The father will say to him, "My dear boy, there is one of us who must alter before we can be perfectly agreed; and I cannot, for I know I am in the right. It is you who must alter, and come round to my way of thinking." And if you have fallen out with God by wilfulness and stubbornness, He cannot come round to you, but you will have to come back to Him. So yield to Him at once; bow down before Him,—your own Father in heaven, who loves you infinitely. Do you mean to say that you will keep up the quarrel with Him? You began the dispute, and you know that you are in the wrong, and that He is right; so say, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." Or if you cannot say as much as that, at least do what Aaron did in his great bereavement, "Aaron held his peace," or what David did when he said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it."

Oh, for that blessed silence which springs from acquiescence in the divine will!

I should like you to go further than that, however, and even to praise and bless the Lord for poverty, and pain, and bereavement. In heaven among the sweetest notes of your song, will be those you sing over your trials here below. There was one who lost his eyesight, but he always praised God for that, for he said that he never saw till he was blind. I have heard of another, who had lost a leg, and he said that he never stood on the Rock of Ages till he had that leg amputated. We, who are branches of the true Vine, will have more of Christ's sharp pruning-knife than of anything else; but let us praise and bless God for it, and henceforth labour, by the Spirit's power, to chase out of our soul the idea that things should be according to our mind. Get away to thy room, and confess thy wilfulness and pride, dear brother, if thou hast fallen into that sad state. Ask the Lord to make thy soul even as a weaned child,—

> "Pleased with all the Lord provides,
> Weaned from all the world besides."

I know that I have been speaking to some who do not love the Lord. I wonder what it is that keeps them where they now are,—out of Christ. You want something to be altered, you say. Well, ask the Lord to alter you, for that is the alteration that is needed. The plan of salvation does not quite suit you. Well, there will never be another. Does not Jesus Christ please you? God will never lay another foundation for a sinner to build his hopes upon, so you had better be pleased with God's way, and build upon Christ Jesus, the sure foundation stone. We tell people, sometimes, that they had better not fall out with their living; and I can tell you, soul, that you had better not fall out with your salvation. God's way of saving you is the best conceivable way, and it is also the only way. He says that whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. May the Eternal Spirit bring you now to believe in the Lord Jesus; and if you do so believe, you shall be saved at once. But do not think that the plan of salvation will be altered to please you. It will not be made according to your mind. There is the gospel; have it or leave it, but alter it you cannot. May the Lord grant that you may accept it, and rejoice in it, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

THE MAGNANIMITY OF GOD

"Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: He is mighty in strength and wisdom" (or, in strength of heart).—Job xxxvi. 5.

WE cannot wonder that, in the extreme bitterness of his soul, Job was driven to utter some expressions which he would not afterwards have attempted to justify. Among the rest Job had thought and almost said that God had despised him. In the tenth chapter, at the third verse, he appealed to Him thus: "Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldest oppress, that Thou shouldest despise the work of Thine hands?" Elihu, in his zeal to vindicate the righteousness of his Maker, fixes his mind, as I think, upon that expression of Job, and meets it with a positive denial, proving his point from the might and the great-heartedness of the Lord. He had promised to fetch his argument from afar, and therefore he does not argue against God's despising any from His mercy or goodness, nor give us a commonplace reason for his assertion, such as would easily have suggested itself even to the thoughtless, but he grounds his declaration that God despises no one, and consequently not Job, upon the fact of God's being mighty. "Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any; He is mighty in strength of heart." That form of argument would not have naturally occurred to you or to me; we might even have been inclined to argue the other way and say—He is so mighty that He cannot be expected to consider such feeble things as His creatures, but He despises them all; and it is therefore little wonderful that He should despise Job among the rest. Elihu, with far better judgment than the most of us possess, draws quite the opposite inference, and declares that because God is mighty therefore He despises not any.

Facts are convincing arguments, and if you carefully observe you will see that usually those persons who despise others are weak, and if weak nowhere else, are weak in understanding. Those little men who are dressed in brief authority are often harsh and tyrannical, but the truly great are courteous, tender, and considerate. The strong have no reason to be suspicious and jealous, and therefore they are free from envy; they are void of fear of the power of others, and therefore they become anxious that their own power should not be oppressive to the weak ones around them. They become considerate of others because this furnishes a fit sphere for the use of their strength. Yon man, who is only strong in appearance, and is really feeble, despises others because he dreads them, and knowing how much he deserves to be despised himself, he pretends to look down upon his neighbours. It is your half-educated man who sneers; it is your pretender to gentility who gives himself airs. Wherever anything is mere pretence, it endeavours to shield itself from criticism by casting sarcasms upon its rivals. It is said of the Pharisees that they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and despised others: had they been truly righteous they would not have despised others, but because they had a mere veneer of religion, a superficial varnish or gilding of righteousness, or something that looked like righteousness, they affected to look down with supreme scorn upon all who did not make the same show as themselves. God is so great in all things that He despises none: He has no rivals, and has no need to sustain Himself by lowering the good name of others. He is supremely real, so true and thorough, that in Him there can never be so much as the thought of despising any in order to guard Himself. His power is not soon

aroused to war, because it has no opposition to fear; His might is associated with gentleness, and fury is not in Him, because it is such great might that when it is once in action it devours His adversaries as flame consumes the stubble. God is too great to be contemptuous, too mighty to be haughty.

Note, too, that mere brute force may despise the weak, but the might here ascribed to the Lord is of a higher order. His might is seen not only in that power which rocks the solid world with earthquakes and shakes the heavens with tempests, but in that nobler form of might which reveals itself in wisdom and nobleness of mind. The power of His arm is equalled by the greatness of His spirit. His might lies in His heart,—in His understanding and in His love; He is mighty in spiritual things, in sublimity of thought, grandeur of motive, nobleness of spirit, and loftiness of aim. When you perceive the exaltation of the divine mind and the sublimity of the divine character, you perceive the reason why the Lord does not despise any. To put my meaning into one cumbrous but expressive word, it is the magnanimity of God which prevents His despising any. The sun is so glorious that it refuses not to shine upon a dunghill, the rain is so plenteous that it declines not to drop into the tiny flower-cup, the sea is so vast that it does not hesitate to waft a feather, and God is so mighty that He rejects not the praises of babes and sucklings. If God were little, He might despise the little; if He were weak He would disdain the weak; if He were untrue He would be supercilious to those about Him; but, seeing He is none of these, but is God over all blessed for ever, the only wise God, we have to deal with One who, though He be high, hath respect unto the lowly; who, though He humbleth Himself even to observe the things which are done in heaven, yet despiseth not the cry of the humble. The magnanimity of God is the reason why He despiseth not any.

By the aid of the Holy Spirit we will this morning first dwell upon *the doctrine*, and then consider *its practical uses*.

I. First, I want you reverently to consider THE DOCTRINE that God is mighty, and therefore despiseth not any.

Begin at the beginning: *the Lord is mighty*—that is to say, God is so strong that power immeasurable and inconceiveable belongeth unto Him. "God hath spoken once: twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God." All that God has already done proves His power, but we cannot even from His greatest works guess at what He is yet able to do. "Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? the thunder of His power who can understand?" Since there is no bound to His power, and it would be sinful to attempt to limit the Holy One of Israel, we are free to believe that the Lord could work on even a more stupendous scale than He has done if so it pleased Him. Search as long as you will, and by His help obtain as clear a discovery of divine power as was ever given to mortal mind, but recollect that He is past finding out, and that even if you saw Him stand and measure the earth, and drive asunder the nations, and cause the everlasting mountains to be scattered, and the perpetual hills to bow, you would yet have to say with Habakkuk, "There was the hiding of His power."

With the Lord nothing is impossible. Learn somewhat of His power from the following facts. First, all the power there is in the universe came from God at first, comes from Him still, and at His bidding would in a single moment cease. Whatever of force there is in inanimate nature it is but God at work, He set the wheel of nature in motion, and at His bidding it would cease to turn. Whatever mental faculty there may be in cherub or seraph, angel or man, it is but an emanation from His creative energy, a ray from His eternal sun, which would cease if He retrained His might. If Jehovah willed it, yonder enormous orbs, which now revolve in order around the central sphere, would rush in wild confusion to inevitable destruction. The law of gravitation, which holds all things in their places, would be broken in an instant if He withdrew the force which makes the law a power; there would be no coherence among atoms, nay, the atoms themselves would dissolve into non-existence and leave one vast sepulchre, one universal void. Herein is power so great that we cry with Nehemiah, "Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and Thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth Thee."

The great God can do all things without help. He needs no assistance from any created thing; indeed, there could be no such aid, since all the power of all other beings is derived from Himself alone. Creatures do not contribute to His strength, they only manifest Him, revealing the power which they have first of all borrowed from Him. To achieve any purpose of His heart He asketh none to be His ally, for alone He doeth as He wills. What is more, He could with equal ease accomplish all His purposes if all created intelligences and forces were against Him. It would make no difference to His supremacy of might though all the tremendous powers which have now been created should revolt; He that sitteth in the heavens would have them in derision. Even powers which set up their standard against Him are beneath His control: His enemies are His footstool, out of their rage He bringeth His peaceful purposes; "He maketh the wrath of men to praise Him, and the remainder thereof He doth restrain." Note well that when God hath done all that He pleaseth He hath not spent His strength. "He fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of His understanding." He watcheth always, but He never wearies so as to need to slumber: He worketh ever, but He never pauseth to take rest because of any lassitude or exhaustion; when He hath done all that He hath purposed to do He remains as ready to work as before; when He hath, according to our notions, gone to the utmost of His potency, He is but at the beginning. These are the skirts of His garments, but His full glory is not seen. I tremble while I speak upon that of which I know so little, but assuredly God is mighty in the most emphatic sense that can be conceived by the most enlarged intellect, yea, and far beyond all that hath entered into the heart of man.

The text also tells us that He is "mighty in strength and in wisdom," so that we have to consider that *God is powerful in mind*. "There is no searching of His understanding." He not only possesses physical might, by which He creates, preserves, or destroys, but the higher power of understanding, for "He is wonderful in counsel." "Great is our Lord and of great power: His understanding is infinite."

It is difficult to find words to express my meaning, for God is a Spirit, but as far as He may reverently be spoken of as possessing a mind and intellect, He is as omnipotent in that sphere as in the physical world. This is the security of His creatures, that He is a great-minded God. He who has great power of hand is to be dreaded, unless He has corresponding greatness of soul. It is calamity when the ruler of an empire cannot rule His own spirit. The world has shuddered at Neros and Domitians and Caligulas, who were so weak in character that they broke every law of morality and humanity, and yet had the destinies of nations under their control. Look at the conformation of the heads of those monsters, and they strike you as resembling both prizefighters and idiots, or a combination of the two ; and one's blood chills at hearing that such beings were once masters of the Roman world. Happy is it for a nation when the master of its legions is of capacious mind and generous spirit, strong in self-restraint, and irresistible in the force of virtue. In the highest degree we have this in "the Blessed and Only Potentate." God hath great thoughts, great designs, great wisdom, great goodness.

He is mighty in all respects, and especially in the restraint which He puts upon His wrath. If you wish to see this, look at the forbearance and long-suffering which He manifests towards the disobedient. How matchless is His patience ! How enduring His mercy ! The wicked provoke Him, and He feels the provocation, but yet He does not smite. Week after week they still insult Him, they even touch the apple of His eye by persecuting His people, but still He lets the lifted thunder drop, and gives space for repentance. He sends them messages of mercy, He implores them to turn from the error of their ways ; but they harden their hearts, they blaspheme Him, they take His holy name in vain. Still, by the space of many years He bears with their incessant rebellions, and though He is grieved with the hardness of their hearts, He keepeth back His indignation. This patience is shown, not here and there to one of our race, but to myriads of the human family, and not for one generation only, but from generation after generation still doth His good Spirit strive, still doth He stretch out His hands all the day long even to the disobedient and to the gainsayers. Not willing that any should perish, He waiteth long and patiently, because He delighteth in mercy.

Equally wonderful, I think, is the power which God hath over His own mind in the ultimate pardoning of many of these transgressors. It is marvellous that He should be able to forgive any, and so perfectly to forgive. It often happeneth to us that we feel compelled to say when greatly offended, "I can forgive you, but I fear I shall never forget the wrong." God goeth far beyond this, for He casteth all our sins behind His back, and He declares that He will not remember them against us any more for ever. What, never ! Such deep offences ; such heinous crimes ! Such provoking transgressions ! Shall they never be remembered ? What, not even remembered ? Shall there not be at least a frown, or a degree of coolness on account of them ? No. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." It shows the great-mindedness of God that He should be able to act thus, and to act thus towards the very chief of sinners. "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage ? He retaineth not His anger for ever because He delighteth in mercy."

Let me add that when He does not forgive, but when persistent impenitence demands the final doom, God is great-souled even in the punishment of the wicked. He takes no pleasure in the sinner's death ; judgment is His strange work. Punishment is never inflicted as a matter of arbitrary sovereignty, but always because demanded by justice. The Lord in vindicating His justice deals not with the poor and the obscure alone, but with the great ones of the earth, plucking down from their high places emperors and kings, red-handed with human carnage, and casting them down to hell. Nor does He on the other hand exercise exceptional severity on the great blasphemer, but He deals with the baser sort also, and does not spare the braggart of the streets who profanes His name. Calmly and impartially doth God deal out justice, "for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." His sentence is so just that none shall be able to gainsay it. Thus He proves the greatness of His mind, for when He does condemn and punish it is never in passion, never in haste, never without exact weighing of evidence. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ? "Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." Our God, then, is mighty of heart.

Now, the pith of the doctrine lies here, that *because of His might God despiseth not any*. The proof is very manifest. God is so great and mighty that all things must be little to Him. There can be nothing great to the infinite God. There are worlds so ponderous that human reckoning cannot estimate their size, there are worlds so numerous that we have to leave them uncounted, yet separately or apart, or taken altogether in their constellations, all these must be as a drop of a bucket to Him. Since, then, all things must be little, it cometh to pass that nothing is therefore more than little, and nothing falleth much more below the level of His greatness than other things which we are wont to think much of. If the divine observation and care is to extend to creatures at all, then it must be exercised upon insignificance and weakness, since, compared with Himself, there is nothing else. If you desire proof that the Lord considereth the lesser things, look at creation. The great and mighty God has displayed His greatness as much in the tiny objects which He has made as in the magnificent worlds which He has fashioned. Myriads of creatures disport themselves in a single drop of stagnant water, and yet in each one of these omnipotence is manifested. The bodies of those minute beings display in every part amazing skill and admirable design. Their very minuteness increases our wonder, and compels us to feel the mightiness of the divine Creator. For each of these infusorial creatures, so small as only to be observed beneath a strong microscope, God findeth fitting food, and puts life-force into each part of its organization, so that it can exist, and grow, and mature, and enjoy life, and transmit it to its successor. He seeth to everything that concerneth a gnat or a fly ; and as surely as He watches over seraphim and cherubim He guardeth the worm of the earth and the minnow of the brook. God has created tiny things, not as a freak or an experiment, nor as the sport of His leisure, but in sober earnest He has evidently put forth as much of His mind in the formation of the minute as in the fashioning of the

immense; and if He has done so, let us not question but that He will deal tenderly with the poor and needy among men, and He will despise none that seek unto Him in sincerity of heart. He who takes care of gnats and flies will hear the prayer of humble hearts, and will not refuse to regard the ignorant and the obscure. Jesus, His Son, was meek and lowly in heart, and suffered the little children to come unto Him, and therefore we who are least among men shall not be despised.

The same respect to the minor things is observable in providence. The providence of God doth not only concern wars between mighty empires, and the discussions of cabinets and royal councils, but it comprehends within its rule everything that transpires. The blooming of each one of the millions of daisies in the meadows is arranged by eternal purpose and the croaking of a frog in the marsh, or the falling of a leaf from an oak in the forest is part of the plan of eternal wisdom. The migration of each swallow is as much arranged as the voyage of Columbus, and the breaking of a fowler's net is as surely ordained as the emancipation of a nation. God is in all things; not a sparrow lighteth to the ground without your Father, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered. A might which encompasses these little things, and condescends to make them a part of His eternal purpose, most evidently proves that the Lord cannot be suspected of despising any.

One telling argument to prove that the magnanimity of God despiseth none is found in the fact that He hath regarded man. David thought thus when he surveyed "the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which He had ordained," for he exclaimed, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" Man is neither the greatest, the strongest, nor the swiftest amongst animals. Lions outmatch him in force, horses in swiftness, eagles in power to soar, and fish in ability to dive. Leviathan far surpasses him in bulk, and behemoth exceeds him in the strength of his loins. Man is apparently a feeble creature, and more likely to be the prey of beasts than their destroyer. Look at him in his naked weakness, and what a defenceless, unprotected creature he appears, and yet he is monarch of the world. As David said: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." That God should consider man is an instance of that great-mindedness which does not look at bulk and strength, but abounds in condescension.

This is more clear, too, when you think of what sort of men God has most of all favoured. Who are His chosen? Remember that the most intimate love of God has seldom fallen to the lot of the great ones of this earth. "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath full often chosen the poor of this world."

> "When the Eternal bows the skies
> To visit earthly things,
> With scorn divine He turns His eyes
> From towers of haughty kings.
>
> "He bids His awful chariot roll
> Far downward from the skies,
> To visit every humble soul,
> With pleasure in His eyes."

What saith Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians? "Things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." He despiseth not any, we are sure, for when He ordained fathers in His church, and set twelve leaders in the apostleship, He chose to this office neither philosphers, nor senators, nor kings, but lowly fishermen: and from that day to this it hath been His wont to do His mightiest actions for His people by those who have been least esteemed among the sons of men, for He is so mighty that He despiseth not any.

Brethren, you know, some of you, another sweet proof that He doth not despise any, for you can say in the language of David, in the twenty-second Psalm, "He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard." You have some of you been in very deep waters through bodily pain, bereavement, poverty, or persecution, and you have found lovers and friends forsake you, for you have been but poor company for their merry-makings; but God hath not forsaken you, He hath been very near unto you in the time of your distress, and thus hath He proved that He despiseth not any. To this man also hath He looked, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at His word.

I need not stay to prove this further, for all history declares that God hath no esteem for human greatness, that He hath no flattery for human excellence; but that, on the contrary, He layeth the axe at the root of the tall and the green trees, and bringeth them down even to the ground; but as for those that are lowly and despised, and appear to be withered, He hath pity upon them and blesses them, and so the word of His servant Ezekiel is fulfilled, "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it."

Now, brethren, the proof which I have given you that the Lord looketh upon little and lowly things shows the greatness of His soul. Our God is not like the great ones among men. Kings and princes generally esteem those most who can do them or the state most service. God needeth nothing from any, and therefore neither esteems the great nor despises the little. He is delivered from all consideration of self, seeing that He is all in all. Those who can do the state no service are usually looked upon by their rulers as the last to be considered. Why should they have a voice? Who are they that their interests should be thought of? But seeing God requireth not to look to any for help, He is not led to look down with despite and contempt upon any. If you feel an undue esteem for some, it follows almost as a matter of course that you should have a want of consideration for others, but because God hath no need to ask favours of any of His creatures or in the slightest degree to care for their strength or wisdom, therefore He maketh not much of the great, and therefore on the other hand He does not make little of those who are of lowly rank. God hath power also to protect all interests, and this human rulers say that they cannot do. The great ones of the earth will often argue thus, "For the good of the general public a portion of the population must suffer. Great measures naturally involve distress here and there,

and this is unavoidable. The law bears hard upon a few, but we cannot alter it: all regulations do so more or less." But God is so mighty that He has no need to perform a deed which involves injustice to one of the least of His creatures. Strict justice shall be dealt out to every individual as impartially as if he were the only creature God had ever made. The Lord knows how to consider every one separate individual of the human family as carefully as if there were no more than that one; for He is so great in might, and His thoughts are so deeply wise, that He looks to the interests of all. "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." Let us adore and bless Him that this doctrine stands on so sure a basis: He is mighty in heart, and despiseth not any.

II. Now I come to THE PRACTICAL USES of this great truth.

And the first use of the truth is, *it should greatly encourage those who are tried.* You have not come, my dear friend, to quite so low a state as that of Job when he sat upon a dunghill and scraped his sores with a potsherd; but even if you were, you ought not to conclude that you are despised of the Lord. He never could despise one of those for whom Christ died. The Lord has not thought contemptuously of you and said, "Let him suffer! He is a nobody, it matters not what becomes of him." On the contrary, whatever your griefs are to-day they have been allotted to you by infinite wisdom, and superlative love. You are in the best condition that you could be in after all. Bad as it appears to you, God knows that your lot is rightly ordained. If it had been better for you, upon the whole, to have been rolling in wealth, you would have been; if it had been better for you never to know pang or pain, you would not have known them: but God's great purposes and plans, involving you and the rest of His people, render it the best thing that you should be tried, and therefore tried you are. If you could have all the facts of the case, and all the divine purposes spread before you, and if you could have as clear an understanding as God has, you would put yourself just where you are now, for your Father's dealings are right and good. He has not put you in the furnace because He despises you, but because He values you. He bought you with the blood of Jesus, and therefore you may be sure He prizes you much.

Neither does the Lord think so little of you as to forget you in your pains. In all your grief Jesus has deep sympathy with you. In the watches of the night His eye sees your faintness and sleeplessness; when nurse and friend must from very weariness leave you, He is still with you, making your bed in your sickness. You must not say, "My God is so busy with heaven's glories, and with the management of the world's affairs, that He forgets me." Far from it. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Depend upon it, the great God is too mighty to despise one of His own children. He does not say, "It is only a work-girl pining away with consumption, she will not be missed." Nor does He say, "It is only a poor old woman, worn our, and suffering the natural pains of old age, it little matters what happens to her." He does not speak contemptuously, and say, "It is only a man of small brain, who will never do much, and is not worth caring about; let him sorrow and die, there will be only one grave more in the cemetery, and one mouth less to feed, and that is all." Oh, no, He "despiseth not any." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." He sees your tears and hears your groans, for He is in fellowship with the very least of His people. "In all their affliction He is afflicted, and the angel of His presence saves them." If any of you have come here this morning very much cast down because your trials are little known to others, and nobody sympathizes with you, do get a grasp of this grand fact, "He despiseth not any," and you will be much cheered. You are not made to suffer because of any indifference in God's heart towards you, but because He loves you. "As many as I love," saith He, "I rebuke and chasten." Take these rebukes and chastenings as tokens of His love, and when the rod falls more heavily than usual perceive it to be the rod of the covenant, which is held in a Father's hand, and only comes upon His own beloved.

A second use of this great truth is one which I pray God to render effectual. *It should encourage every sinner who is seeking the face of God* to think that God is mighty, and despiseth not any. You, dear friend, feel now as if God might very well pass you by and suffer you to perish. You have begun to seek His face, but you could not blame Him if He were to hide Himself from you and leave you to perish, for you have such a keen sense of your unworthiness and insignificance. Be comforted by this,—God is too great to deny you His favour. What profit would He have in your blood? What benefit would it be to Him that you should go down alive into the pit? His justice has been glorified sufficiently in the death of His Son Jesus, and those that believe in Him shall therefore live. Beloved friend, it may be you say, "I am so ignorant, I know but little of the Lord." Will He despise you because of that? If He does so, woe unto us all, for we are all ignorant, and on that ground He might despise even the angels whom He charged with folly. In comparison with His omniscience all creatures are fools. Little as you know, He will teach you and instruct you, but He will not despise you. "Ah," say you, "but I have such slender faculties." Suppose you have, the greatest intellect that God has created must in comparison with Him have little enough of capacity, and therefore He would despise all that He has made. But it is not so. Does the Lord ask any faculty from us, except the faculty to receive His mercy and to lay hold upon His grace? Your very emptiness and sense of need constitute a faculty of receptiveness into which He will pour His grace. Be not discouraged, however low in the scale of intelligence you may place yourself. God is mighty in heart and despiseth not any.

Your heart is broken. Well, it is written, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Your graces are very weak, you cannot see clear marks of the divine Spirit about you. It is written, "He hath not despised the day of small things." Even sparks of grace He never tramples out, and although your grace is but as a smoking flax, which may have more of offence about it than of excellence, even that He doth not quench. The bruised reed, the grace which seems to be destroyed, and out of which no music can be brought, He doth not despise or break. Others may despise you, but the heavenly Father will not.

It is just possible that you say, "O, sir, I cannot think deep thoughts. I try to grasp the great doctrines, but they are beyond me." God is so mighty

that He does not despise you for that, for He has sent you a gospel which requires no deep thought. The gospel of "believe and live" is on the level of any man's capacity who desireth to understand and believe. Christ Jesus has pitched the gospel note so low that our poor cracked bass voices may join in the tune. He hath made the steps of the Palace Beautiful so easy that little children may climb them. I bless Him for that word, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not," for then I, who feel myself as a mere babe amidst the great mysteries of His kingdom, may come to Him and be sure that He despiseth not any, and despiseth not me.

"Ah," but you say, "I fear that God will cast me away because I shall never be eminent for any great grace even if He saves me. My faith, I fear, will always be weak, my love will always be chill, my character will be imperfect." Well, beloved friend, then you will owe more to His love than others, and more to His patience and His grace, but in any case He will not despise you. Think you that the great God needs our great graces? It is true He is pleased with great faith, but He would be a great God if we had no faith at all. It is true He delights to see the heroism of His children, but not because He depends upon that or needeth it in the slightest degree. He getteth nothing out of us, our goodness extendeth not to Him, therefore is He too mighty to despise us if we cannot render anything to Him. Yet another replies, "I can understand God's saving a man who afterwards becomes an eminent minister or a gifted missionary; but if He were to save me He could not make much of me. What should I be if grace did its best with me? I could only be a humble unknown member of the church, drawing greatly upon His resources, but giving Him a very small return." Well, beloved, the Lord is so mighty that He is willing to receive multitudes of such. Why should He not? If He did not receive them He would not be enriched by His refusal; if He does receive them He will not be impoverished by what He bestows upon them. Believe firmly in the generosity of God. I have known what it is to find shelter behind His magnanimity, when I have cried, "Oh that He would look upon me in love! I am utterly unworthy and insignificant —will He take the trouble to spurn me? Will it be worth His while to refuse me His grace? Surely I am too unimportant for Him to break His promise in order to reject me, and act contrary to His nature in order to cast me away, and both of these He would have to do if He rejected one poor, needy, penitent spirit which dares to trust in Him through Jesus Christ." O poor, discouraged one, believe in God's great-heartedness. Throw yourself at the cross-foot, sinner, and say unto God, "By Thy very greatness I will lay hold upon Thee. Surely Thou art too mighty to crush a worm like me, too mighty to refuse me now that I trust the blood and merit of Thy Son. Display the greatness of Thy might by saving me, even me, I beseech Thee." Do you not see how full of consolation is the doctrine of the text? May faith be given by the Holy Ghost to enable you to grasp it.

Lastly, this doctrine affords *an example to God's people.* If our heavenly Father is mighty and despiseth not any, then it clearly follows that if we are imitators of God as dear children we must not despise any. I pray you never despise any of your brethren and sisters in Christ. Are they poorer than you? Do not despise them, but rather help them. If they are very, very poor, think what they have to bear, and do not add to their other sorrows the grief caused by your contempt. Deal gently and tenderly with them. If they are parts of your Lord's body you should be glad to serve them, for so you wash His feet. You should feel it to be a blessing that there are poor saints to whom you can minister, because in so doing you are ministering to Christ. "The poor ye have always with you"; and they are needful, for if there were no poor saints we might begin crying "Lord Jesus, what can we do for Thee? We wish we could show our love to Thee, but now, seeing there are no poor saints, we do not know how to clothe Thee, nor how to visit Thee in Thy sickness, and we shall miss the blessing thereby." If poor saints abound around you, esteem them, because it is through them you will be able to be commended by your Lord when He will say to you, "I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink."

Perhaps your poorer brethren are more honourable in God's esteem than you are, and probably they love the Master better than you do. It is very possible that they show more of the power of godliness in their lives than you do in yours, and it may be when Christ will come in His glory He will put them in a higher seat than some who have houses and lands. Brethren, do not despise one another. If you see a brother with very little talent doing his best, never sneer at him; God may perhaps bless his one handful of corn more than He will your basketful if he sows in more faith than you do. Do not despise young beginners. What if they do not know as much as you do; you do not know too much, and you know but little to the purpose if you have no compassion upon the lambs of the flock. Never despise a brother because of the mistakes he makes in doctrine. If you can set him right, do so, but if the love of God is in him, do not cast him out for his blunders. Do not say, "I will never associate with that man." In the family of grace there are some queer people; some of the Lord's are such that, if He did not choose them in sovereignty, I am at a loss to see how else they were chosen. But then, if the Lord loves them, you should endeavour to do the same. Never despise one of Christ's little ones, or evil will come of it.

Once more, *never despise any.* There is a text that some people are very pleased with—"Honour the king." Yes, by all manner of means: I trust we shall always be very loyal and honour the sovereign of the realm in which we dwell. But did you ever notice the precept which comes before it, which I recommend to those people who sneer at the poor? it runs thus—"Honour all men." This is just as much a duty as "Honour the king." "Honour all men." What, honour the lower classes? Yes, sir, "honour all men." Honour agricultural labourers? Yes, "all men." Honour paupers, negroes, crossing-sweepers? Yes, "honour all men." Respect the worker and the sufferer; respect the burden and the burden-bearer? Anything in the shape of a man or a woman deserves to be honoured, for man was made in the image of God. You are not to say of the fallen woman, "Away with her! The less said about her the better." Perhaps so, sister, but the more *done* the better. Nor are you to say of any man, "He is an incorrigible character; we cannot touch his case." No, that is not the way Jesus deals with men—He despiseth not any. Upon the worst of characters we ought to spend sevenfold love and patience, in the

hope that we may rescue such depraved ones from the depths of sin.

If it comes, you know, to the matter of despising, and you and I begin despising our fellow-creatures, God may make short work of us by despising us all. He may just shut the door of mercy in our faces and say, "You think little enough of one another: you poor people are railing at the rich, and you rich people are sneering at the poor. By your own judgment you shall be judged." The Lord knows, if He were to leave a woman to be judged by women, or even if He were to leave a man to be judged by men, a whole host of us would be lost. But instead of that He sets wide the door of grace, and bids the despised ones come and welcome. For Jesus' sake He looks in pity upon men, and has a kindness towards them. He sets before us an open door of mercy, and cries, "I have given My Son to die, and whosoever among you will but believe in Him shall prove that I will not despise you, but will receive you to My heart, love you in time and love you in eternity, and give you to be sharers of the throne of My only begotten Son for ever and ever." Brethren, shake off your pride and love your fellow-man, for if ye love not your brother whom ye have seen how can you love God whom ye have not seen? If He is mighty and despiseth not any, then be sure that if you despise any it is because you are not the mighty body that you think you are; your contempt of others proves that you are a little-souled creature, weak, pitiful, pretentious. You may measure yourself by this—if you despise others you ought to be despised, but if on the contrary your tender heart of sympathy would lift even the beggar from the dunghill you are magnanimous, great-souled and like unto God. May the Holy Ghost make you more and more so. Amen.

THE DOORS OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

"Hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?"—Job xxxviii. 17.

LAST Sabbath our spirits flew forward as far as the judgment-day. We stood with wondering awe to gaze upon the great white throne and the fillet of gold about the head of the reaper who gathered in the harvest of the earth; we trembled as we saw the other angel take the sharp sickle and reap the world's vintage and hurl it into the winepress of Jehovah's wrath, where it was trampled under foot until the blood of men flowed forth in torrents. Our excursion at this time will not take us so far in human history. We shall halt at a nearer stopping-place. We shall not journey even to the resurrection: only to the doors of the shadow of death.

The question is, "Hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" and the answer implied is—"No." In this chapter God is questioning Job, in order to show him his inability and his ignorance; to each question which the Lord puts to the patriarch a negative answer is expected. "Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?" "Hast thou walked in the search of the depth?" "Have the gates of death been opened to thee?" "Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth?" Job had done none of these things.

Well, then, Job, "Hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" The only answer the patriarch could have given or that we can give is "No." We can get as far as the gates of death, but we cannot pry within. Apart from revelation we have no information about the dreary land beyond, that land which lies enshrouded, as far as we are concerned, in perpetual gloom. We cannot tell when or how we ourselves shall die, so little do we know of the dread mystery. The message will some day come to us that the pitcher is to be broken at the cistern, but when it shall come we little dream. It may be much nearer than we think, and, on the other hand, it may be farther off than we have feared. We are all, in this life, something like the prisoners confined during the dreadful French revolution. They were shut in, so that they could not escape; and every morning there came a man with a little slip of paper who read out the names of that day's victims, who were then hurried to the tumbrel which was in waiting outside to drag off its weary load to death. So every morning comes the death angel into the world, and he reads out the names of such a one and such a one; we miss our comrade who has been called, and we grow so accustomed to the routine that, alas! we think too little of having missed him. But we are waiting, each one of us, till the missive shall come for ourselves, yet we know no more when we shall die than does the ox in the pasture, or the sheep in the fold.

Neither do we know what it is to die. We know, in a certain sense, what the act of death is; but what is the strange feeling with which the soul finds itself houseless, forsaken of the body which falls about it like a crumbling tenement,—what it is to have the link severed which keeps the mortal bound to the immortal—the spiritual caged within the material,—what that is, we do not know; neither hath any told it to us. We have watched others passing; we have stood by the bedside of the dying; we have witnessed the last gasp; and still it remains a secret what it is to die. We only know that these gates of the shadow of death are so shut upon us that we cannot hold any intercourse whatever with the world beyond, save only as there is an everlasting fellowship in the person of Christ between all that are in Him; so that

> "The saints on earth, and all the dead,
> But one communion make."

Indeed, we are so shut off from the other world that we never even dare to pry behind the curtain which God hath thrown across the abode of spirits. There have been necromancers in all ages who have desired to intrude into these mysterious regions, and they have pretended to have done so. Their craft is to be abhorred as hell; woe unto the man that cometh near to them! They are, as far as Christians are concerned, to be utterly loathed, for, where the Lord hath hung up a curtain and shut the door, it

is not for you and me to intermeddle, lest in eating those sacrifices of the dead we be found to be having fellowship with devils, and be cast down to share their doom.

"Hast thou seen the gates of the shadow of death?" We are content to give the answer which Job must have given, that we have not seen them and do not wish to see them. Between those iron bars we do not wish to pry. What the Lord reveals we are content to learn from His Word, but we wish to know nothing more.

Now, dear friends, that being the case, we shall only in meditation go down to those gates as far as we may lawfully go, and speak only about what we may actually know, not dreaming or doting about things beyond our ken. There have been some poets who have sung of descents to Avernus and of the circles of the Inferno. Ye need not that I go through Dante's majestic conceptions, or tell how Milton sings of worlds unknown. Ours is a far less ambitious business. We have no poetry to make; we have simple facts to state.

I. First, then, we ask you to come down as near to the gates of death as we may, in meditation, VIEWING DEATH IN GENERAL for a few minutes.

Look ye up in vision to these terrible portals; and do you not observe, as you stand before them, that *these gates are always open?* Never, day and night, are those gates of death shut, for at all hours there is traffic through them. Men die at midnight, as they did in Pharaoh's palace, and men die at noon, as the child did who said, "My head, my head," and whose father said, "Take him to his mother," and who then fell asleep in her lap. They die in spring-time, and the flowers sweetly waking from the earth adorn the hillock which marks their tomb, and they die in summer, and know nothing of the sweet flowers that bloom and perfume all the air. They drop like autumn leaves, and the winter, howling their requiem, bears many of them away. There is never a moment, I suppose, at any time when the fall of feet may not be heard by listening ears that are hard by the gates of deathshade. The dead have always been coming since Abel led the way—one perpetual stream, never ceasing day nor night.

Let us remember also that *multitudes have now passed through those iron gates!* Ye cannot count the hosts who have entered. The calculating machine might fail, and the powers of mind utterly quail before the mighty total. We speak of them as the great majority, and earth with her more than thousand millions has but a slender congregation of living persons compared with the congregation of the dead. What multitudes, I say, have passed through from the first day until now. Sometimes there has been a rush when death's jackals, the kings and princes of the world, have driven their prey in troops through them by means of bloody wars. At other times, men in hosts have rushed through those gates pursued by plague or famine; and always by human decay or disease men have come up to these gates, ever, ever, ever passing through. The stream of passengers through the gates of death goes on, on, on. While you and I are sitting here, they are stepping between the posts. Perhaps some dear to us are nearing the portals. We ourselves are, certainly, on the way, and at all times our fellow creatures are being swallowed within the gaping jaws which never shut.

If you will stop here a minute, and look, and have eyes strong enough in the shade to *mark who they ar that come*, you will see there a man leaning on hi staff. But did you notice that there also went by him little children that had not yet learnt to speak You see the strong man come on a sudden, running away from life; and you see the invalid who had long waited for his summons: you may tell his bones as he passes down to his grave. Do you see yonder man? There is nothing special about him; he looks just like another. He was a king once; there is little royal about him now. Do you see that other man He was once a beggar; he does not now seem a bit more beggarly than did the monarch. They have neither of them brought any store with them; they come here penniless—all of them, and they pass through with empty hands. Titles, grandeur, estates position, fame, all are left behind. They come a great crowd in a liberty, equality, and fraternity of death, a common brotherhood that will never be realized in life. Do you see them going? In view of this general levelling, you may set small store on the distinctions of this world. I have come to reckon that nothing is worth seeking after but that which will survive the tomb.

Through that gate you have seen many go in thought to-night. Will you please to remember that *no one has ever returned*, with the exception of a few restored by miracle. Through that way they go, but there are no steps backward. Gone, gone for ever. Once the breath has left the body, I think that the soul shall not revisit its old haunts, or know anything of all that is done under the sun. But whether that be so or not, it is certain that they will not come back in the old familiar form. They are gone. They cannot return. It is idle to weep and wish them amongst us again: floods of tears cannot restore them. As for the tree that is cut down, at the scent of water it will bud; but rivers of precious water from weeping eyes cannot cause these dead ones to live again.

Now, concerning these gates of the grave, we may say further that, though they are thus thronged, *there are very few that ever come there as voluntary passengers*. Man dreads to die. It is right that he should, so long as it does not come to a fear that is bondage. Understand this—that God has implanted within us all the desire to live, for right ends and purposes. There are a few that pass that way in a hurry or of their own consent. Ah, dreary souls that take away their lives! To what has a man come when he dares to contemplate such an insult to his Maker? He that gave thee breath may take it back but thou mayest not give it up thyself. To die by your own hand is not to escape from suffering, but to plunge yourself into it for ever; for we know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Therefore he that murders himself, if he knows what he is doing, gives sure evidence that eternal life is not in him. We must all go through those gates, but we must gallantly bide our time, and take arms against the sea of trouble that now awaits us; then at last if we be Christ's, and all of us may be His, and know we are His, when our Captain bids us come to Him we will bow our heads and pass through the gates of iron, not fearing for a moment. Our Lord will come to meet us, and our soul will stretch her wings in haste, and fly fearless through the shadowed portals nor feel aught of terror as she passes them.

Those thoughts may suffice about death in general.

II. Now, in the second place, let us go down t

the doors of that deathshade, and stand some moments VIEWING SAINTLY DEATHS. I wish only to speak simply about them.

First, I remark that *all saintly deaths are not pleasant to look upon.* Some of the grandest men that ever lived have died in a storm. Martin Luther's death-bed was troubled. I do not wonder that when a man has done such glorious mischief to Satan's dominions, he should not be suffered to enter into his rest without one more struggle with his foe. John Knox, again, had a fierce battle when he came to die. He found it hard, though he triumphed at the last even as Luther did. And many that have served their Master well, instead of shoutings of joy and singing of hymns in their departure, have had to lay hold with all their might upon their crucified Saviour in order to sustain their hope. There is something right about this too, it becomes a lesson to us all. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" And if to die is sometimes hard work to a man who is known to be a true believer and who has shown to others that he is really saved, what shall they expect in the hour of death who have no such confidence in God?

Yet, beloved, standing at the doors of death to-night, I must confess that, as far as I am concerned, of those I have seen passing through, who have believed in Christ, *most of the saints have passed through gladly.* They have entered the gates with a cheery note, with a song, or with a Hallelujah. I cannot forget the times in which I have been asked to sing at dying beds when I could not possibly have done it for very choking of sympathy with those about me. But the dying man has sung, and the dying woman has joined sweetly in the hymn, and when we seemed to feel as if it might be too much for the failing strength we have been asked by the saint who was ready to depart that we might sing another verse. While they have been

"Sweeping through the gates of the new Jerusalem,"

they have wanted us to sing them home. If I had to tell where I have seen the most joy on earth, I should certainly not say at the bridal feasts, for that joy has much that is flimsy about it; in many that partake in that festival the sentiments are often unreal. But the joy of the dying man—the joy of the expiring saint—has something so deep, so sublime, yet so simple in it, that I know not where to equal it, whether I am permitted to search in the palaces of kings or in the homes of content. The greatest joy on earth is, after all, the joy of departing saints. So you may stand at the gates of deathshade, and hear them sing as they pass through. Some of them you may hear saying extraordinary things. Haliburton cried, "Have at thee, death! Have at thee, death!"—as if he fought and conquered the grim foe without a fear; others have shouted, "Victory, victory, victory, through the blood of the Lamb!" in their last moments. Sorrow there has been, but joy there has been oftener far.

Concerning the doors of the shadow of death, let me say that *there are stores of grace laid up hard by these gates of the grave for saints when they come thither.* You must not expect, dear friends, to have dying grace in living moments. You must not expect at this time to have grace to die with, when, perhaps, God intends you to live another fifty years. What would you do with such grace? Where would you put it? You shall have it when you come to die. Only trust in Christ to-day, and do you His bidding; when the dying time shall come the dying grace shall be afforded you.

In addition to this, I believe that God not only gives His people grace to die, but, in their last moments, *some of the saints get visions of another world before they enter the gates thereof.* I am persuaded that the glow and the glory that I have seen on some men's faces when they have been dying have not been of earth; that the strange light that lit their features, and the wondrous smile of ineffable delight with which they have fallen asleep, have not been things of time. They could not have been created by their present circumstances, for their surroundings have been all to the contrary. The radiance from the world beyond has been upon them. What strange things, too, they have said! Some of them have been hard to comprehend, for the expiring saints have spoken a language more of heaven than of earth, as if they knew things which were unlawful for them to utter, and must not speak so as to be understood. Stray notes from harps of seraphim they have caught, and they have tried to sing them here below, but have failed. Yet have we heard enough to let us know that God has partly drawn up the jalousies, and permitted them to see through the lattice and to behold the King in His beauty. Angels, too, we doubt not, come to those gates of death. Why should they not? They came to Jesus in Gethsemane. They are bidden to take care of the Lord's people, lest they dash their foot against a stone. I have no doubt that they minister to the heirs of salvation, for it is written that, when Lazarus died, angels carried him into Abraham's bosom. The angelic bands wait, I believe, at these gates of death to help the righteous in their last extremity.

Best of all, I should like you, as you come with me to these doors of deathshade, to notice that *there is a blood-mark right across the entrance.* If you look down there is the print of a footstep unlike that of all the rest, for it is the print of a foot that once was pierced. Ah! I recognize that mark; my Lord has gone that way. I have not yet myself been down to the doors of deathshade, but He, my Saviour, has been there; He has passed through them indeed, and yet He lives. Hence, the joy of the believer is, that when he passes through, because Christ liveth he shall live also, and because Christ is risen he shall rise too. I could not believe the resurrection if it were not certain that Christ has risen. But if ever there was a fact in history that is well attested beyond all conceivable doubt, it is the fact that He who was put into the grave by the Jews, and whose tomb was sealed, rose again from the dead on the third day. All His people shall also rise, because He has led the way. Oh gates of deathshade, we dread ye no longer, since Christ has passed through your portals.

And see, brethren, for the believer, *all round those gates of deathshade bright lamps are burning.* Do you not see them? They are lamps of promise. "When thou passest through the rivers I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee." "O death, I will be thy plagues." You know how the Lord of the pilgrims has given the assurance over and over and over again, in all shapes and ways, that He will not leave nor forsake His people, but that He will help them even to the end, and cause them when they walk through the valley of the

shadow of death to fear no evil because He is with them.

The gates of the grave, then, as far as believers are concerned, are not places of gloom at all. We ought often to go there. It is greatly wise to be familiar with our last hours—to antedate them and to die daily. Make a friend of death. Oh, go to the graves, not to weep there, but that thou mayest not weep when thou goest there. Often strip thyself and go through the rehearsal of thy death, that when the time shall come it may be no strange work for thee to die since thou shalt have died daily for, it may be, fifty years at a stretch.

III. Now, lastly, and very sorrowfully, a few words VIEWING THE DEATH OF SINNERS. Down to these grim gates the ungodly must go as well as the people of God. To every one of them is the lot appointed. Let us speak the truth about them solemnly and tenderly, with tears in our heart, though sad words be on our lips.

The death of ungodly people is not always terrible. There are many that die and are lost, of whom David says in the psalm, "Like sheep they are laid in the grave." They never cared for the house of God nor regarded the Sabbath; they knew nothing of prayer, or of faith. Their consciences have become seared. They played bravado with God, and He has given them up, so when they come to die they take it coolly enough. They "shuffle off this mortal coil" almost without a fear, and they that stand around say, "O, he died so sweetly—such a happy death." Ah me! ah me! ah me! Saints die struggling often, and sinners often die in dreadful peace. I say "dreadful," for have you never noticed the stillness—the awful silence—of nature before a tempest, when there is not a breath of air, and not a leaf stirs on the trees; the very clouds seem to hang still in mid heaven, and earth and sky get more quiet and still more quiet, and our very breath becomes intensely stifling in the dread stagnation, till with peal on peal at last the dread artillery of heaven begins to shake heaven and earth. Such is the death of many an ungodly man—a treacherous calm. Oh, what an awakening for him when in hell he shall lift up his eyes, far from every hope of mercy! Pray God you may not die so. I should not like to die stupefied; I would prefer to be in my senses. Presumption is a drug which stupefies the soul, and because of it men often die at peace, full many of them. But it were better far they had never taken that dire drug, but could really look into the future, if perhaps even at the last moment, while their feet were sliding, they might find grace enough to start back and lay hold on everlasting life that they might not descend into the abyss below. Because their eyes are blinded there are many that die peaceably enough, and are lost.

Of impenitent men I may say that, when they come to die, *many of them are not at peace;* a very large number of such people shrink back from the doors of death, because, in the quiet chamber, memory begins to work. Then the evil deed, then the midnight scene, then the neglected Sabbath, then the unread Bible, then the throne of grace forsaken, all claim to speak; and as the clock goes tick, tick upon the wall, the mind begins to go over childhood, youth, manhood, married life, and to remember and to bring up sin. It is not every sinner that is such a fool as to be able to remember a wasted life without some terror or regret. Fear, too, is generally busy, for the mind begins to ask, whether the thought is pleasant to the dying person or not, "Where am I going?" and there is a something in man that does not let him believe that he is a mere animal. Look at your wife, man—you that believe all living men to be mere beasts. What is that dear body of your wife whom you have loved these many years? Well, principally so much water and so much gas; when that is taken away there is a small residuum of earthy ash—that is all. And that is what you have loved—so many pounds of water and gas and earth! No, sir, you have not. You have loved a *woman.* You have loved a thing infinitely better than dead earth and water and gas. You know that. You do not believe that your mother is only mere water and gas and earth, nor your child, not yet yourself. You cannot persuade yourself to accept such materialism as that. There is a something in this body that is better than this water, and gas, and earth, a something that will consciously exist when these have been dissolved: and there is that within all of us that makes us believe it whether we will it or not. Hence, at the portals of death there comes into the mind the question, "Where am I going?" And if the heart cannot answer that question by saying, "I am going where Jesus is: I am going to my Saviour, in whom I have trusted, who has washed me from my sin,"—then fear comes up and the man begins to say, "Oh, how can I go forward? The Bible tells me I am going to judgment, and I am unfit for judgment,—that I am going to resurrection, and what must it be for a sinful body like mine to rise from the dead? I am going to condemnation, and already in my conscience I am condemned. How can I go? How can I stop? Ah, must I leave thee, O earth, and cannot I enter thee, O heaven? Then whither must I fly?" Not many ungodly men can manage to shake off such thoughts as these in the dread prospect of departure.

Let me say, further, that *near these gates of death-shade is a very difficult place in which to seek the Lord.* When a man gets troubled with memory and fear, and his body is racked with pain, he is very ill-fitted to listen to the voice of Jesus. I would not discourage a dying man for a moment from looking to Jesus. If he desireth salvation, if he will but believe in the Christ of God, he shall have eternal life even at the last. But speaking from what I have seen, the most of men in the article of death are quite unfit for thought; quite unable to feel anything beyond the stabs of physical anguish, and quite incapable of faith. No man knoweth how far God's mercy goeth; but, if that mercy be given to faith, I cannot see how it can be extended to some dying men. Delirium, a wandering mind, an aching head—oh, these will give you quite enough to do in dying, without having to seek your peace with God then. It is task enough only to die, to take a tearful farewell of those babes and of the partner of your life; it is enough to die, without then having to begin to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Hast thou seen the doors of death-shade? If thou hast, thou wilt not choose them as a place to repent in, thou wilt rather choose the present time to seek the Lord—now while yet thy mind is fresh and vigorous, and He is waiting to be gracious.

I must not detain you more than another minute or two, but let me remind you that *at the doors of deathshade is the place of testing and the place of stripping.* The man comes there, who has professed to be a Christian, and if he is not, how the rags of

his self-righteousness are torn off! Or he says, "I was no professor of religion: I was better than that, I was an honest man." Now it turns out at last that he was not even true to his God, and his fancied honesty drops off him like a garment. Build castles in the air, if you will, but death is a wonderful dissipator of all your magic. At the shadowy gates nothing will do for you or for God but reality. If the religion you have and the hope you have will not stand the test of self-examination and heart-searching sermons, certainly it will not stand the test of a dying hour. What a stripping time it will be! Now, my lord, you must take the last look at your coronet: that will never encircle your brow again. Now, look through the window at your broad estates: you will not be able to call a foot your own. Even the six feet of earth in which you lie will only be yours as long as the charity of your successors will permit you to slumber in peace. Good-bye to your money bags. Farewell to the market and the exchange! You have got your wealth with much labour, but you are forced to leave it now—every penny of it. None of it can go with you.

Worse still, *the gates of deathshade are the places of farewell.* An ungodly man has to bid farewell sometimes to a Christian wife. Kiss her cheek, man: you will never see her again. You have a Christian child—a dear child that has lately joined the church, but you are no follower of Christ, when you come to die, they will bring her to your bedside, and you will have to say, "Good-bye, Mary. I shall never see you again, or if I do it will be only as Dives, who looked up and saw Lazarus far away in Abraham's bosom, but with an awful gulf between." Some of you unconverted brothers, how will you like to be separated from your Christian sisters? Some of you daughters—how will you like to be divided from your father and your mother, who will be in heaven? Oh, all of you say, "We would like to meet in heaven as unbroken families." Young girl; young man; what if thy name should be left out when Christ shall summon home His own? Certain it is that deathshade gates are the places of everlasting farewell. God grant you may never have to take such farewell of any of your kin who are in Christ, but may ye soar up to heaven and be raised with them when the trump of the archangel sounds.

Thus I have, as best I could, talked of the end of the earthly life. O souls, prepare to meet your God, for you may have to meet Him ere another sun has risen. I beseech you, by the living God, whose servant I am, postpone not repentance and faith; but now, while mercy's white flag is to the front, and God waiteth to be gracious to you, bow before the cross of Christ, trust in Jesus, and be saved. The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE PLEIADES AND ORION

"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?"—Job xxxviii. 31.

MOST of you know that singularly beautiful cluster of stars called the Pleiades—very small, but intensely *bright.* These are most conspicuous about the time of spring, and hence, in poetry, the vernal influences which quicken the earth and clothe it with the green grass and the many-coloured flowers, are connected with the Pleiades. By the sweet influences of the Pleiades we understand, then, in plain language, those benign influences which produce the spring and the summer; these, it is said, no man can restrain. Orion, a very conspicuous constellation, with its glittering belt, is best seen towards the close of autumn, just before the coming in of the winter; it is a southern and wintry sign, and hence, poetically, the winter is traced to the bands of Orion, and we are told in the text, literally, that no man is able to loosen the bands of frost, or check the incoming of the cold. In other words, the whole verse asserts that none can stay the revolutions of the seasons: when God ordains the spring, the shining months come laughing on; and when again He calls for winter, snow and ice must rule the dreary hour. The husbandman is entirely dependent upon the God of heaven; he may plough with industry, and cast in the good seed with hope, but unless the sweet influences of heaven shall be given, he can reap no harvest. If the drought be long and severe, he cannot cause the clouds to drench the thirsty furrows; or, if the rain descends in torrents, drowning the pastures, he cannot seal up the bottles of heaven. He is absolutely dependent upon God, who governeth all things according to His will; and we, who know so little of agricultural operations, being so far removed from the country which *God* has made, living in the town which *man* has made, we also are as much dependent as any, for even the king is nourished by the fruit of the field; and follow what merchandise we will, yet still ultimately it is from the field that our nourishment must come. All of us, then, and not us alone, but all the beasts and birds, and all the creatures, are entirely and absolutely dependent upon God, and unless He help them, they cannot help themselves. This is the simple teaching of the verse, but it was doubtless used to teach Job that as he could not alter the ordinances of heaven, so neither could he change the purposes of God in the events of providence. You cannot hasten the spring nor postpone the winter, neither can you prevent those calamities which plunge nations in distress, nor prohibit those mercies which lift up tribes into prosperity. Evil comes to the sons of men by God's purpose, and good cometh also. Neither is it in thy power, O son of man, with all thy discretion and skill, with all thine economy and industry, to avert the evil which God appoints. The scythe of the dread mower cannot be arrested by wisdom: the inevitable hour comes to all. Want, and sickness, and bereavement, invade us at the Lord's bidding, and although we may greatly mitigate their rigour, yet we cannot avert them, for the ordinance of God must surely come to pass, and whatsoever is written in the folded book of the divine decree, must in due season be fulfilled in the history of man. If thou canst not alter, then bow thyself

and submit; if thou canst not change the purpose, then yield to it and ask to have it sanctified to thee. O Job, if thy cattle must be taken away, if thy children must die, if sore boils must break out upon thy body, if thou must sit upon the dunghill, if thou hast no power to alter a single circumstance, then accept the affliction at the hand of the infinite One, humbly kiss the hand that smiteth, and say, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." The doctrine of a divine providence is calculated to create in the minds of the thoughtful and believing the spirit of resignation. They might perhaps rebel and struggle, if this were of some avail, but since it would be utterly useless, since the great wheels of providence proceed in their perpetual revolutions, not pausing for our tears nor hastening for our groans, then it is best for us to admire it as it revolves, to believe that it is producing good, and to submit ourselves to whatsoever the Lord appoints.

However, I do not intend using the text in that sense, this morning, but as we are told that no man can restrain the benign influences of the Pleiades, so, in the first place, *men cannot utterly prevent the working of the gracious Spirit;* and as men, in the second place, cannot loose the bands of Orion, so men, of *themselves, are not able to overcome those wintry powers which sometimes seize upon the human heart.* These two things, and then, in the third place, *the lessons from them.*

I. WHO SHALL BIND THE SWEET INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY GHOST?

The Holy Spirit does not always operate in the same degree of power, but when His time, His set time, to favour Zion is come, then, blessed be God, He is like the dew upon the grass, that waiteth not for man, neither tarrieth for the sons of men. It is not in human or in diabolical power to restrain the influences of the Holy One of Israel when He deigns to visit His Church. Many attempts have been made against the Church of God, but they have all proved failures, because the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit has frustrated all the purposes of the Lord's enemies. The Church of God, especially in her early days, has been assailed by the envenomed tongue of *slander.* All over the Roman empire it was reported that Christians were men of the most brutalised habits. I dare not mention, for the cheek of modesty would be crimsoned, what were the charges brought against Christians, of crimes perpetrated in their assemblies; suffice it to say, that amongst the rest, as they met together to break bread and drink wine in memory of their Lord, it was said they were accustomed to eat the flesh of a man, and that they passed round from hand to hand and drank together out of a cup of warm human blood. Of course, the populace believing these horrible stories, were violently opposed to the Christian faith. And how did the Christian faith overcome the popular opposition stimulated by such calumny as this? Simply by the power of the Holy Spirit. The sweet influences of the Holy Ghost which descended upon the disciples at Pentecost remained with them, so that when they preached, they preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; when in their private assemblies they spoke of Jesus, they spoke in the power with which they had been endowed at Jerusalem, and calumny was of no more avail than chaff contending with the whirlwind, or stubble warring against the fire. In fact, these very calumnies brought men out of curiosity to behold these atrocious sinners in their orgies of vice, and coming, they listened to the gracious words which proceeded out of their mouths, and, in the power of the Holy Ghost, they believed and became Christians too. Beloved, this stands good to-day. Many a Christian has to endure slander, and of the most cruel kind too. To a sensitive heart, perhaps, slander is a more severe trial than even the whip or the rack. And yet, glory be to God, if our names be cast out as evil, they cannot deprive us of the comfort of the Holy One of Israel. Often, when we are worst spoken of by the world, we are best beloved of our God. The Lord hath a way of taking up His people when they are despised and rejected of men, and manifesting His love to them after an unusual sort, so that if the cup might have been dashed with bitters, God poureth in so much of the honey of His own precious love, that the bitter is forgotten, and the calumny is swallowed up in the communion. Happy are ye, beloved, when they say all manner of evil against you for Christ's name's sake, for you can reply to your accusers, "Can you bind up the sweet influence of the Holy Ghost? Can you stay from my soul the divine and overflowing consolations which proceed from the Pleiades of promise when they shine full upon my soul?"

If calumny doth not avail, the world has always been ready with coarser weapons—she resorts to *open persecution.* But, beloved, all the persecutions which have ever assaulted the Church, have never been able to stay the sweet influence of the Pleiades, I mean to quench the work of the Spirit, and deprive the Church of God of her true comfort. When it has been her spring-time, all the blood which could be shed could not thrust her back again into her dreary winter. Her flowers bloomed, her buds began to shoot forth, and her fruits adorned her branches, to the glory of our God. Behold Paul and Silas in the dungeon of Philippi! Their persecutors have scourged them; they have laid them in the stocks; they have thrust them into the noisome filth of the innermost prison, but the sweet influence of the Pleiades are felt, and they begin to sing in the dead of night, until the prisoners hear them. Behold the influence of these same Pleiades in every place where the apostles went! They were followed by their Jewish persecutors, and they were molested by the Gentile mobs; but their preaching drew to the cross of Christ a company whose hearts the Lord had touched, and He added unto the Church daily of such as should be saved. In the after-apostolic days, how often in the midst of the amphitheatre, when the nobles and the matrons of Rome, and the Plebs, in all their ranks were gathered together, and a few defenceless men and women were given up to bears and wolves and lions in the midst of the arena, how the sweet influence of the Pleiades fell on them! How they sung their psalms as the lions rushed from their dens, or folded their arms in peace, praising the Lord that He thought them worthy to be partakers of His sufferings! So was it on the snowy Alps, so was it in the valleys of Piedmont, so was it amongst the suffering Huguenots of France, so was it amongst our martyred fathers. Smithfield felt the influence of the Pleiades full often when her flames became as chariots in which the saints mounted to their thrones. In the glens of Scotland, among her lone hills and shaggy woods, when such men as Cargill and Cameron opened the Bible and read the text by a flash of lightning, and then preached of the royalties of King Jesus—in those covenanting days, the sweet influence

of the Pleiades were perhaps more felt than in these softer hours, when men learn to sleep under the ministry of the truth, and too many of them are ready to cancel their principles and give up their hopes, if but a little gain should cross their path. Persecution, what hast thou done? March before us, ye cruel ranks of persecutors, each with the hell-brand on your brow; ye sons of Cain, ye brethren of Korah, ye disciples of Balaam, ye have never been able to impede the onward march of the Church of God—no, not so much as for a single hour. Vain were your arts and villainies, for God from heaven fought against you.

Nor, dear brethren, have even the crafty *heresies* which at different times have crept into the Church of God been able to bind the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit. Oftentimes, the very spring-time of the Church has come, when to all outward appearance it appeared that evil had altogether triumphed. When Popery's power had become consolidated and universal, it was then that Savonarola, Jerome of Prague, and John Huss, were raised up together with our own John Wickliffe, to shake the foundations of the throne of Antichrist: at the darkest hour of the world's history the light began to shine. These men, when they had either burnt them alive, or consumed their corpses, these men it was supposed, would be forgotten, and their influence would perish from off the face of the earth; for, were not all the doctors on the side of Rome, were not all the schoolmen zealous to maintain her dogmas? What were these few men that they should be able to stand against the old, the venerable, the wealthy? But, brethren, the old error had to give way, and the light of the gospel shone forth, and a new spring life came to the world, and the time of the singing of birds, and the blooming of the flowers was come, and men called it the Reformation. Rest assured it will be so to-day. The craft of Satan, and the wickedness of man have invented forms of mischief so insinuating, that they threaten speedily to enthral our land; we have among us a form of Popery in which Romanism is divested of its grosser idolatries, clothed with the gorgeous vestments, garnished with attractive pomp, and upheld by the most earnest, and to all appearance, the most pious of men. Will this prevail? Will this destroy the gospel by whose dew the nation has so long been watered? We have among us at the same hour a rationalism, sufficiently cautious not to deny too much, stealthily advancing to its ultimate results, but lingering wisely by the way to talk of liberality and breadth of thought. This is fascinating to the last degree to many minds, and is subduing to itself hundreds of the more thoughtful youths of this country. Between these two millstones will not Christ's kingdom be crushed? May we not fear that rationalism and ceremonialism will be like the two hands of Samson, to remove the pillars whereon our house doth lean? Ah! not so. If the Holy Spirit do but descend upon the living churches of God, and put power into the preaching of the truth, we may safely laugh all these to scorn, and say to the greatest of them, "Canst thou stand for a single second against the benign power of the adorable Spirit who is the guardian of the truth, the life of the Church, the defender of the faith, the vanquisher of errors, the defier of hell, the establisher of truth's empire, and the destroyer of the throne of falsehood?"

Advancing step by step, I would remind you that there is a great opposition in man himself to the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit. When the time comes for any one man to be saved, his *natural enmity* is sure to be on the alert against the divine power, and Satan is certain also to strengthen him lest he should lose his victim. Now, I glorify God in this that thou, sinner, though thou mayst resist and grieve the Spirit for awhile, yet if He comes to thee with omnipotent power effectually to save, thou must yield, for thou, even thou, with all thine enmity, canst not bind the sweet influences of the Spirit of eternal life. It is with many men as I have sometimes seen with a village brook; it has been dammed up for some reason, and the water has become a pool. A heavy shower has by-and-by fallen upon the hills, and the full stream has leaped downward. There stands the dam for a little while, but it trembles as the stream swells. Perhaps the villagers strengthen it, but if the rain continues to fall, the stream increases in volume, and at last, with one noble outburst, down leaps the torrent, and the dam is swept away like a bowing wall. So with our evil nature, when the Holy Ghost comes, with greater and greater power, descending from the hills of God's eternal purposes, at last sweeps away every remnant of opposition, and on He sweeps in the greatness of His strength. "You deny, then," says one, "the free-will of man?" Who says that? I never denied it; on the contrary, I insist upon it more than most men. There is no opposition between the doctrine of irresistible grace and the fact of the free agency of man. "How," say you, "if man be thus irresistibly carried as by storm, how can he be free?" Bethink thyself, man, and answer for thyself. Wert thou never overcome in argument? Didst thou never resist an argument for a time, till at last another reason was given, and then another, and thou couldst not but yield to the overwhelming arguments? Didst thou then prove that thou hadst no reason of thine own? Nay, it proved thou hadst a reason, and therefore could be mastered by arguments fitted to thy reason. If thou hadst been bereft of reason—an idiot—nobody could have spoken of an irresistible argument so far as thou wert concerned, but thy powers of understanding enabled thee to be overcome by legitimate force. So with the will—we do not dream, as some falsely imagine, that physical force is used by the Lord with men's moral natures, but we teach that there are appeals and persuasions, arguments and forces, which are applicable to the will which, without violating its freedom even in the smallest degree, yet overwhelm it and subdue it to the right and the true, so that the man with full consent yields up himself to the full power of divine love. Do not the hymns of Mr. Wesley often express our meaning when he uses such words as *overcoming* and *forcing*? as in the verse—

> "Save the vilest of the race,
> Force me to be saved by grace."

Such expressions mean just what we mean, and no more. We do not mean the violation of the will, but we do mean this, that where the Holy Spirit comes, though the man's will may have been obstinate enough before, when He exerts His wondrous influences, He makes the will to yield itself at once; the man is made willing in the day of God's power—the sweet influences of the Pleiades are not bound even by human rebellion.

It is cause for thankfulness also that no man can bind the sweet influence completely after he has been saved. If your experience be at all like mine, you

sometimes get into a very horrible state of mind; feel as if you had no spiritual life at all; cannot pray—or, if you pray, do not enjoy it; go up to the house of God, and get no comfort; turn to the Bible, and behold no gleams of light. You get wretched, and you sing with Dr. Watts—

> "Dear Lord, and shall we always live
> At this poor dying rate?"

Well, on a sudden, you have such a visitation; you have not had such a time for months. It may be under a sermon, or, perhaps, at the Lord's table, or even in the midst of your business, before you are aware, your soul is made like the chariots of Amminadib; you feel so rejoicing—it is not bodily excitement, it is spiritual life, filled with vigour. Now you can pray; now you can pour out your soul in tears; now you feel most happy and blessed: you wonder how you could have been like a desert before, for you blossom so much like a garden now. Ah! it is this, that the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit could not be bound even by your darkness and your death. God determined to visit you, and coming to you, He overcame every obstacle, and made your soul to rejoice with joy unspeakable.

Beloved, it is just so with *a church*. I am sure this church was in about as bad a plight as we could well suppose, for the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit to work in it; it was a scattered flock, and divided and brought low; yet, though there were a thousand discouragements, no sooner did the Holy Spirit visit this church, than see how it began to multiply and rejoice! During these years the same influences have blessed us, obstacles have been overcome, difficulties have been swept away, and none have been able to keep from us the reviving influences of the Holy Ghost.

You have now before you the thought of the freeness of the Spirit of God, who, like wind, bloweth as He listeth, and is not bound by human might. Let me only add, that although no man can by his own power bind or restrain effectually and finally the power of the Spirit of God, yet the Lord may withdraw His Spirit either from a church or from an individual for a season, and so cause sore distress, and prove that nothing is good or strong without Him. Be tender, therefore, of the Holy Spirit. O you who know His power, trifle not with any of His divine warnings! be jealous lest you grieve Him; follow His faintest monitions, and in all things do Him honour as your Friend and Guide. He may remove from the sinner who is not obedient to Him; He may remove altogether, and then such a soul is given up. From the saint also He may for a time be gone, till the good man repents and humbles himself, and then He will return, like a dove, with all His peaceful powers, to abide with him evermore.

II. Now we shall turn to the second half of the text. There is a winter time both with churches and with individuals when Orion is in the ascendant, and then, though we could well wish to do so WE ARE NOT ABLE TO LOOSE THE BANDS OF THE FROST.

This is sadly true in individual cases. My dear brethren and sisters, I suppose in your endeavours to do good you have met with *persons in despair*. There are none who more thoroughly baffle all the arts of the human comforter than these. You bring them the gospel, and they see it, but refuse it; if they cannot help it, they will sometimes get a little light, but only let them have time enough, and they will shut their eyes and get into the dark again. They bring objections, and you answer them so conclusively that you could almost laugh at them, but they only renounce one set of fears to raise another. You hunt them out of one hole, and you close it so that they never can get into it again: alas! they make another; you drive them forth again, they find another retreat. They are most ingenious in inventing reasons for misery. They are diligent in the business of tormenting themselves. They are good people—really have the fear of God—are desirous of eternal life—have it even, and, yet for all this, are involved in a net in which the more they struggle the more they are entangled; like men in the mud of the river Nile, who, sinking in it, splash and plunge only to sink deeper every time. Have you not felt altogether confounded in dealing with them? Have you not come out of the house and said, "I did think I could comfort people: I had some sort of conceit that I could have brought forward precious promises which might have cheered the hopeless, but I am altogether beaten. I can do nothing." Now, you may quote the language of the Psalm we sang this morning—

> "When He shuts up in long despair,
> Who can remove the heavy bar?"

Such cases are not at all uncommon. What a happy day it is when God, having proved to us that we cannot loose the bands of Orion, looses them Himself, and says to the captives, "Go free!" These make the best of Christians, when they obtain liberty; they become amongst the fairest of the divine family, when they anoint their faces with the oil of joy. The terrible experience they have had helps them to sympathize with others, and instructs them in the devices of Satan, so that they can console others.

If it sometimes becomes a puzzle how to cheer others, I am sure it is so with *yourself*. Whenever I get under the bands of Orion, I find I cannot loose them from my own hands. There are some very happy, cheerful spirits, who appear to have no winter, but the most of us occasionally fall into doubts and fears, and spiritual decays, when our liveliness and joy are at a low ebb.

> "If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
> To find I cannot feel."

We are, in the words of the text, bound with the bands of Orion, frost-bound, ice-bound. The soul, which once ran warbling on like a clear stream, is cold and hard as a stone; its prayers are like icicles, its emotions like blocks of ice. Then, brethren, you may try and make the effort, as you ought to do, to loosen yourself from these bands, but you are powerless. Then is that text learned experimentally, "Without Me ye can do nothing." Oh, then we feel that we are less than nothing and vanity, while merciless Orion hangs fetters on our soul, and hunts our joy to death. Blessed be God, the warmth of love ere long returns, and the Pleiades shine again, and then we "Rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Now, brethren, this same truth is carried out in our works of faith in connection with *each soul*. You are going into your classes this afternoon, and I would be far from dispiriting you, but I would have you remember that if you attempt to convert a soul yourself, you had better first answer the question of our text, "Canst thou loose the bands of Orion?" It were easier for you to turn winter into summer

than to turn a child of wrath into an heir of grace. You have a task before you which is utterly impossible to human strength. Conversion is no more in your power than creation. Regeneration lies not with you, but men are begotten again by the great Father of Spirits unto a lively hope. Bow before the power of God, but feel at this moment your own utter powerlessness in the work to which He has called you. To turn an understanding from darkness to light, to make the stubborn will supple, to break the iron sinew of pride, and make the neck to bow with cheerful obedience—this belongs not unto you, but unto the Eternal Spirit who is omnipotent in the world of mind. Think of this, and go in His strength, and not in your own.

Brethren, if it be so with individuals, it is, in proportion, equally so with entire *congregations*. We have, under God, as His servants, to save a perishing world; we are sent out as labourers in Christ's vineyard to be the means of reclaiming the wild wastes to the husbandry of Christ; but what a task is ours! How impossible! We had better first attempt to loose the bands of Orion before we shall be able, unaided of God, to loose the bands of wickedness, and say to the oppressed, "Go free!" The missionary enterprise, apart from supernatural influences, is the most insane that ever crossed the mind of man. Yea, I will venture to say, that the work of preaching the gospel, even in Christian England, is of all attempts the most foolish, unless we believe in the celestial power, which alone can make preaching to be of any avail. Withdraw the Spirit; withdraw our belief in His power, and our teachings become the subjects of deserved ridicule. It is even so in our attempts to revive a *slumbering church*. I discern a sleeping church pretty readily. When I am preaching in any place, I can soon tell what kind of people I am preaching to by their looks. There is a fire that flashes where there is life. Truth draws forth a responsive glance; good men's bosoms heave while Christ is preached; but in some places hearers are stolid, cold, dead; you might almost as well preach to the green hillocks that surround the church as preach to them; they stir not, they move not, neither can they be moved. Now, at such times it is very dispiriting unless one can fall back upon the belief that the Holy Ghost can, if He wills, on a sudden, quicken the most dead of all professing churches, and make His people again to live, so that like the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision, they shall stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army, ready to fight the battle of their Master. Canst thou loose the bands of Orion? Christian, feel thy powerlessness. Behold, what must be done, and yet how thou canst do less than nothing in it! Stand here, and hear the voice of God which now speaks to thee; that voice I will try to expound in the third part of the subject, which consists of THE LESSONS DRAWN FROM THIS GREAT TRUTH, that we can neither restrain nor yet command the influences of the Holy Ghost.

On the very surface lies the lesson of *humility*. I trust, brethren, I have no need to say this, for the doctrine before us must have already had an effect upon your minds: while you have been thinking of the power of God, and of your own insignificance, you must have felt bowed down and humbled. It is always dangerous to be useful. It is to be desired above silver, and coveted above fine gold, and yet, when obtained, it has its measure of dangers, for Satan will whisper even if natural pride do not, "What an excellent man thou must be! What qualifications there must be in thee! What glory God gets out of thee!" "See," says the devil, "hundreds saved under you! Believers comforted under you!" and then the foul thought, the wicked thought seeks to build its nest right under the eaves of God's own temple in the heart, "Thou art something after all." But, brethren, we need to be brought back to this, "Thou canst do nothing out of Christ; thou art, apart from Him, a withered bough, to be gathered and cast into the fire." Yes, thou preacher, powerful, useful, honoured of God, nothing but a withered bough, apart from Christ! Yes, thou godly woman, thou godly, earnest man, engaged in the Sabbath-school or in the Bible-class, all speak well of thee, and yet thou art a cloud without rain, and a well without water, unless thou hast a vital union with Christ! As well might a child uproot an Alp, as thou attempt to win a soul apart from Christ! As well an infant creep from the cradle, and pluck the sun from its place, and hurl the moon into the deep, as thou be able to deliver a soul from going down into the pit. Oh, this thought, brethren! I feel as if I could not speak of it, for it prostrates me before God, and makes me ask Him never to leave me to myself to think myself something, lest He be angry with me, and use me no more.

Should not the next thought which comes into the mind be that of *gratitude and adoration* to God? If we cannot command the Holy Spirit's power, yet *He* can. What if Orion's bands cannot be loosed by us, they can be loosed by Him! There is no despairing soul that cannot find comfort when He visits it. "Yea, He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children"; "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people." "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." He openeth the blind eyes, and bringeth "out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." Glory be to His name! Where the human arm fails to work results, the divine arm with ease achieves its purpose. And with us here, within our hearts, these gardens so frost-bitten, can be visited by Him; and if the Well-beloved comes, the summer comes with all its pleasant fruits. If Jesus will but walk into this garden, and open the doors of our hearts and enter in, then there will be a paradise where there was aforetime a wilderness. Blessed be the Lord, we cannot have sunk so low but He can lift us up; we cannot be so barren and so comfortless but what He can make us fruitful and give us joy and peace again. There is no church which He cannot revive. Are you members of congregations which are slumbering? Do not despair. You will go home after the day's service, and say, "I wish I could do some good here, but I am only one." No, dear brother, you cannot loose the bands of Orion, but God can. The great Head of His Church can suddenly come into His temple, and fill it with His glory. He can rake together the almost expiring ashes, and kindle the fire anew, and bring the sacrifice, and make your church yet to be a temple to His praise. Glorify the name of God, the All-powerful One: never let despair cross your soul. While He lives who made heaven and earth; while He works who bears up the pillars of the universe; while He loves who once gave up His Son to redeem us, there

can be no cause for trembling. Zion shall be comforted; her days of gladness shall dawn; her winter of sorrow shall flee away: God is on her side, and Orion relaxes his bands.

There is another lesson, however, which I must not fail to bring before you in a word or two, namely, this: behold *the path and walk of faith*! She cannot walk in human power. She hath quick eyes, and she perceives mortal might to be a mere pretence, but she walketh in the power of the unseen One. "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?" Faith answers, "I can." If Joshua bound the sun, put chains upon the horns of the moon, faith feels that she can do the same. Canst thou loose the bands of Orion? "Aye," says faith, "that I can"; for if Elias, for three years of drought, prayed, and the heavens were covered with clouds, and there was a sound of abundance of rain, and he did this by the prayer of faith, even so can we do by the power of Him that liveth and ruleth in the highest heavens. Faith hath the art of getting hold upon the arm of God, and then, though she cannot stir or move in her own strength, yet she moveth the arm of God that moves everything; she touches the motor nerve of omnipotence, and He acts whose action is conquest, whose work never fails. O brethren and sisters, if we can believe and pray, all things will be possible to us, and we shall hold the Holy Spirit bound in this church, to remain with us for many and many a year, for He never will depart while His people's cries and tears, and joyful thanksgivings are like a golden chain to stay His blessed feet; He will be bound and held by us. We may do with Him as the spouse did with her beloved. "I found him," says she, "and I would not let him go." O beloved members of this church, make it a resolution that the Holy Spirit shall not go from us, that we will, with diligent service, and unceasing prayer, and constant gratitude, stay Him and compel Him, seeing the day is far spent, to abide with us. One of the best ways to retain the Holy Spirit is to use what powers we have. Look at our husbandmen, how busy they have been during the last two or three weeks, while the sun was shining, to gather in their hay! We must use every gleam of heavenly sunshine, for Jesus' sake. It does not always come, but when a church is favoured with it, let it use it to the utmost of its power, for God will not continue to give while we do not appreciate, and prove our appreciation by making the full use of it. Yes, prayer and faith can hold the Spirit.

Prayer and faith can also loose the bands of Orion. We will have sinners saved, we will have churches revived, we will have London yet warmed with the life of God. Not because we can do it, but because we will give *Him* no rest until He comes forth from His secret dwelling-place, and make the power and life of His truth to be known from the ends of the earth.

The drift of the sermon is to cut you off from yourselves, and throw you flat on your faces before God. Sinner, you cannot save yourself, you cannot bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, you cannot take away from yourself those bands of Orion, but Jehovah can, and in simple faith in Him who offers His blood before the throne, come to your Father, and ask Him to do these things for you, and they shall be done, and you shall glorify His name. May the blessing of of God descend upon these words, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

JOB AMONG THE ASHES

"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."—Job xlii. 5, 6.

JEHOVAH had spoken, Job had trembled. The Lord had revealed Himself, Job had seen Him. Truly, God did but display the skirts of His robe, and unveil a part of His ways; but therein there was so much of ineffable glory, that Job laid his hand upon his mouth in token of his silent consent to the claims of the Everlasting One. God spoke of Job out of the whirlwind concerning the greatness of His power, the wonders of His workings, the splendour of His skill, the infinity of His wisdom. Carefully read that wonderful speech of the Most High to the trembling patriarch. I dare not call it poetry; for it rises as much above human poetry as the sublimest poetry stands above the poorest prose. It is simply a statement of facts, and these are mentioned in language of the simplest kind; but the overpowering glory of the utterance lies in the facts themselves. These sublime stanzas are spoken in the idiom of God. Those only know the peculiar style of the living God who have become familiar with the sacred Word in spirit and in truth, and such persons can at once distinguish the speech of Jehovah from that of men. Read the divine address, that you may see how Jehovah caused the afflicted patriarch to feel Him near.

In the confession which now lies before us, *Job acknowledges God's boundless power;* for he exclaims, "I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee." He felt that whatever the Lord chose to think or desire He could at once accomplish. Job had a glimpse of that omnipotence of which the height and depth no mind can ever measure.

Job sees his own folly. He speaks like a man in a maze or a muse, and he says, "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?" Look at the second verse of chapter thirty-eight, and you will see that he is quoting what God had said to him. The Lord's words are ringing in his ears, and in his anguish he repeats them, accepting them as justly applicable to himself. It is not far from being right with us when the words of God can fitly become our words. "The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" And now Job replies, "I am that foolish one: I uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." Job felt that what he had spoken of himself, yet in the main the Lord was in the main true; and [illegible] said to Job's three friends,

" Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath " ; but under a sense of the divine presence Job felt that even when he had spoken aright, he had spoken beyond his own proper knowledge, uttering speech whose depths of meaning he could not himself fathom. Many a holy prophet has done this, for inspired men are described as those who " enquired and searched diligently ; searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." It is not the thoughts of the prophets which have been inspired of God so much as their words ; for frequently they were moved to speak prophecies which were quite beyond their own understanding : in fact, my brethren, are not all the great mysteries of the faith above human thought ? and may we not fearlessly assert that no inspired man has ever known all the depth of God's meaning treasured up in the words which he himself has been led by the Spirit of God to write ? Hence I assert that there is a verbal inspiration, or no inspiration at all worthy of the name. Job, as he comes before us in the text, is impressed with his own folly. He had to a large degree spoken what he felt sure was true, but he now feels that he did not understand what he said ; and he at the same time tacitly confesses that he may have said in his bitterness many an unwise and unseemly thing, and therefore he bows his head before the Lord his God, and confesses that he has darkened counsel by words without knowledge, and uttered things that he understood not.

Notwithstanding, *the man of God proceeds to draw near unto the Lord*, before whom he bows himself. Foolish as he confesses himself to be, he does not therefore fly from the supreme wisdom. Although he knows that he has babbled ignorantly, he does not therefore seek to hide away from the Lord, as Adam did when he sought the shade of the trees of the garden. No, he takes up the Lord's words again, and is emboldened by them to approach. Read the thirty-eighth chapter, third verse ; the Lord there says, " Gird up now thy loins like a man : for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me." Like a man in a dream, Job accepts the invitation, and answers, " Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak : I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me." This was brave and wise action. Whatever Job might be or might not be, he was a firm believer in his God, and in every word which the Lord was pleased to speak. He held even to discouraging words with desperate tenacity, and even learned to find honey in words which roared like lions upon him. Hence, when he is humbled in the dust, he recollects that God had bidden him draw nigh to Him ; and albeit to his fears that bidding may have sounded like a challenge, yet to his faith it becomes an encouragement, and he in effect replies, " My God, I will venture to take Thee at Thy word. Thou biddest me come, and come I will. Dust and ashes though I be, I will do as Thou dost allow me, and make my humble appeal to Thee." Dear friends, it is altogether wrong to allow our sense of folly or of sin to drive us away from God ; but it is altogether right when our humiliation draws us to the Lord, and our conscious need drives us to the throne of grace. The more foolish and sinful we are, the more urgent is our need to come to God, who alone can make us clean, and instruct us in the way of heavenly wisdom. I commend to you, therefore, God's servant Job, of whom I may say, whatever fault we may perceive in him, none of us could have behaved so gloriously as he did ; unless, indeed, the Lord should give us like grace. The Lord led Job to find fault with himself, yet God Himself does not complain of him, but even commends him. The three carping friends are commanded to bring a costly sacrifice, but this was not demanded from Job ; and even when they brought their seven bullocks the Lord did not accept them till Job, whom they had condemned, had made intercession for them. Job bore away the palm from the conflict. So let us do as Job did, and make our approach unto the Lord in child-like confidence even when He seems to frown. Let us get where Job was when he said, " Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." When we bow lowest before His throne, let not our humble bending have anything of distance in it. Lowlier before Thee, O Lord, would we be ; but at the same time our cry is, " Nearer to Thee."

Thus we come to the text, having used the connection as a step to its door. On the text I make three observations : first, *we have sometimes very vivid impressions of God.* Job said, " I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear : but now mine eye seeth Thee." In the second place, *when we are favoured with these clearer views of God, we have lowlier thoughts of ourselves*—" wherefore I abhor myself " ; and thirdly, *whenever we are thus made lowly, our heart is filled with repentance :* " I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." May the Holy Spirit aid us in this experimental meditation !

I. First, then, WE HAVE SOMETIMES VERY VIVID IMPRESSIONS OF GOD. Job had long before *heard* of God, and that is a great matter. I do not think he meant merely that he had heard men speak of God, but that he had really, for himself, heard God's voice. He had been a reverent believer in the teachings of God, and an obedient servant to His commands : thus he had really heard God. The man who can say this can say a great deal. If God has ever been on speaking terms with you, you have much cause for gratitude. It is clear that you are not dead in sin, or if you were so when the Lord spoke to you, you are now alive ; for His voice causes the dead to live. If you have heard God in the secret of your soul, you are a spiritual man ; for only a spirit can hear the Spirit of God : none can discern the Lord but the man to whom He has given spiritual life. Job had heard God, but now he has a more vivid apprehension of Him. It is sometimes said that one eye-witness is better than ten ear-witnesses, and there is much truth in the saying : certainly, facts perceived by the eye make a far more vivid impression upon the mind than the same facts heard by the ear. If we witness a sad scene of poverty it has far more effect upon our heart than the most graphic description. Word-painting can never bring out the reality of a thing so well as the actual sight of it. Of course, Job could not literally see God, he does not mean to assert that he did ; for " no man hath seen God at any time " ; but Job means that he now had a view of God very much more clear than any which he had obtained before ; in fact, as much clearer as eyesight is more clear than hearing.

Notice, that *in order to this close vision of God affliction had overtaken him.* It was not till after he had scraped himself with the potsherd, nor till his friends had scraped him with something worse than potsherds, that Job could say, " Mine eye seeth Thee." Not till every camel and every sheep had been stolen,

and every child was dead, could the afflicted patriarch cry, "Now mine eye seeth Thee." Happy is that man who in prosperity can hear the voice of God in the tinkling of the sheep-bells of his abundant flocks, can hear Him in the lowing of the oxen which cover his fields, and in the loving voices of dear children around him. But, mark you! prosperity is a painted window which shuts out much of the clear light of God, and only when the blue, and the crimson, and the golden tinge are removed, is the glass restored to its full transparency. Adversity thus takes away tinge, and colour, and dimness, and we see our God far better than before, if our eyes are prepared for the light. The Lord had taken everything away from Job, and this paved the way to his giving him more of Himself. In the absence of other goods the good God is the better seen. In prosperity God is *heard*, and that is a blessing; but in adversity God is *seen*, and that is a greater blessing. Sanctified adversity quickens our spiritual sensitiveness. Sorrow after sorrow will wake up the spirit, and it will infuse into it a delicacy of perception which, perhaps, does not often come to us in any other way. I purposely say, "perhaps"; for I believe that some choice saints are favoured to reach it by smoother ways; but I think they are very few. The most of us are of such coarse material that we need melting, aye, and braying as in a mortar before we attain to that sacred softness by which the Lord God is joyfully perceived. O child of God, if thou art to suffer as much as Job suffered, if thou gettest to see the Lord with a spiritually enlightened eye, thou mayest be thankful for the sorrowful process! Who would not go to Patmos if he might see the visions of John, and who would not sit on the dunghill with Job to cry with him, "Now mine eye seeth Thee"?

Possibly, also, *helpful to this was Job's desertion by his friends.* Job's three friends! Ah me, I know their kindred! They were most devotedly attached to him, no doubt; and how warmly they proved it! They had met together with him, and said soft and sweet things to him in those days when he moved like a prince among the nobles of his people, and every eye that saw him blessed him. But when they found him sitting "down among the ashes," they had altered thoughts of him. They suspected him; and though they knew nothing against him, yet they perceived that he was not in the same honour as before. Between a prince in ermine and the same man in sackcloth there is, to some minds, a great difference. Besides, the instinct of self-preservation leads men to hold off from one who is sinking, lest they sink with him. After sitting in silence for a week, these excellent men found it in their hearts to assail him with their judicious observations. Here and there they inserted nice little bits of cruelty, all meant for his good. Was he not covered with sores? Was there not a cause for all this? By this torture God delivered Job from men: he was not likely after that to incur the curse which comes through making flesh your arm. He was also strengthened in personal independence of mind: he could clearly see that his breath was in his own nostrils, and not in other people's, and that he could stand alone by God's help, aye, even stand against those eminent men who had contended with him. Friends are all too apt to block out our view of our best Friend. When gracious minds are driven from men, they are drawn to God, and learn to sing with David, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him." I do not doubt therefore that the desertion and upbraiding endured by Job from his friends, were a great help towards his being able to say to the Lord his God, "Now mine eye seeth Thee." Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar might have interposed between Job and God, and their kindly help might have placed Job under lasting obligations to them; but now he looks alone to God, and honours Him only.

Still, *before Job could see the Lord, there was a special manifestation on God's part to him.* "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind." God must really come and in a gracious way make a display of Himself to His servants, or else they will not see Him. Your afflictions will not of themselves reveal God to you. If the Lord Himself does not unveil His face, your sorrow may even blind and harden you, and make you rebellious. The desertion and unkindness of friends is, also, no help to grace: its tendency is to sour and imperil your piety, if it act out its natural influence: there must be a special revealing of the Lord to our own souls before we shall get such a clear apprehension of Him as Job intended by the words, "Now mine eye seeth Thee." Read through the thirty-eighth chapter, and see how Jehovah declares His wisdom and His power: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?" "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?" Here was a marvellous field for thought. The Lord speaks in nature, and it is done. His glory is seen in heaven and earth, in the sea, and all deep places. God is, and there is none beside Him. Yea, Jehovah is God alone.

Nor did the Lord fail to show to Job His justice, defying him to emulate it. See the fortieth chapter, eleventh and twelfth verses:—"Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place." God is the supreme governor, and He beareth not the sword in vain; He is impartial and infallible, and none can disannul His judgment, or condemn His acts.

I need not tarry to say to you that all through that wonderful address of the Lord to His servant He is saying, in so many words, "I am God; but who art thou?" The Lord is proving that nothing is impossible to His power and His wisdom. He had, after all, not allowed His servant to sink out of His reach. He was always able to rescue him. You learn here, also, that God is not amenable to our judgment. He giveth no account of His matters. He makes Job feel that He is God, and then there is an end of the matter. No apology is made to Job, and no explanation is given him: he must bow in unreserved submission and surrender unconditionally; and he does so.

Notice how by the Lord's first words Job was silenced, and could only whisper, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further."

Thus far he worshipped; but he must yet go further, until he cries, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

II. We have now reached our second point—WHEN WE HAVE THESE VIVID APPREHENSIONS OF GOD, WE HAVE LOWLIER VIEWS OF OURSELVES.

Why are the wicked so proud? It is because they forget God. Why did Pharaoh dare to say, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" It was because he did not know Jehovah; but after those ten plagues, he altered his tone, and cried out, "Intreat the Lord (for it is enough"). Even his great pride was forced to bow before Jehovah when judgments were let loose upon him. If men knew God, how it would change their thoughts and talk! If they could have even an indistinct idea "by the hearing of the ear," many of them would never be so irreverent as they now are, nor so lofty in their ideas of their own wisdom; but if they could "see" Him as Job did, and behold His inexpressible glory, they would become far more meek and lowly.

Here let me observe that *God Himself is the measure of rectitude*, and hence, when we come to think of God, we soon discover our own shortcomings and transgressions. Too often we compare ourselves among ourselves, and are not wise. A man says, "I am not so bad as many, and I am quite as good as such a one, who is in high repute." What if it be so? Dost thou judge thyself by other erring ones? The measuring line is false; it is not the standard of the sanctuary. If thou wouldest be right, thou must measure thyself with the holiness of God; God Himself is the standard of perfect holiness, truth, love, and justice; and if thou fallest short of His glory, thou hast fallen short of what thou oughtest to be. When I think of this, self-righteousness seems to me to be a wretched insanity.

If you would know what God is, He sets Himself before us in the person of His dear Son. In every respect in which we fall short of the perfect character of Jesus, in that respect we sin. There is no better description of sin that I know of than this: "Sin is any want of conformity to the law of God," and God's law is the transcript of His own mind. Wherein in any moral or spiritual respect, we fall short of the divine character, we to that extent fall into sin. No, my brethren, we cannot hear the ceaseless cry of the cherubim, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," without at once sinking, sinking, sinking, till we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes. Permit me to suggest to each one here who has a high idea of himself, and has no sense of self-abhorrence, that such self-honour must arise from ignorance of God; for there is such an immeasurable distance between the perfection of God and our faultiness that our true position is that of penitent humility.

Our next reflection is this: *God Himself is the object of every transgression*, and this sets sin in a terrible light. Sin frequently has our fellow-men as its object; but even then I am not incorrect in what I have said, for sins against our fellow-men are still sins against God. It would be well if we felt with David—"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." Think, then, of sin as an offence against God, committed in God's presence, committed while He is looking on. My beloved friends, in this light observe the wantonness of sin; for who could wish to offend against a perfectly holy and entirely loving God? If God is all He should be, why do we not agree with Him? If in God we see every possible and conceivable good, why do we set up ourselves, our wills, our desires in opposition to Him? He is so gracious towards man that He may be described by that one word "love"; and if it be so, why do we not love Him with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength? Every shortcoming and every transgression, therefore, is a wanton offence against infinite goodness. If Jehovah were a tyrant there might be some excuse for rebellion; but since He is infinitely just and loving, it is atrocious that His own creatures, aye, His own children, should offend against Him.

Note, next, the impertinence of sin. How dare we transgress against God? O man, who art thou that rebellest against God? How darest thou to do to His face that which He forbids thee? How darest thou to leave undone in His very presence that which thy Lord commands thee to do? This makes sin a piece of presumption, a daring and glaring provocation of the Lord God. Thus it is evident that in the immediate presence of God sin doth like itself appear.

The fact that sin is levelled at God makes us bow in lowliness. Although some of us can hold our heads high among our fellow-men, and we can say, "I am neither a drunkard, nor a thief, nor a liar, neither have I offended against the laws of integrity and charity"; yet when we come before God, we perceive that we have not dealt towards Him as we ought to have done. To Him we have been thieves, robbing Him of His glory. "Will a man rob God?" To Him we have been liars: we have dealt treacherously, and have broken our promises. To Him we have been ingrates; to Him we have been worse than brutes. Instead of equity, we have dealt towards God iniquity. Instead of love, we have dealt out enmity. The Lord has nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Him. Even our holy things have been defiled; our best tears need to be wept over, and our truest faith is spoiled with unbelief. Oh, when we think of this, we can understand why Job says, "Now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself."

Once more, *when God is seen with admiration, then of necessity we are filled with self-loathing.* The more you appreciate God, the more you will depreciate yourself. While the thought of God rises higher, and higher, and higher, you also will sink lower and lower in your own esteem. The word used by Job, "I abhor myself," is a strong one. It might be paraphrased thus, "I nauseate myself. I am disgusted with myself. I cast forth from my soul every proud thought of myself—cast it out from me as a sickening and intolerable thing." Ah, dear friends, you have not seen God aright if your abhorrence turns upon your fellow-men; but if the one man you abhor is yourself, you are not mistaken! A sight of God will make us regard our fellow-creatures with sympathy, as involved in the same sin and misery as ourselves. As a common danger in a sinking ship makes every man a brother to his fellow, so a clear sense of our common guilt and ruin will make us feel the brotherhood of man: but, on the other hand, a sight of God will prevent our dreaming of personal excellence, and will compel us to take the lowest room. Since God is glorious in our eyes, we become ashamed. We adore God, and in contrast, we abhor self.

Do you know what self-loathing means? Some of you do, I know. And I am sure that in proportion as you truly love, reverence, and worship God, in that proportion you are full of abhorrence of self. You

fine gentlemen, who hold your heads so high that you can scarcely get through common doorways, you know nothing of this! You high and mighty ladies, who cannot condescend to associate with any who are not of your superior rank; and you purse-proud men, who expect all to worship the golden calf which you have set up, you know nothing about this. O you wonderfully wise men, you intellectual persons, who so modestly dub yourselves "thoughtful and cultured," you snuff out a poor evangelical believer as if he were an idiot; may the Lord give you an hour of Job's "I abhor myself," and then you will be bearable; but as you now are, you are a trial! While the dunghill is your proper place, you covet the throne of the Almighty; but He will not yield it to you: you would improve upon divine revelation, and revise infallible inspiration; but your boasting is vain. Oh that you had a manifestation of God, and then you would know yourselves! God grant it to you for His mercy's sake!

III. Thirdly, I have to show you that such A SIGHT FILLS THE HEART WITH TRUE REPENTANCE. Job says, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" The word "myself" has been added by the translators; and they could hardly have done otherwise. Job's expression, however, refers to all that had come out of himself, or had lurked within himself. He abhorred all that he had been doing and saying. He says, "I abhor and repent in dust and ashes." What did he repent of? I think Job repented, first, of *that tremendous curse which he had pronounced upon the day of his birth.* It was terrific. See third chapter. "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months." He wished he had perished from the womb, that his birthcry had been his first and his last:— "For now should I have lain still and been quiet." Before God Job has to eat his bitter words. It is always a pity to say too much in moments of agony, because we may have to unsay that which escapes us. He would not curse God, but he did curse the day of his birth, and it was unseemly. Of this he unfeignedly repents.

Next, Job heartily repented of *his desire to die.* In the sixth chapter he expresses it as he did several times: he says, "Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that He would let loose His hand, and cut me off!" Do you wonder that he said this? Was ever man so tried? I do not wonder at all, even at his cursing the day of his birth, considering all the bodily pain and mental irritation which he was enduring at the time. I wonder that he played the man as well as he did; but still he must have looked back with deep regret upon his impatience. The last verses of the book run thus: "After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days." This is the same man who begged to die. Elijah also said, "Let me die, I am no better than my fathers," and yet he never died at all. What poor creatures we are! What haste impatience breeds!

Job had to repent, next, of *all his complaints against God.* These had been very many. In the seventh chapter he turns to God and says, "I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I a sea, or a whale, that Thou settest a watch over me? When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then Thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity. How long wilt Thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?" Ah! poor Job had to swallow his murmuring as well as his spittle, for he repents of every rebellious thought. He complains of his having complained, and with self-abhorrence he repents in dust and ashes.

I do not doubt but what Job repented of *his despair.* The ninth and tenth chapters, and many other passages wherein Job speaks, are tinged with hopelessness. He felt as if God had left him a prey to the enemy; but this was not true. The Lord has never deserted any one of His people. There is not on record in all the history of the ages a case in which God has failed them that trust Him. Has he not said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" and He never has left nor forsaken any believer; yet Job evidently thought that He had done so, and he was greatly troubled.

Job had uttered *rash challenges of God.* In the ninth chapter, at the thirty-fourth verse, he says that there is no daysman between him and God, or else, he would plead his cause: "Let Him take His rod away from me; and let not His fear terrify me: then would I speak, and not fear Him: but it is not so with me." This was wrong, and Job abhorred himself for having fallen into so ill a temper, and so little becoming in a man of God.

His critics goaded him by cruelly charging him with hypocrisy and wickedness, and Job vindicated himself with great earnestness, appealing to God, and saying, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." This was true. The indignation of an honest heart cannot be blamed for speaking thus to men; but Job felt that he could not speak thus before the Lord. He could plead his innocence in the common courts of men, and there he could well enough defend himself; but when the matter came into the King's own court, he could not answer in the same strain, but felt compelled to plead guilty. Job has to retract all his pleadings and challenges. If the case is to be heard as "Jehovah *versus* Job," then Job yields the point unreservedly. Who is he that can contend with his Maker over a matter of holiness? We are wrong, God must be right!

Job had also to confess that his statements had been a darkening of wisdom by words without knowledge. Sometimes we say, "I perfectly understand *that*; I could clear up that mystery." We define this and define that to our brethren; but when we get into the presence of God, we find that our definitions are the proofs of our ignorance. "Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt." Job drops his wisdom as well as his righteousness, although he was one of the wisest and holiest of men. While we see not God, we fancy that we read all the riddles of His word, but when we behold Him more nearly, we say with David, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee." We are apt to judge the Lord by feeble sense instead of trusting Him for His grace. This cometh of evil. In the presence of God Job bowed his head and repented of all his suspicions and mistrusts; and this is what we must do if, in the

day of our sorrow, we have been petulant and unbelieving.

Let me pass on. According to our text, *repentance puts man into the lowest place.* He says, " I repent in dust and ashes." " Dust and ashes "—that signifies the dust-heap, or what in Scotland they call the " midden." Job had made dust and ashes his headquarters. The dunghill, the refuse place, was now the spot which he felt to be fitted for him. Repentance puts us in a lowly seat. You have heard sometimes, I dare say, among the beautiful nothings of the modern school, the mention of " the dignity of human nature." Behold a throne for " the dignity of human nature." Yonder dust and ashes are for this proud royalty. The dust-heap is for human nature in its glory, when it has on its richest robes. When it takes its worst place, where is it ? The lowest pit of hell, prepared for the devil and his angels, is the fit place for man when he has at last come to his true estate. I say that when man wears his best Sunday righteousness, he is even then only fit for the midden ; and every man of God that has been brought to true repentance, owns that it is so. Alas ! saith the man that sees his sinfulness, I should be a disgrace to any dust shoot ; if I were cast away with the rotten refuse of the house, it might creep away from me, because my sin is a worse corruption than physical nature knows of, an insult to the worm of decay, since in common putridity there is not the foul offence of moral evil. Repentance, you see, makes a man take the lowest place.

Next, note that *all real repentance is joined with holy sorrow and self-loathing.* I have read in the sermons of certain teachers that " Repentance is only a change of mind." That may be true ; but what a change of mind it is ! It is not such a change of mind as some of you underwent this morning when you said, " It is really too cold to go out," but afterwards you braved the snow, and came to the Tabernacle. Oh, no ! repentance is a thorough and radical change of mind, and it is accompanied with real sorrow for sin, and self-loathing. A repentance in which there is no sorrow for sin will ruin the soul. Repentance without sorrow for sin is not the repentance of God's elect. If thou canst look upon sin without sorrow, then thou hast never looked on Christ. A faith-look at Jesus breaks the heart, both for sin and from sin. Try thyself by this test.

But, next, *repentance has comfort in it.* It is to my mind rather extraordinary that the Hebrew word, which is justly translated " repent," is also used in two or three places at least in the Old Testament to express comfort. Isaac, it is said, took Rebekah to his mother's tent, and was " *comforted* after his mother's death." Here the word is the same as that which is here rendered " repent." Isaac's mind was changed as to the death of his mother. As, then, there is in the Hebrew word just a tinge of comfort, so in repentance itself, with all its sorrow, there are traces of joy. Repentance is a bitter-sweet or a sweet-bitter. After thou hast tasted it in thy mouth as gall, it will go down into thy belly and be sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.

The door of repentance opens into the halls of joy. Job's repentance in dust and ashes was the sign of his deliverance. God turned His wrath upon the three critics, but justified Job, and gave him the honourable office of intercessor on their behalf. Then " the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends" " The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning," and the turning point was that sitting down in the dust and ashes. When you are brought as low as you can be, the next turn must be upward. Down with you, then ! Off with the feathers of your pride, and the finery of your self-righteousness ! Down with you among the useless and worthless things ! From that point you will ascend. The more crushed, humbled, exhausted, and near to death, you are, the more prepared you are for God to raise you up.

Job was an unrivalled saint ; none of us can compare with him ; and if that perfect and upright man had to say, " I abhor myself," what will you and I say when we see God ? We shall by-and-by behold Him on the judgment-seat ; how shall we endure it ? If you have no righteousness but your own, you will stand naked to your shame in the day when the Lord appeareth. You self-righteous men, dare you go before God in your own righteousness ? If you dare, I marvel at your presumption. Job dared not. He could stand up boldly before his accusers, but when before God he was in another attitude. When it comes to dying and appearing before the Most High, you that have no righteousness but one of your own spinning, what will you do ? If God should take away your soul at once, could you dare to go before Him in that fine character of yours, that wonderful morality, that large generosity ? If you have any sense left, you dare not attempt such a thing.

What shall you and I do ? Brethren, we are not afraid ; for there is a righteousness of God which is given to us by faith through Jesus Christ. God Himself cannot find any fault with His own righteousness ; and if He gives me His own righteousness, even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ, which is to all and upon all them that believe, then I may hope to sit at last, not on the midden, but on the throne, rejoicing to find myself in Christ Jesus, crowned with a crown which I shall delight to cast at His feet. How happy are we if we can sing—

> " Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
> My beauty are, my glorious dress ;
> 'Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,
> With joy shall I lift up my head " !

THE TURNING OF JOB'S CAPTIVITY

"The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends; also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."—Job xlii. 10.

SINCE God is immutable He acts always upon the same principles, and hence His course of action in the olden times to a man of a certain sort will be a guide as to what others may expect who are of like character. God does not act by caprice, nor by fits and starts. He has His usual modes and ways. The psalmist David uses the expression, "Then will I teach transgressors *Thy ways*," as if God had well-known ways, habits, and modes of action; and so He has, or He would not be the unchangeable Jehovah. In that song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, which is recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Revelation, we read, "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." The Lord has ways as high above our ways as the heavens are above the earth, and these are not fickle and arbitrary. These ways, although very different if we view them superficially, are really always the same when you view them with understanding. The ways of the Lord are right, though transgressors fall therein by not discerning them; but the righteous understand the ways of the Lord, for to them He makes them known, and they perceive that grand general principles govern all the actions of God. If it were not so, the case of such a man as Job would be of no service to us. It could not be said that the things which happened aforetime happened unto us for an ensample, because if God did not act on fixed principles we could never tell how He would act in any fresh case, and that which happened to one man would be no rule whatever, and no encouragement whatever, to another. We are not all like Job, but we all have Job's God. Though we have neither risen to Job's wealth, nor will, probably, ever sink to Job's poverty, yet there is the same God above us if we be high, and the same God with His everlasting arms beneath us if we be brought low; and what the Lord did for Job He will do for us, not precisely in the same form, but in the same spirit, and with like design. If, therefore, we are brought low to-night, let us be encouraged with the thought that God will turn again our captivity; and let us entertain the hope that after the time of trial shall be over, we shall be richer, especially in spiritual things, than ever we were before. There will come a turning point to the growing heat of affliction, and the fire shall cool. When the ebb has fallen to its lowest, the sea will return to its strength; when mid-winter has come, spring will be near, and when midnight has struck, then the dawning will not be far away. Perhaps, too, the signal of our happier days shall be the very same as that of the patient patriarch, and when we pray for our friends, blessings shall be poured into our own bosoms.

Our text has in it three points very clearly; firstly, *the Lord can soon turn His people's captivity*: "The Lord turned the captivity of Job." Secondly, *there is generally some point at which He does this*: in Job's case He turned his captivity when he prayed for his friends. And, thirdly, *believers shall never be losers by God*, for He gave Job twice as much as he had before.

I. First, then, THE LORD CAN SOON TURN HIS PEOPLE'S CAPTIVITY.

That is a very remarkable expression—"captivity." It does not say, "God turned his poverty," though Job was reduced to the extremity of penury, having lost all his property. We do not read that the Lord turned his sickness, though he was covered with sore boils. It does not say that He turned away the sting of bereavement, reproach, and calumny, although all those are included. But there is something more meant by the word *captivity*. A man may be very poor, and yet not in captivity, his soul may sing among the angels when his body is on a dunghill, and dogs are licking his sores. A man may be very sick, and yet not be in captivity; he may be roaming the broad fields of covenant mercy though he cannot rise from his bed; and his soul may never enjoy greater liberty than when his body is scarcely able to turn from side to side. Captivity is bondage of mind, the iron entering into the soul. I suspect that Job, under the severe mental trial which attended his bodily pains, was, as to his spirit, like a man bound hand and foot and fettered, and then taken away from his native country, banished from the place which he loved, deprived of the associations which had cheered him, and confined in darkness. I mean that, together with the trouble and trial to which he was subjected, he had lost somewhat the presence of God; much of his joy and comfort had departed; the peace of his mind had gone, and the associations which he had formed with other believers were now broken: he was in all these respects like a lone captive. His three friends had condemned him as a hypocrite, and would not have association with him except to censure him, and thus he felt like one who had been carried into a far country, and banished both from God and man. He could only follow the occupation of a captive, that is, to be oppressed, to weep, to claim compassion, and to pour out a dolorous complaint. He hung his harp on the willows, and felt that he could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land. Poor Job! He is less to be pitied for his bereavements, poverty, and sickness than for his loss of that candle of the Lord which once shone about his head. That is the worst point of all when trouble penetrates to the heart. All the bullets in the battle, though they fly thick as hail, will not distress a soldier like one which finds a lodging in his flesh. "To take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them," is a grand and manly thing; but when that sea of trouble fills the cabin of the heart, puts out the fires of inward energy, washes the judgment from the wheel, and renders the pumps of resolution useless, the man becomes very nearly a wreck. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Touch a man in his bone, and in his flesh, and yet he may exult; but touch him in his mind—let the finger of God be laid upon his spirit—and then, indeed, he is in captivity. I think the term includes all the temporal distress into which Job came, but it chiefly denotes the bondage of spirit into which he was brought, as the combined

result of his troubles, his sickness, the taunts of his friends, and the withdrawal of the divine smile. My point is that God can deliver us out of that captivity; He can both from the spiritual and the temporal captivity give us a joyful release.

The Lord can deliver us out of spiritual captivity, and that very speedily. I may be addressing some, to-night, who feel everything except what they want to feel. They enjoy no sweetness in the means of grace, and yet for all the world they would not give them up. They used at one time to rejoice in the Lord; but now they cannot see His face, and the utmost they can say is, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" It little matters that some live in perpetual joy, the triumphs of others cannot cheer a man who is himself defeated. It is idle to tell a distressed soul that it ought to rejoice as others do. What one ought to do and what one can do are sometimes very different, for how to perform that which we would we find not. In vain do you pour your glad notes into a troubled ear. Singing songs to a sad heart is like pouring vinegar upon nitre, the elements are discordant, and cause a painful effervescence. There are true children of God who walk in darkness and see no light; yea, some who are the excellent of the earth, nevertheless are compelled to cry aloud, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Throughout all time some of these have been in the church, and there always will be such, let our perfect brethren condemn them as they please. The Lord will always have His mourners, His Church shall always have an afflicted and poor people in her midst. Let us all take warning, for we also may be tried and cast down ere our day is over; it may be that the brightest eye among us may yet be dimmed, and the boldest heart may yet be faint, and he that dwells nearest to his God at this moment may yet have to cry out in bitterness of soul, "O God, return unto me, and lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me."

Therefore mark well this cheering truth, God can turn your captivity, and turn it at once. Some of God's children seem to think that to recover their former joy must occupy a long period of time. It is true, dear brother, that if you had to work your passage back to where you came from it would be a weary voyage. There would have to be most earnest searchings of heart and purgings of spirit, strugglings with inbred lusts and outward temptations, and all that, if joy were always the result of inward condition. There must needs be a great deal of scrubbing and cleansing and furbishing up of the house, before you could invite your Lord to come, if He and you dwelt together on terms of law. But albeit, that all this cleansing and purifying will have to be done, it will be done far better when you have a sense of His love than it ever can be if you do it in order to make yourself fit for it. Do you not remember when first you sought Him you wanted Him to deal with you on the legal ground of making yourself better, and you prepared the house for Him to come and dwell in it; but He would not come on such terms. He came to you just as you were, and when He came He Himself drove out the intruders which profaned the temple of your soul, and He dwelt with you, in order to perfect the cleansing. Now He will vouchsafe to you the conscious enjoyment of His presence on the same terms as at first, that is, on terms of free and sovereign grace. Did you not at that time admit the Saviour to your soul because you could not do without Him? Was not that the reason? Is it not a good reason for receiving Him again? Was there anything in you when you received Him which could commend you to Him? Say, were you not all over defilement, and full of sin and misery? And yet you opened the door, and said, "My Lord, come in, in Thy free grace, come in, for I must have Thee or I perish." My dear friend, dare you invite Him now on other terms? Having begun in the Spirit, wouldst thou be made perfect in the flesh? Having begun to live by grace, wouldst thou go on to live by works? When thou wast a stranger, didst thou trust in His love, and now that thou art His friend, wilt thou appeal to the law? God forbid. O, brother, Jesus loves thee still, and in a moment He will restore thee. O, sister, Jesus would fain come back to thy heart again, and that in an instant. Hast thou never read that joyful exclamation of the spouse, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib"? Why, can He not do the same with you now, and quicken and enspirit you even in a moment? After all, you are not worse than you were when He first visited you; you are not in so sorry a plight after all, as your first natural state, for then you were dead in trespasses and sins altogether, and He quickened you, and now, though you say you feel dead, yet the very expression proves that there is some life lingering in you. Did I not hear you say,

> "Return, O Sacred Dove, return,
> Sweet messenger of rest,
> I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
> And drove Thee from my breast."

Why, friend, those sighs and groans are sweet to the Lord, and they would not have been in thee if He had not put them there; they are sure tokens that His grace has not been altogether taken from thee. Knowest thou not, O child of God, that the grace of God is intended to meet all thy sins after conversion as well as before conversion? Dost thou not know that the Lord loved thee of old, despite thy sins, and He loves thee still? Understandest thou not that the ground of thy salvation is not thy standing or thy character, but the standing of Christ before God, and the character and work of Christ in the presence of God? Believe thou firmly that still He loves thee, for so indeed He does. Cast thine eyes upon those dear wounds of His, and read His love still written there. Oh, unbelieving Thomas, do not put thy finger into thine own wounds, for that will not help thee, but place them in the wounds of Jesus. Come close to Him, and thou shalt cry with ecstacy of spirit, "My Lord and my God." Well do I know what it is to feel this wondrous power of God to turn our captivity. When one is constantly engaged in ministry, it sometimes happens that the mind wanders, the spirit flags, and the energy is damped, yet, all in a minute, the Lord can quicken us into vigorous activity; the tow catches fire and blazes gloriously, when the Holy Spirit applies the fire. We have heard a hymn sung, and we have said, "I cannot join in that as I could wish," and yet, on a sudden, a mighty rushing wind has borne us away with the song right into heaven. The Lord does not take days, months, weeks, or even hours, to do His work of revival in our souls. He made the world in six days, but He lit it up in an instant with one single word. He said, "light be," and light was, and cannot He do the same for us, and chase away our

gloom before the clock ticks again? Do not despair, nay, do not even doubt your God. He can turn your captivity as the streams in the south.

Beloved, *He can do the same as to our temporal captivity.* We do not often say much about temporals when we are preaching; I fear we do not say enough about them, for it is wonderful how the Old Testament is taken up with the narration of God's dealings with His people as to temporal things. Many people imagine that God has a great deal to do with their prayer-closet, but nothing to do with their store-closet; it would be a dreadful thing for us if it were so. Indeed, my brethren, we ought to see as much the hand of our Lord on the table in the kitchen when it is loaded as we do at the communion table, for the same love that spreads the table when we commemorate our Saviour's dying love, spreads the table which enables us to maintain the bodily life without which we could not come to the other table at all. We must learn to see God in everything, and praise Him for all that we have. Now, it may be I address some friend who has been a great sufferer through pecuniary losses. Dear friend, the Lord can turn your captivity. When Job had lost everything, God readily gave him all back. "Yes," say you, "but that was a very remarkable case." I grant you that, but then we have to do with a remarkable God, who works wonders still. If you consider the matter you will see that it was quite as remarkable a thing that Job should lose all his property as it was that he should get it back again. If you had walked over Job's farm at first, and seen the camels and the cattle, if you had gone into his house and seen the furniture and the grandeur of his state—if you had seen how those who passed him in the street bowed to him, for he was a highly respected man, and if you had gone to his children's houses, and seen the comfort in which they lived, you would have said, "Why, this is one of the best-established men in all the land of Uz." There was scarcely a man of such substance to be found in all that region, and if somebody had foretold that he would in one day lose all this property—all of it—and lose all his children, why you would have said, "Impossible! I have heard of great fortunes collapsing, but then they were built on speculations. They were only paper riches, made up of bills and the like; but in the case of this man there are oxen, sheep, camels, and land, and these cannot melt into thin air. Job has a good substantial estate, I cannot believe that ever he will come to poverty." Why, when he went out into the gate where the magistrates sat to administer justice, they rose up and gave him the chief seat on the bench. He was a man whose flocks could not be counted, so great were his possessions—possessions of real property, not of merely nominal estate: and yet suddenly, marvellously, it all took to itself wings and disappeared. Surely, if God can scatter He can gather. If God could scatter such an estate as that, He could, with equal ease, bring it back again. But this is what we do not always see. We see the destructive power of God, but we are not very clear about the upbuilding power of God. Yet, my brethren, surely it is more consonant with the nature of God that He should give than take, and more like Him that He should caress than chastise. Does He not always say that judgment is His strange work? I feel persuaded that it was strange work with God to take away all Job's property from him and bring him unto that deep distress; but when the Lord went about to enrich His servant Job again, He went about that work, as we say, *con amore*—with heart and soul. He was doing then what He delights to do, for God's happiness is never more clearly seen than when He is distributing the largesses of His love. Why can you not look at your own circumstances in the same light? It is more likely that God will bless you and restore to you than it was ever likely that He would chasten you and take away from you. He can restore you all your wealth, and even more.

This may seem to be a very trite observation, commonplace, and such as everybody knows, but, beloved, the very things that everybody knows are those which we need to hear, if they are most suitable to our case. Those old things which we did not care about in our prosperity are most valued when we are cast down by the terrible blows of tribulation. Let me then repeat the truism, the Lord who takes away can as easily restore. "The Lord maketh sore, *and bindeth up*; He woundeth, *and His hands make whole.* He killeth, *and He maketh alive.*" Believe that He will put forth His right hand soon if the left has been long outstretched, and, if you can believe it, it will not be long before you will be able to say, He hath regarded the low estate of His servant. He hath lifted the poor from the dunghill and set him among princes, even the princes of His people. For the Lord putteth down the mighty from their seat, but He exalteth them that are of low degree. I leave with you this simple truth. The Lord can turn the captivity of His people. You may apply the truth to a thousand different things. You Sunday-school teachers, if you have had a captivity in your class, and no good has been done, God can change that. You ministers, if for a long time you have ploughed and sowed in vain, the Lord can turn your captivity there. You dear wives who have been praying for your husbands, you fathers who have been pleading for your children, and have seen no blessing yet, the Lord can turn your captivity in those respects. No captivity is so terrible but God can bring us back from it; no chain is so fastened but God can strike it off, and no prison-house is so strong but God can break the bars and set His servants free.

II. I pass on to our second remark, which is this. THERE IS GENERALLY SOME POINT AT WHICH THE LORD INTERPOSES TO TURN THE CAPTIVITY OF HIS PEOPLE.

In Job's case, I have no doubt, the Lord turned His captivity, as far as the Lord was concerned, because *the grand experiment which had been tried on Job was now over.*

The suggestion of Satan was that Job was selfish in his piety—that he found honesty to be the best policy, and, therefore, he was honest—that godliness was gain, and therefore he was godly. "Hast thou not set a hedge about him and all that he hath?" said the old accuser of the brethren. The devil generally does one of two things. Sometimes he tells the righteous that there is no reward for their holiness, and then they say, "Surely, I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency"; or else he tells them that they only obey the Lord because they have a selfish eye to the reward. Now, it would be a calamity if the devil could charge the Lord with paying His servants badly; it would have been an ill thing if the fiend had been able to say, "There is Job, a perfect and an upright man, but

Thou hast set no hedge about him. Thou hast given him no reward whatever." That would have been an accusation against the goodness and justice of God; but, as the devil cannot say that, He takes the other course, and says—"Thou hast set a hedge about him and all that he has; he serves Thee for gain and honour; he has a selfish motive in his integrity." By God's permission the matter was tested. The devil had said, "Put forth now Thy hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." But Job had done no such thing. In his extremity he said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." God puts His servants sometimes into these experiments that He may test them, that Satan himself may know how true-hearted God's grace has made them, and that the world may see how they can play the man. Good engineers, if they build a bridge are glad to have a train of enormous weight go over it. You remember when the first Great Exhibition was built they marched regiments of soldiers, with a steady tramp, over the girders, that they might be quite sure that they would be strong enough to bear any crowd of men; for the regular tramp of well-disciplined soldiers is more trying to a building than anything else. So our wise and prudent Father sometimes marches the soldiery of trouble right over His people's supports, to let all men see that the grace of God can sustain every possible pressure and load. I am sure that if any of you had invented some implement requiring strength you would be glad to have it tested, and the account of the successful trial published abroad. The gunsmith does not object to a charge being fired from the barrel at the proof-house far greater than any strain which it ought ordinarily to bear; for he knows that it will endure the proof. "Do your worst or do your best; it is a good instrument; do what you like with it"; so the maker of a genuine article is accustomed to speak; and the Lord seems to say the same concerning His people. "My work of grace in them is mighty and thorough. Test it Satan; test it world; test it by bereavements, losses, and reproaches; it will endure every ordeal." And when it is tested, and bears it all, then the Lord turns the captivity of His people, for the experiment is complete.

Most probably there was, in Job's character, some fault from which his trial was meant to purge him. If he erred at all, probably it was in having a somewhat elevated idea of himself and a stern manner towards others. A little of the elder-brother spirit may, perhaps, have entered into him. A good deal that was sour came out of Job when his miserable comforters began to tease him—not a hundredth part as much as would come out of me, I warrant you, or, perhaps, out of you; but, still, it would not have come out if it had not been in. It must have been in him or otherwise all the provocation in the world would not have brought it out; and the Lord intended by His trials to let Job have a view of himself from another standpoint, and discover imperfections in his character which he would never have seen if he had not been brought into a tried condition. When through the light of trial, and the yet greater light of God's glorious presence, Job saw himself unveiled, he abhorred himself in dust and ashes. Probably Job had not humbled himself of late, but he did it then; and now, if any sort of selfishness lurked in him, it was put away, for Job began to pray for his cruel friends. It would take a good deal of grace to bring some men to pray for such friends as they were. To pray for one's real friends, I hope, comes natural to us; but to pray for that Bildad and the other two, after the abominable things they had spoken and insinuated—well, it showed that there was a large amount of sweetness and light in Job's character, and abounding grace deep down in his soul, or he would scarcely have interceded for such ungenerous tramplers upon a fallen friend. Now, behold, Job has discovered his fault, and he has put it away, and the grand old man bows his knee to pray for men who called him hypocrite—to pray for men who cut him to the very soul. He pleads with God that He would look in mercy upon men who had no mercy upon him, but had pitilessly heaped all kinds of epithets upon him, and stung him in his tenderest places, just when they ought to have had pity upon him. His misery alone ought to have stopped their mouths, but it seems as if that misery egged them on to say the most cruel things that could possibly have been conceived—the more cruel because they were, all of them, so undeserved. But now Job prays for his friends. You see the trial had reached its point. It had evidently been blessed to Job, and it had proved Satan to be a liar, and so now the fire of the trial goes out, and like precious metal the patriarch comes forth from the furnace brighter than ever.

Beloved friends, the point at which God may turn your captivity may not be the same as that at which he turned Job's, for yours may be a different character. I will try and indicate, briefly, when I think God may turn your trial.

Sometimes He does so *when that trial has discovered to you your especial sin.* You have been putting your finger upon divers faults, but you have not yet touched *the* spot in which your greatest evil is concentrated. God will now help you to know yourself. When you are in the furnace you will begin to search yourself, and you will cry, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me." You will find out three or four things, perhaps, in which you are faulty, and you will commit yourself to the Lord and say, "Give me grace, good Lord, to put away these evil things." Yes, but you have not come to the point yet, and only a greater trial will guide you to it. The anger of the Lord smokes against your house, not for this or that, but for another evil, and you have need to institute another search, for the images may be under the seat whereon a beloved Rachel sits. The evil in your soul may be just at the point where you think that you are best guarded against temptation. Search, therefore, and look, dear brother, for when the sin has been found out, and the Achan has been stoned, then the valley of Achor shall be a door of hope, and you shall go up to victory, the Lord going with you.

Perhaps, too, your turning point will be *when your spirit is broken.* We are by nature a good deal like horses that want breaking in, or, to use a scriptural simile, we are as "bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke." Well, the horse has to go through certain processes in the *ménage* until at last it is declared to be "thoroughly broken in," and we need similar training. You and I are not yet quite broken in, I am afraid. We go very merrily along, and yield to the rein in certain forms of service; but if we were called to other sorts of work, or made to suffer, we should need the kicking strap put on, and require a

sharper bit in our mouths. We should find that our spirit was not perfectly broken. It takes a long time of pain and sickness to bring some down to the dust of complete resignation to the Divine will. There is a something still in which they stick out against God, and of many it is true, "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." We have been brayed in that mortar, and with that pestle day after day, and week after week, and yet we are still foolish. When our soul shall cheerfully say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," then our captivity will be almost over, if not quite. While we cry, "It must not be so, I will not have it so," and we struggle and rebel, we shall only have to feel that we are kicking against the pricks, and wounding our foot every time we kick; but when we give up all that struggling, and say, "Lord, I leave it entirely with Thee, Thy will be done"—then will the trial cease, because there will be no necessity for it any longer. That is with some the culmination and turning point of trouble. Their Gethsemane ends when, like the Lord Jesus, they cry, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Sometimes, again, trial may cease *when you have learned the lesson which it was intended to teach you, as to some point of gospel truth.* I think I have sometimes said that many truths of the gospel are like letters written with sympathetic ink. If you have ever had a letter written with that preparation, when you look at it you cannot see anything whatever: it is quite illegible. The proper thing to do is to hold the writing up to the fire. As it warms at the fire the acid writing becomes manifest, and the letters are before you. Many of God's promises need to be held before the scorching fires of adversity and personal trouble, and then we read the precious secret of the Spirit's consolation. You cannot see the stars in the day time upon the surface of the earth, but if you go down into a well you can, and when you go down the deep well of trouble it often happens that you see a beauty and lustre in the promise which nobody else can see, and when the Lord has brought you into a certain position in which you can see the glory of His grace as you never could have seen it anywhere else, then He will say, "It is enough; I have taught My child the lesson, and I will let him go."

I think, too, it may be with some of us that *God gives us trouble until we obtain a sympathetic spirit.* I should not like to have lived forty years in this world without ever having suffered sickness. "Oh," you say, "that would have been very desirable." I grant you it appears so. When I met with a man that never had an ache or a pain, or a day's sickness in his life, I used to envy him; but I do not now, because I feel very confident that he is a loser by his unvarying experience. How can a man sympathise with trouble that he never knew? How can he be tender in heart if he has never been truched with infirmity himself? If one is to be a comforter to others, he must know the sorrows and the sicknesses of others in his measure. It was essential to our Lord, and, certainly, what was essential to Him is necessary to those who are to be shepherds of others, as He was. Now, it may be that by nature some of us are not very sympathetic; I do not think Job was: it is possible that though he was kind, and generous to the poor, yet he was rather hard, but his troubles taught him sympathy. And, perhaps, the Lord may send you trouble till you become softer in heart, so that afterwards you will be one who can speak a word in season to the weary. As you sit down by the bedside of the invalid, you will be able to say, "I know all the ins and outs of a sick man's feelings, for I have been sore sick myself." When God has wrought that in you, it may be He will turn your captivity.

In Job's case, the Lord turned his captivity *when he prayed for his friends.* Prayer for ourselves is blessed work, but for the child of God it is a higher exercise to become an intercessor, and to pray for others. Prayer for ourselves, good as it is, has just a touch of selfishness about it: prayer for others is delivered from that ingredient. Herein is love, the love which God the Holy Spirit delights to foster in the heart, when a man's prayers go up for others. And what a Christlike form of prayer it is when you are praying for those who have ill-treated you and despitefully used you. Then are you like your Master. Praying for yourselves, you are like those for whom Jesus died; but praying for your enemies, you are like the dying Jesus Himself. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," has more of heaven in it than the songs of seraphs, and your prayer when offered for those who have treated you ill is somewhat akin to the expiring prayer of your Lord. Job was permitted to take a noble revenge, I am sure the only one he desired, when he became the means of bringing them back to God. God would not hear them, he said, for they had spoken so wrongly of His servant Job, and now Job is set to be a mediator, or intercessor on their behalf: thus was the contempt poured upon the patriarch turned into honour. If the Lord will only save the opposer's soul through your prayer, it will be a splendid way of returning bitter speeches. If many unkind insinuations have been thrown out, and wicked words said, if you can pray for those who used such words, and God hears you and brings them to Jesus, it will be such a triumph as an angel might envy you. My brother, never use any other weapon of retaliation than the weapon of love. Avenge not thyself in anywise by uttering anything like a curse, or desiring any hurt or mischief to come to thy bitterest foe, but inasmuch as he curses, overwhelm him with blessings. Heap the hot coals of thy good wishes and earnest prayers upon his head, and if the Lord give thee to bring him to a state of salvation, He shall be praised, and thou shalt have happiness among the sons of men.

Perhaps some of you are in trouble now because you cannot be brought sincerely to pray for your enemies. It is a grievous fault when Christian men harbour resentments; it is always a sad sign when a man confesses, "I could not heartily pray for So-and-so." I would not like to live an hour at enmity with any man living, be he who he may; nor should any Christian man, I think. You should feel that however treacherous, dishonourable, unjust, and detestable the conduct of your enemy may have been to you, yet still it is forgiven, quite forgiven in your heart, and, as far as possible, forgotten, or wherein remembered, remembered with regret that it should have occurred, but with no resentment to the person who committed the wrong. When we get to that state, it is most probable that the Lord will smile upon us and turn our captivity.

III. The last word I have to say—the third word—is this, that BELIEVERS SHALL NOT BE LOSERS

FOR THEIR GOD. God, in the experiment, took from Job all that he had, but at the end He gave him back twice as much as he had—twice as many camels and oxen, and twice as many of everything, even of children. I heard a very sweet remark about the children the other day, for somebody said, "Yes, God did give him twice as many children, because his first family were still his. They were not lost but gone before." So the Lord would have His people count their children that are gone to heaven and reckon them as belonging to the family still, as the child did in Wordsworth's pretty poem, "Master, we are seven." And so Job could say of his sons and daughters, as well as of all the other items, that he had twice as many as before. True, the first family were all gone, but he had prayed for them in the days of their feasting, he had brought them together and offered sacrifice, and so he had a good hope about them, and he reckoned them as still his own. Tried brother, the Lord can restore to you the double in temporal things if He pleases. If He takes away He can as certainly give, and that right early. He certainly can do this in spiritual things; and if He takes away temporals and gives spirituals we are exceedingly great gainers. If a man should take away my silver and give me twice the weight in gold in return, should I not be thankful? And so, if the Lord takes away temporals and gives us spirituals, He thus gives us a hundred times more than He takes away.

Dear brethren, you shall never lose anything by what you suffer for God. If, for Christ's sake, you are persecuted, you shall receive in this life your reward; but if not, rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. You shall not lose anything by God's afflicting you. You shall, for a time, be an apparent loser; but a real loser in the end you shall never be. When you get to heaven you will see that you were a priceless gainer by all the losses you endured. Shall you lose anything by what you give to God? Never. Depend on it, He will be no man's debtor. There dwells not in earth or heaven any man who shall be creditor to the Most High. The best investment a man makes is that which he gives to the Lord from a right motive. Nothing is lost which is offered to the cause of God. The breaking of the alabaster box of precious ointment was not a wasteful thing, and he who should give to the Lord all that he had would have made a prudent use of his goods. "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord," and he that giveth to the Lord's church and to the Lord Himself lays up his treasure in heaven, where it shall be his for ever.

Beloved, we serve a good Master, and if He chooses to try us for a little we will bear our trial cheerfully, for God will turn our captivity ere long.

In closing, I wish I could feel that this subject had something to do with you all, but it is not the case. Oh, no, there are some of you who have felt no captivity, but you have a dreadful captivity to come, and there is no hope of God's ever turning that captivity when once you get into it. Without God, without Christ, strangers from the commonwealth of Israel, you are in bondage until now, and there will ere long come upon you bondage that will never end. You cannot pray for your friends: you have never prayed for yourself. God would not hear you if you did pray for others, for, first of all, you must be yourself reconciled to Him by the death of His Son. Oh, that you would mind these things and look to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, for if you do He will accept you, for He has promised to cast out none who come to Him. And then look at this: after all is right between God and your soul you need not fear what happens to you in the future, for, come sickness or health, come poverty or wealth, all is right, all is safe, all is well. You have put yourself into the hand of God, and wherever God may lift that hand you are still within it, and therefore always secure and always blessed: and, if not always consciously happy, yet you have always the right to be so, seeing you are true to God, and He delights in you. God bless you, and give you all salvation, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

THE TRULY BLESSED MAN

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord: and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."—Psalm i. 1–3.

IT is an old saying, and possibly a true one, that every man is seeking after happiness. If it be so, then every man should read this Psalm, for this directeth us where happiness is to be found in its highest degree and purest form. "Blessed," says David, "is such and such a man"; and the word which he uses is, in the original, exceedingly expressive. It implies a sort of plurality of blessedness—"Blessednesses are to the man"; and it is scarcely known whether the word is an adjective or a noun; as if the blessedness qualified the whole of life, and was, in itself, better even than life itself. The very highest degree of happiness is blessedness, "these blessednesses," as Ainsworth says, "heaped up one upon the other." Surely this is the very highest to which the human heart can aspire. Let us then, this evening, come with attentive hearts to consider in the light of revelation the character of the blessed man. We will begin by considering—

I. WHO THE "BLESSED MAN" IS.

The description given of him is simply this, that *he is a man*. There are moral qualities given, but the only thing said of him, in the first place, is that he is a man. Here is something very suggestive, for he is a person *subject to the common sorrows of humanity*. If we hear of a person greatly blessed by the sense of Christ's presence, and so enabled to walk in holiness and much usefulness, we cherish the delusion that he must have been better than the ordinary run of men, certainly not such an one as ourselves. Ah! but how

great is the mistake! God fashioneth all hearts alike, and if there be distinctions they are of grace, not of betterness by nature. The most blessed man is still a man. He must suffer pain, or pine in sickness, endure losses and crosses, and yet in it all be a blessed man.

Being a man, he is also *subject to infirmities*,—perhaps of a quick temper, or of a high and haughty spirit. He may be tempted to sloth or besetting sin of another kind. Still being a man he must have some infirmity, and yet, none the less is he blessed. Do not dream that the best of men are yet without fault. They will confess to you that they have—

> "To wrestle hard as we do still
> With sins and doubts and fears."

More than this, it appears that *he has to endure the same temptations that we have.* "The way of sinners" often crosses his path; the "seat of the scornful" is sometimes next door to his own; or even under the same roof. He is not blind: he is obliged to see the lust which struts through the street. He is not deaf: he is forced to hear the lascivious song as it floats on the midnight air. He is subject to like passions, and tempted in all points as we are, and yet—*he* is blessed! Only a man, but much more than he could have been, had not God blessed him.

Observe, too, *he does not hold any eminent position.* It is not "Blessed is the king, blessed is the scholar, blessed is the rich," but, "Blessed is the man." This blessedness is as attainable by the poor, the forgotten and the obscure, as by those whose names figure in history, and are trumpeted by fame. It is not to the hermit who lives alone, but to the workman toiling amongst his fellows. Not to the man who wears a surplice and assumes the exclusive title of "priest." But it comes to any man, in fustian, or corduroy, who loves God and seeks to obey him. His position has nothing to do with it. His character has everything to do with it. He is a man, and nothing but a man, though grace makes him much more.

The Psalm reveals to us, too, that in order to secure his blessedness, *he is a man needing help.* He is likened to a tree. It must drink of the rivers of water, and so this man must live upon divine grace. "His way" is said to be "known to the Lord," implying that God's approval of his way brings him strength. The best of men cannot live upon themselves. Our hearts are like the fire in the Interpreter's house which the enemy tried to quench, but blazed the more because a man stood behind the wall and fed the flame from a vessel of oil in his hand. Here is a secret and mysterious power, the work of the Holy Spirit, who "works in us to will and do of God's good pleasure." In ourselves we are as weak as we can be, and left to ourselves would soon fall into some sin.

There is in the Psalm, however, one word which truly describes this man, and that is, that *he is a righteous man*! Observe the last verse: "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." The balance of this man's nature has been readjusted by the divine Scale-maker. He was once all out of gear: put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; but now his judgment is rectified, and in spirit and character he is a righteous man. Once he was naked and defiled, but he has been washed in the fountain filled with blood, and clothed with the righteousness of Christ, a garment glittering with gold and silver threads, and all by faith.

This is the description of the "blessed man"; but still I beg you to remember he is only a man. Some such were born in the lowliest paths of life, educated in the most slender fashion, yet they have been among the finest witnesses and most heroic martyrs for their Lord. The brightest spirits that now wave the palm-branch, and strike the golden lyres most rapturously, were but sons of Adam, like ourselves. Ezekiel, privileged to see more visions perhaps than any other prophet, is constantly called "son of man," as if God would keep him humble, reminding him of the hole of the pit whence he was digged. However blessed you may get, my brother, it is still only, "Blessed is the man." So I have tried to put the ladder down to you who are beginners in the heavenly life, to show you that there is not a long step to take at first. You are a man, and the text comes to you with, "Blessed is the man!" May it be true of everyone of us! Now, we get, following on this,—

II. WHAT THE "BLESSED MAN" AVOIDS.

There is, I believe, a book published which is entitled, *What to eat, drink, and avoid.* I should imagine the third section to be by far the largest portion, for there are a thousand things to be avoided. Now in this Psalm it appears that the divinely blessed man avoids *the common way of ungodly persons.* The ungodly are not necessarily drunkards or swearers. These are ungodly, of course, but not all ungodly persons are like them. The ungodly are just your go-easy sort of people. They may go to church or chapel, or go nowhere. They are often very respectable, good neighbours, kind to the poor. They may hold public office, and enter Parliament. There is no place they may not fill, for it is not considered an offence among men to be "ungodly." The tragic folly and sin of these people is, that they have neglected the chief thing to be remembered, namely, that there is a God, that they are His creatures, and, being His creatures, ought to live to Him. But they give God no part of their lives, and He is in none of their thoughts. They will think of their neighbours, remember their friends and acquaintances. The duties of the second table of the law they observe in a measure, but the first table is despised as though it had never been written.

The blessed man, however, avoids this. He sees that God, who filleth all things, ought to fill his thoughts, and that the great end of his being should be "to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." It is chiefly here that the godly man differs from others. He does not consider first how the world regards a thing, but how God looks at it. If they ask, "Is it fashionable?" he replies, "the fashion of this world passeth away." "But will you gain by it?" "Ah!" says he, "that is not the measuring-line I carry. I am content to lose, so that I can keep my word and serve God." The first thought of the truly blessed man is how he can best glorify the name of Christ, and in so doing he avoids, "the counsel of the ungodly."

In the next place he avoids "*the way of sinners.*" Sinners live for pleasures. The Christian has his, but they would never please the worldling, nor would the worldling's gratify his new tastes. The sinner can do a thousand things which the saint cannot do, and would not if he could: and the Christian can do a thousand things of which the sinner knows nothing. Let a thing be labelled "sin" in God's book, and though men may laugh at it, call it a mere joke, a piece of fun, a peccadillo, the godly man accepts God's labelling of it, and leaves the "way of sinners" let

it be never so smoothly turfed, and grassed never so attractively.

The true Christian shuns "*the seat of the scornful.*" It makes his blood boil when he hears God's name profaned. His heart is full of horror because of the wicked who obey not God's law. Though he be told to "prove all things," he knows that a very slight test is enough for some things, and he puts them quickly aside, to hold fast only that which is good. Some professors like to sit near the seat of the scornful, "for arguments sake" they say. 'Twas thus that Mother Eve ruined the whole world, by listening to the serpent's suggestions; and much mischief has been done in a similar way since then to Christian faith and simplicity. Ah! the further I can get from the scorner's seat the better, and there let him sit alone! Away! away! away! for behold the day cometh when like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the profane shall go down alive into the pit. Happy is the man who shall escape that horror, by keeping far, far away. These are some of the things the truly "blessed man" avoids, and the more he avoids them, the more blessed he is.

Once more, he avoids *the very persons of sinners* except so far as he has to deal with them in civil matters and the common courtesies and duties of life. They are not his bosom-friends, he would never dream of being unequally yoked with them in marriage: he shuns their company all he can, for his congenial associates are elsewhere. Their ways, example, words, he avoids. As he would keep from plague-infected places and people, so he strives to keep aloof from men who blaspheme, lest their profanity should taint and defile him. "Father," said a young fellow, "I can go into such and such company and not be hurt." The father stooped down to the fireplace and picked up a piece of coal. "There," said he to his son, "take that in your hands." The son shrank from the black cinder. "Why," said the father, "it will not burn you!" "No! but it will blacken me," he replied. Ah! bad company can blacken even where it does not burn, so keep away from it. Thou canst never retain this blessedness unless, like the man described here, thou walkest not in the counsel of the ungodly, thou standest not in the way of sinners, nor sittest in the seat of the scornful.

And now for the third truth here insisted on—

III. WHEREIN THE "BLESSED MAN" DELIGHTS.

"His delight is in the law of the Lord," Man must have some delight, some supreme pleasure. His heart was never meant to be a vacuum. If not filled with the best things, it will be filled with the unworthy and disappointing. As we remarked the other night, when our text was. "Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him," —man cannot be alone, for if evil departs, good will come, but if good is driven away, evil will come. If you do not fill the measure with wheat, the arch-enemy will fill it with chaff. If the river flows not with sparkling sweet water, it will soon reek with pestilent miasma. Take care to have something worthy to delight in. I do not know how those people go through the world who never have any sort of pure excitement, but always go moping about from the first of January to the last of December. Life must to them be a sorry drag. The sparkling eye and the smiling face are the things God meant men to have, and they do not realise life's full beauty unless at times they possess them. Why, the Christian, above all men, should have what the world calls his "holidays and bonfire nights,"—his days of rejoicing, times of holy laughter, seasons of overflowing delights. Nay! I think he should strive to have them always, for we are told, "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." If we take our religion as men do physic, it is of little good to us. Some folks go to the house of God as you might suppose criminals would go to the whipping-post. But I like to see people come up to the house of God with glad alacrity, like children going home, or like those who are bound for the place—

> "Where my best friends and kindred dwell,
> Where God my Saviour reigns."

The true Christian has his holy delights; and chief among them is his revelling in the law of the Lord, the Word of God. Of course, David had not a fourth of what we possess; it was a very little Bible then, but it has gone on increasing like a majestic river, until it is the wondrous volume we have. We, therefore, should take ten times more delight in it than the Psalmist did. Why do Christians delight in it? *Because it is God's law.* Anything belonging to God should delight the believer. A child far from home is intensely pleased with anything that father gave him. A letter from home is a welcome and joyous thing. Here is a letter from home to us telling us of our Father's grace, and permitting us to read the precious secrets of his heart of love for us. We delight in it *because it comes with divine authority to us,* and so brings confidence and joy to our hearts.

The other day I was reading a book in which six reasons were given why the Christian delights in God's law. First, *because of its antiquity.* Many people delight in old coins. Some will go down to the Thames and buy pieces of old iron that are rusty, under the idea that they are antiquities; which they may or may not be. Ah! there is nothing so old as this book! The first writings of Hesiod fall short at least five hundred years of the writings of Moses, so that that part of the blessed volume has divine antiquity about it, and is radiant with divine inspiring. Let us ever delight in it then.

We delight in it *because of the justice of it.* There is a law revealed in it, if perfectly carried out, no man would hurt his neighbour, but love him as he loves himself; no rank or class would press heavily upon another, and each would remember, consider, try to bless the other. It is made as no human law can be made, and every person yielding to it feels it in his conscience to be just

We prize the book, too, *because of its lofty wisdom.* There is more wisdom for the life here than anywhere else besides. We do not come here for astronomy, or geology; but we come here for the highest of all wisdom, the science of God; for, though Pope says,—

> "The proper study of mankind is man,"

we beg his pardon. A yet more proper study of mankind is God, and here, in this book of God, we learn of His love to us in the person of Christ Jesus, and grasp the science—heavenliest wisdom—of a crucified Redeemer.

We delight in the book, also, *because it is true.* Fiction may be read or not, as men's tastes may direct; but it is of infinite value to have a book in which every word stands fast, when like a dream heaven and earth shall have melted away.

Again, we delight in it *because it is pleasant.* There

are sweetnesses in it better than the honey-droppings from the honey-comb. When we read it, it makes the godly heart to beat at a high and glorious rate, and sometimes takes him on the wings of eagles, bearing him to a loftier Pisgah than Moses ever stood upon, and so helping him to see the land on the further side of Jordan, his eternal rest and heritage.

Lastly, the Christian delights in "the law of the Lord, *because it is profitable.* This book enriches with the best of wealth, and stored-up treasures for all eternity. Now gathering up all these reasons I want earnestly to ask each one of us here, "Do you delight in this book?" Not, do you read it: but do you read it with delight? To go to it dragged there by duty, is miserably to miss its best messages, and is no evidence of true godliness. To put a sentence of it under the tongue as a sweet morsel, to grow healthy upon it when you are sick, rich upon it when poor, this is one of the truest tests of being a "blessed man," and if you do not enjoy this, God help you to begin at the foundation; repent of sin, seek the Saviour, or otherwise where God is you can never come.

But I must hasten on to ask,—

IV. WHAT OCCUPIES THE "BLESSED MAN'S" TIME?

"*In His law doth he mediate day and night.*" By day he gets little intervals of time to read it, so he steals from his nightly rest moments in which to meditate upon it. Reading reaps the wheat, meditation threshes it, grinds it, and makes it into bread. Reading is like the ox feeding: meditation is like it digesting, when chewing the cud. It is not merely reading that does us good; but the soul inwardly feeding on it, and digesting it. A preacher once told me that he had read the Bible through twenty times on his knees, and had never found the doctrine of election there. Very likely not. It is a most uncomfortable position in which to read. If he had sat in an easy chair he would have been better able to understand it. To read on one's knees is like a Popish penance. Besides, he read in the wrong way. If instead of twenty times galloping through he had read once and pondered continually, probably he would have seen clearer than he evidently did.

It is said of some horses that they "bolt their oats." This good brother was "bolting" Holy Scripture, and so getting little nutriment out of it. The inward meditation is the thing that makes the soul rich towards God. This is the godly man's occupation. Put the spice into the mortar by reading, beat it with the pestle of meditation, so shall the sweet perfume be exhaled.

May I ask whether there are not some here who do not mediate on God's Word at all? If so, then this solemn thought will seize us: if you have not the blessedness of God's Word, you must inherit its curse. Let us see to it; and now beginning at the cross of Jesus Christ, study the mystery of His wounds for our sin, and then go on afterward to meditate in His law day and night.

This brings us now to the very centre of the Psalm's teaching.

V. WHEREIN IS THIS MAN SO DIVINELY "BLESSED?"

Very briefly on each point. He is blessed first of all, *for life,* "He shall be like a tree." Not a dry, dead, sapless pole. His life is such that unregenerate men are strangers to it. He has been begotten again unto a living hope. The sap of God's grace is in him; he is united to Christ his Root, and because He lives, and lives in him, he lives also. He has *stability.* The tree planted. Well-rooted in the ground. The wicked are like the chaff which the wind drives away, but the Christian's life is stable. "Solid joys and lasting pleasures" are his portion. He has, too, *the gladness of growth.* The tree remains not the sapling, but grows upward, downward, abroad, spreading its branches. So the godly man is ever learning more of his Heavenly Father, and endeavouring to be more conformed to the image of his Lord. He has the blessing, too, of *favoured position.* Planted by God Himself. Not self-sown, or the foundling of the wind. If he is a servant he believes God has put him where he should be. Poor or rich, he learns to be content, for he is a tree divinely planted. He is *well sustained.* Whatever is really good for him God has pledged Himself to give. Not a tree in the desert, but placed where the rivulets come rippling to his roots. He hears his Master say, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

He has, yet again, *beauty in God's sight.* Beauty of an unfading kind; "his leaf also shall not wither." When personal beauty decays by reason of old age, and beauty of wit and learning be assailed by approaching death, still he shall be fair, in the likeness of his Master, as a young olive tree, and grow as a cedar in the court of his God. And to crown all, he has *constant prosperity.* "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." He may not grow rich, but he still prospers. His ships may be broken at Ezion-Geber, and he can thank God even for that, for their breaking may help him to heavenly grace, through his very tribulations; so he is content to lose in his possessions if his soul is made wealthy in faith and love, and sweet submission to God's will. This metaphor of the flourishing tree, is a very beautiful one. See it there, always green, loaded with fruit, standing where it can never know drought. If God has taught us to delight in His law, that is our true picture and portrait. Is it ours?

But to close, here we are made to ask,—

VI. WHO IS THIS BLESSED MAN'S GUARDIAN?

There must be somebody who takes care of him, or he would not be so blessed as he is. Ah! "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." If thou art resting in Christ for salvation, the Lord knows thy way. The minister knows nothing of your trials; you half wish you might dare tell him so that he might guide and comfort. But if he knows not, the Lord knows all your way. Are you sore depressed, do waves of grief roll over your soul? Well, pour out your heart to God: for He knows, and knows how to help. If the Lord did not look after us in our best days, we should perish by the sunstroke of too much prosperity, and if He did not watch us in our worst days we should be frost-killed by the cruel Arctic winds of adversity.

But saith one, "How may I begin this way?" "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and this is the fear of the Lord, to trust thy soul in the hands of God's appointed Saviour, and know thou art safe. Say from thy very heart,—

> "Just as I am, without one plea,
> But that Thy blood was shed for me,
> And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
> O Lamb of God! I come."

If thy very soul sings that, thou art on the road to true blessedness, and all that is in the Psalm shall be thine in life, in death, and throughout eternity. May God bless thee thus, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL KINGDOM, AND HOW IT COMETH

" Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."—Psalm ii. 8, 9.

OBSERVE, dear friends, the wonderful contrast between the violent excitement of the enemies of the Lord, and the sublime serenity of God Himself. He is not disturbed though the heathen so furiously rage, and their kings and mighty ones set themselves in battle array. He smiles at them: He hath them in derision. You and I are often downcast and depressed, and our forebodings are dark and dismal, but God sits in His eternal peacefulness, and serenely overrules tumult and rebellion. The Lord reigneth, and His throne is not moved, nor His rest broken, whatever may be the noise and turmoil down below.

Notice the sublimity of this divine calm. While the heathen and their princes are plotting and planning how to break His bands asunder, and cast His cords from them, He has already defeated their devices, and He says to them, " Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion." " You will not have My Son to reign over you, but nevertheless He reigns. While you have been raging I have crowned Him. Your imaginations are indeed vain, for I have forestalled you, and established Him upon His throne. Hear Him as He proclaims My decree, and asserts His filial sovereignty." God is ever beforehand with His adversaries: they find their scheming frustrated, and their craft baffled, even before they begun to execute their plans. By God's decree the ever-blessed Son of the Highest is placed in power, and exalted to His throne. The rulers cannot snatch from His hand the sceptre, nor dash from His head the crown: Jesus reigns and must reign till all enemies are put under His feet. God has set Him firmly upon Zion's sacred hill, and raging nations cannot cast Him down: the very idea of their so doing excites the derision of Jehovah, He disturbs not His great soul because of their blustering. As if it were a banquet rather than a conflict, the Lord God, as Himself a king, speaks to the King's Son, even to His Anointed on His right hand, and having owned His royal rank, confers upon Him the highest honours. At great feasts many a monarch has been known to say to his favourite, " Ask what I shall give thee, and nothing shall be denied thee this day." Even thus doth the great Father say to His glorious Son the Prince of Peace, " Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen, Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth, Thy possession." He bids Him open His mouth wide, and request a boundless dominion. He will give Him distant nations, yea, and the whole round earth to be His kingdom. There is an air of regal festivity and peaceful joy about all this which strangely contrasts with the uproar of the adversaries. Brethren, I wish we could enter in some measure into this sublime quiet. We may well be confident since God is so. If the Captain be assured of victory it behoves the common soldier to be bravely hopeful. The battle is the Lord's, and since He is the Lord God omnipotent, fear about the issue of the conflict is foolish and wicked. All events are in His hand—His hand who can dash whole worlds to dust, or make them when it pleases Him. What can stand against the almighty will? Who shall say unto Jehovah, " What doest Thou? " In this eternal all-sufficiency is our rest, and we may therefore cease from anxiety. Stand thou still my weary brother, and see the salvation of God. Put not forth thy timorous hand to stay the trembling ark, but know that Jehovah can protect His own. Lay thy Martha cares aside; sit at thy Saviour's feet, and listen to His voice. He will tell thee that God reigneth yet, and that His Anointed shall reign also. Things are not as they seem: all is well when all looks ill. If the heavens are clouded the sun is not put out: if the evening hath darkened, even to midnight, yet the morning cometh; to the moment shall it break, nor can all the powers of darkness hinder the dawning day. Jehovah's fixed decrees remain engraved as in eternal brass, nor can the craft of hell efface a single line nor stay the execution of a single purpose. Despite all opposition the sacred purpose will blossom into the actual providence, and the providence will ripen into salvation. God's plan will be carried out without failure in any point, and there is no cause for alarm.

If we were more calm and restful we should do our work better, for do we not gather both wisdom and courage when we abide in quietness and confidence? The joy of the Lord is the strength of His saints. The assurance of faith, if we were filled with it, would make us go forth " fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Alas, our short-sighted fretfulness, our anxious mistrust, and our timorous suspicion cause us needless distress, weaken us for service, and expose us to the assaults of our adversaries. Without the preparation of the gospel of peace our feet are unshod, and we are unfit for the heavenly pilgrimage. Grovelling here below among the troubles of the hour, the most of Christians are a timorous folk, and act like the tribe of Reuben in the day of Barak's battle, to whom Deborah cried, " Why abodest thou among the sheep-folds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? " O ye who lie among the pots, and do servile work in abject fear, arise to a braver spirit. Up ye to the everlasting hills and breathe a purer air; gird yourselves with the belt of confidence in God, and you shall be " strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." May God grant that the subject of this morning may help us out of the depressing influences which surround us, and raise us into fellowship with the calm in which Jehovah sits smiling, and out of which He saith, " Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion."

Our text suggests to us this morning, first, that *the kingdoms of the earth, and the earth itself, are Christ's inheritance,*—" I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance." Leave out those little words which the translators have inserted, for they but feebly help the sense. " I will give the heathen,

Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth, Thy possession." When we have dwelt upon that we shall then notice *that this is to be had for the asking:* "Ask of Me, and I shall give." Thirdly, we shall note that *the power by which the dominion shall be gained is altogether of God:* "I shall give." And fourthly, we shall remark that in order to complete the conquest of the world *all existing and all future confederacies against the Lord, and against His Christ, shall be utterly destroyed:* "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

I. For our comfort let us notice the teaching of the text that THE LORD WILL GIVE TO CHRIST THE HEATHEN AS HIS INHERITANCE AND THE UTTERMOST PARTS OF THE EARTH AS HIS POSSESSION. This I take to refer to our Lord as man. Already as God the kingdom of the divine Son ruleth over all. There never was a limit to the reign of Jesus as God, not even when He was hanging on the cross; He was the everlasting Father even when He was "the child born, the Son given."

It is in His wondrous nature as God-man Mediator that these words may be understood, for so the apostle Paul evidently interpreted them. The mysterious sentence, "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee," may refer to the deep and secret truth of the eternal filiation of our Lord, whatever that may be; but Paul quotes it in the thirteenth Acts as referring to His resurrection. Here are his words, "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee." It is in resurrection power that Christ comes forth, and God gives to Him to have dominion over the earth and all that is upon it. Because He liveth and was dead He hath the keys of hell and of death. By virtue of His humiliation He reigns. For the suffering of death He is crowned with glory and honour. The heavenly host proclaim His worthiness to take the book and open its seven seals, singing, "For Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." He descended that He might ascend above all things and fill all things; He laid aside His glory that He might be crowned with this new glory and honour, and might have all things put under His feet as the Son of man. We speak therefore of Jesus Christ the Risen One, who once died, but has now risen from the tomb, and quitted this earth for the splendours of the New Jerusalem.

Our conviction is that this same Jesus is to reign over the whole world. I shall not enter into the question whether this will be accomplished before His second advent, or will be the result of His glorious appearing. I should not like to assert that this consummation will be reached before His advent, for that might seem to militate against our duty to watch for His coming, which may be at any moment: on the other hand, I would not venture to assert that the gospel cannot be universally victorious before His coming, because I perceive that this opinion is a pillow for many an idle head, and is ruinous to the hopeful spirit of missionary enterprise. It is enough for me that a wide dominion will be given to our Lord at some time or other, and that assuredly His kingdom shall embrace all the nations of mankind. The whole earth shall yet be filled with His glory; the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head and clear the world of his slimy trail.

For the next few minutes you will be so good as to keep your Bibles going, for the appeal must be to God's own word. I gather that the kingdom of Christ is to be so extensive as to comprehend all mankind, first, because, of the exceeding breadth of the prophecy of it which was made to Abraham in Genesis xii. 3. That is an old covenant promise which refers to Abraham as the father of the faithful, and to his one great seed, even Jesus, the promised Messiah. Here are the far-reaching words,—"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Assuredly they are not as yet all blessed in him to such an extent as to exhaust the divine meaning. When God in covenant promises a blessing it is no light thing, and therefore I am sure that this grand covenant blessing of the nations is something more than a name. Though I doubt not that the whole earth is to some extent the better because of the coming of Christ, and His peace-making death, and the spread of His pure faith, yet I cannot believe that multitudes who live and die in the thick darkness of ignorance and idolatry are really blessed in Christ in such a sense as to make it a covenant blessing. How much are Tartary, China, and Thibet blessed by the gospel? There must be something better yet for all the families of the earth than anything they have hitherto received. All the families of the earth shall yet know that the promised Seed hath lived and died for them, and some of every kindred and tongue shall find salvation in Him.

Jacob, too, when he spake concerning the Shiloh in Genesis xlix. 10, said, "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." By the people is not meant the seed of Israel, but the nations, or the Gentiles; so the Septuagint and the Syraic understand it, and so indeed it is. Jesus, our great Shiloh, sets up the standard, and His chosen rally around in ever growing numbers till the dispersed of Babel shall find in Him a new centre, and a pure language shall be given to them in Him. The words mean not "gathering" only, but a willing obedience, the fruit of faith and the expression of piety. To this is parallel the word of Paul in Romans xv. 12: "And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust." It is evident, then, that the nations shall come to trust in the Messiah, and thus shall they find life eternal.

Moses, too, in Deuteronomy xxxii. 21, to which passage Paul in the Romans so especially refers, speaks of the heathen nations when he says, "I will move them to jealousy with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." Truly this is fulfilled in these days when the gospel line hath gone out throughout all the earth, and its words unto the ends of the earth; and this our own foolish nation, this once barbarous people which seemed shut out from God, worshipping idols with all the cruel rites of the Druids, has been brought into covenant with God and made to rejoice in Him. Degraded heathen in all lands have become believers, and so shall all nations be brought believingly to Jesus' feet, that Israel may be angered and provoked to jealousy until her time shall come, when she shall look on Him whom she hath pierced, and shall mourn for Him, and turn to Him with full purpose of heart.

When we reach the Psalms we come into the

clear light of prophecy concerning the kingdom of our blessed Master. Our text stands first, and is sufficient in itself: the heathen are to be His inheritance, and the utmost bounds of the world are to be His possession. Turn to that famous passion psalm, the twenty-second. Its pathos with regard to the griefs of the Crucified One is deep and touching. You see Him hanging on the tree, a gazing-stock to scoffers, with His tongue cleaving to His jaws, and His heart melting like wax in the midst of His bowels; and yet ere the psalm closes the plaintive gives place to the triumphant, and the dying One cries, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's; and He is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him; and none can keep alive his own soul." On the cross this prospect cheered our dying Master's heart, that the kingdom should be the Lord's, and that all the kindreds of the nations should come and worship before Him; let it cheer us also. Do you think that the crucified Lord will be disappointed of the end for which He died? Will you venture to assert that a single drop of His blood was shed for nought? Rest assured that He shall see of the travail of His soul, till even His great loving heart shall be content. God hath said it, "I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He hath poured out His soul unto death;" and be ye calmly confident that the word of the Lord will stand.

Turn your Bibles over till you reach Psalm lxvi., and the fourth verse, and there you come upon another word of comfort: "All the earth shall worship Thee, and shall sing unto Thee; they shall sing to Thy name." This sentence is not merely the passionate hope of an enthusiastic worshipper, but a voice inspired of the Holy Spirit, plainly declaring that all peoples shall adore their Maker with hearty praise and joyful song.

How glowing is the language of Psalm lxxii. Can we expect too great things for our King when we remember the gracious words beginning at the eighth verse: "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him; and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him." Read on at verse seventeen: "His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed." These terms include the most barbarous tribes that exist, and they specially mention nations which boast that they were never conquered: such as the untamed rovers of the wilderness, who centuries ago laughed at the Roman power. The legions which subdued all other peoples could not conquer the sons of Ishmael; fleet of foot as a hart, swift as a young roe, they fled over the desert sands, out of reach of the pursuer; yet these shall bow before our Lord, and joyfully pay Him homage. He will sway His sceptre where sceptre was never owned before; He shall set up a throne where all other authority has been laughed to scorn.

You will not be wearied if I ask you to look at Psalm lxxxvi. verse 9. There you will find it written, "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and shall glorify Thy name." It is not to be mere outside worship that shall be paid, for the nations are to glorify His name, which is a high form of praise. All nations are to glorify the Lord, and this they have not done as yet.

We expected to find, and we are not disappointed in our expectation, that Isaiah would be sure to speak concerning these things. I would rather you heard the word of God by far than my word, and therefore we will keep to our reading. It will bring you encouragement and heart-cheer to know what prophets said in olden time, when only Israel had the light. They did not think the light would be confined to the one peculiar people, but they expected that on the nations which sat in darkness light would break, and they also would seek the Lord. Turn to Isaiah and read. See what he says in his second chapter. "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." I can but give samples. The passages abound all through Isaiah in which there is the intimation of the general spread of the Redeemer's kingdom. Turn to Isaiah xlix. 6: "It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth. Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to Him whom man despiseth, to Him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose thee." (v. 12.) "Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim." "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to Thee."

Nor is Isaiah alone in such prophecies as these. I cannot detain you by reading what Ezekiel saith concerning the ever deepening waters which shall carry life to all lands; and I will only mention one word of Jeremiah, because it so peculiarly proves that the homage paid by heathen nations to our Lord will be that of their hearts; and that the reign of Christ, whatever it may be else, will certainly be a spiritual reign. Jeremiah iii. 17: "They shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart." Christ will work a heart-change when He shall win the nations to allegiance, and this shall lead to a manifest change of life,—"neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart."

Daniel, that John of the Old Testament, of course saw more clearly than any the coming kingdom of the Anointed One. What doth he say in chapter vii. 18? "But the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. Until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him." Can anything be more positive than this last word?

Look how the idols are to be destroyed according to the prophet Zephaniah (ii. 11): "The Lord will be terrible unto them: for He will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship Him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen." Zechariah says to the same effect (ix. 10): "He shall speak peace unto the heathen, and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." (xiv. 2): "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one."

Lest I should weary you, I forbear to quote any more. To me it is evident beyond all contradiction that according to the whole run of Scripture the kingdom of Christ is to extend over all parts of the earth, and over all races and conditions of men, and therefore I charge you never despair for the grand old cause. An infidel notion is abroad that these different religions have sprung up at different times as developments of the religious instinct, and that they may all profitably exist side by side with ours. It is admitted that the religion of Christ is excellent, and that it deserves a large following, but still other religions have their advantages and must not be despised: nay, something better than the gospel of Christ may yet be discovered. This is the current talk in certain circles, and we would at once express our horror at it. Jesus is not to share a divided throne. Cast ye with abhorrence from your souls every such blasphemous thought. Jesus must reign till all enemies are put under His feet, and to Him all rivals are enemies. If Jesus be King He is the Only Potentate. Christians are enlisted under a banner which does not brook another standard side by side with it, they serve a Prince who will not share dominion with others, who will not submit that even a province shall be rent away from His government. He shall reign for ever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hallelujah! Like a burst of thunder let all hearts that love Him say Amen.

II. It appears from our text that THIS UNIVERSAL DOMINION IS TO BE ASKED FOR. Thus saith the Father to His glorious Son, "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee." Beloved, Jesus fails not to ask. We do not doubt that He responds to the Father's invitation, and asks for His inheritance. This is the way in which the psalm before us touches upon the priestly character of Christ as combined with His kingly office. He ever liveth to intercede, and a part of His daily intercession is to ask that the heathen may be His inheritance. Now, beloved, this is a lesson to us. We belong to Christ; we are members of that body of which He is the mystical Head, and it is ours to act with Him in His life-work: as He asks, we are to ask with Him. As Jesus suffers in His people, so He pleads in them. Let us cry day and night unto God for the coming and kingdom of our Lord. Let the throne of the Highest be surrounded by our perpetual prayers. Let us urge for the Lord Jesus His suit in the courts above, that the heathen may be His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth His possession. We are so truly one with Him that His sympathies and hopes are ours; His glory is our glory, His victory our victory, and therefore our supplications should naturally and spontaneously arise for Him every day of our lives. Our union with Him has given us a kingdom, the same kingdom as that which He claims. He Himself has said it: "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." As surely as He sets His Son upon His holy hill of Zion, so surely will the Lord bring us all there. Our prayers therefore should daily rise together with the pleadings of the great Intercessor Himself. O Lord, Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory; let Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

This prayer is one which is commanded by God Himself. About its fitness we can, therefore, have no doubt. Your Saviour taught you to say, "Thy kingdom come." In this text we find it prescribed as a prayer to the Well-beloved,—"Ask of Me"; and therefore it is certainly a proper prayer for us, and we may use it without question. We are highly honoured in being permitted to present such a petition: to be allowed to pray for myself is mercy, to be permitted to pray for my fellow man is favour, but to be suffered to pray for Jesus is honour. It is written, "Prayer also shall be made for Him continually," and thus there is a special honour put upon those who intercede. My Lord's prayer for me saves me; but when He bids me pray for Him, He dignifies me, and I say with David, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Whatever else we forget, never from our private intercessions let us omit the prayer that the heathen may come to glorify Christ.

It is a joy to know that this prayer will be effectual to the full. It is no vain desire, no dream of a fevered brain: the infinite wisdom of God Himself suggests it, for He says, "Ask, and I shall give Thee." This union of precept and promise is found attached to every covenant blessing, but here it is conspicuously and distinctly stated in so many words—"Ask, and I shall give Thee." Concerning this thing the promise of God is definite, we may therefore pray with full assurance. Let us avail ourselves of this plain direction every hour of our lives. O church of God, ask on Christ's behalf, and the Lord God will give Him the kingdom. Heir of Heaven, ask on behalf of the Elder Brother, for the Elder Brother pleads in thee, and God will hear both thee and Him and He will grant the united request. My heart is full of confidence when pleading upon this subject: what surer warrant do we want than "Ask, and I shall give Thee"?

Let our prayer be wide and far-reaching. Let our desires embrace the world. Pray not for your own country only, though it needs it, and God alone knows how much; but pray for the colonies, the continent, and the far-off lands. Ask that all heathens may become Christians. Plead that the whole round earth may be the Lord's: that the uttermost parts of the earth may resound with songs in His praise. On this earth His blood has fallen; the precious drops could not be gathered up again, and so this globe remains blood-marked,—the one star upon which the

Son of God poured out His life. It must be the Lord's: the sacrifice of Calvary has made it sacred to the Son of God. As our Government marks with the broad arrow those stores which belong to it, so did Christ upon the tree, when the blood fell from His hands, and feet, and side, mark, as it were, with something more full of meaning than the broad arrow, this round earth on which He bled, and it must be for ever and ever His by right of purchase and ransom. It was made subject to vanity for a little season, but it is to be redeemed from it; and when it shall be purified and beautified in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, you will not know it: for it will come forth as "a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Its sister stars have long wondered at its silence, or its discord, but at the sight of its restoration to the choirs of holiness they will sing in deep delight, and chant a new song unto the Lord. With what admiration will they perceive, rising up from this once beclouded orb, a flame of unquenchable praise with pillars of perfumed smoke, the incense of eternal gratitude. Sweeter the offering of this once fallen world than that of any other sphere, for it has been redeemed, and upon it have been seen marvels of free grace and dying love such as no other world has known. Oh, may this soon come to pass; may the prayer be heard; and God be praised; but it can only be accomplished through His own appointed method, the asking of Christ, the pleading of the church. Oh, rouse thee, church, to ask. Awake thee from thine unholy lethargy, and cry day and night unto God. Cease not, but with anguish, like a woman in travail, cry aloud and spare not, until He give the risen Lord the heathen for His inheritance, and make His throne higher than the kings of the earth.

III. Thirdly, THIS DOMINION IS TO BE GAINED BY THE POWER OF GOD. Notice the text, for it is very explicit: "Ask of Me, and *I shall give Thee.*" The power and grace of God will be conspicuously seen in the subjugation of this world to Christ: every heart shall know that it was wrought by the power of God in answer to the prayer of Christ and His church. I believe, brethren, that the length of time spent in the accomplishment of the divine plan has much of it been occupied with getting rid of those many forms of human power which have intruded into the place of the Spirit. If you and I had been about in our Lord's day, and could have had everything managed to our hand, we should have converted Cæsar straight away by arguments or by oratory; we should then have converted all his legions by every means within our reach; and, I warrant you, with Cæsar and his legions at our back we would have Christianized the world in no time: would we not? Yes, but that is not God's way at all, nor the right and effectual way to set up a spiritual kingdom. Bribes and threats are alike unlawful, eloquence and carnal reasoning are out of court, the power of divine love is the one weapon for this campaign. Long ago the prophet wrote, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." The fact is that such conversions as could be brought about by physical force, or by mere mental energy, or by the prestige of rank and pomp, are not conversions at all. The kingdom of Christ is not a kingdom of this world, else would His servants fight; it rests on a spiritual basis, and is to be advanced by spiritual means. Yet Christ's servants gradually slipped down into the notion that His kingdom was of this world, and could be upheld by human power. A Roman emperor professed to be converted, using a deep policy to settle himself upon the throne; then Christianity became the State-patronized religion: it seemed that the world was Christianized, whereas, indeed, the church was heathenized. Hence sprang the monster of a State-church, a conjunction ill-assorted, and fraught with untold ills. This incongruous thing is half human, half divine as a theory it fascinates, as a fact it betrays; it promises to advance the truth, and is itself a negation of it. Under its influences a system of religion was fashioned, which beyond all false religions, and beyond even Atheism itself, is the greatest hindrance to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Under its influence dark ages lowered over the world; men were not permitted to think; a Bible could scarcely be found, and a preacher of the gospel, if found, was put to death. That was the result of human power coming in with the sword in one hand and the gospel in the other, and developing its pride of ecclesiastical power into a triple crown, an Inquisition, and an infallible Pope. This parasite, this canker, this incubus of the church will be removed by the grace of God, and by His providence in due season. The kings of the earth who have loved this unchaste system will grow weary of it and destroy it. Read Revelation xvii. 16, and see how terrible her end will be. The death of the system will come from those who gave it life: the powers of earth created the system, and they will in due time destroy it.

Frequently do we meet with the idea that the world is to be converted to Christ by the spread of civilization. Now, civilization always follows the gospel, and is in a great measure the product of it; but many people put the cart before the horse, and make civilization the first cause. According to their opinion trade is to regenerate the nations, the arts are to ennoble them, and education is to purify them. Peace Societies are formed, against which I have not a word to say, but much in their favour; still, I believe the only efficient peace society is the church of God, and the best peace teaching is the love of God in Christ Jesus. The grace of God is the great instrument for uplifting the world from the depths of its ruin, and covering it with happiness and holiness. Christ's cross is the Pharos of this tempestuous sea, like the Eddystone lighthouse flinging its beams through the midnight of ignorance over the raging waters of human sin, preserving men from rock and shipwreck, piloting them into the port of peace. Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigneth from the tree; and as ye tell it out believe that the power to make the peoples believe it is with God the Father, and the power to bow them before Christ is in God the Holy Ghost. Saving energy lies not in learning, nor in wit, nor in eloquence, nor in anything save in the right arm of God, who will be exalted among the heathen, for He hath sworn that surely all flesh shall see the salvation of God. The might of the Omnipotent One shall work out His purposes of grace, and as for us, we will use the simple processes of prayer and faith. "Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee." Oh, that we could keep in perpetual motion the machinery of prayer. Pray, pray, pray, and God will give, give, give, abundantly, and supernaturally, above all that we ask, or even think. He must do all things in the conquering work of the Lord Jesus. We cannot convert a single child, nor

bring to Christ the humblest peasant, nor lead to peace the most hopeful youth; all must be done by the Spirit of God alone, and if ever nations are to be born in a day, and crowds are to come humbly to Jesus' feet, it is Thine, Eternal Spirit, Thine to do it. God must give the dominion, or the rebels will remain unsubdued.

IV. Thus the power of God worketh to bring about the kingdom of Christ; and THIS INVOLVES THE BREAKING UP OF ALL THE CONFEDERACIES WHICH NOW EXIST OR EVER SHALL EXIST FOR THE HINDRANCE OF THE REDEEMER'S KINGDOM.

Our text employs a figure which is very full of meaning. "He shall break them with a rod of iron." He breaks not the subject nations, nor the inherited heathen, but the kings of the earth who stood up and took counsel together against the Lord, and against His Anointed. Against these He will lift up His iron rod of stern justice and irresistible power. Over His own inheritance He will sway a silver sceptre of love; over His own possession He shall reign with gentleness and grace; but as for His adversaries, He will deal with them in severity and display His power in them. How shall they stand out against Him? They have formed their confederacy with great care and skill: as when men prepare clay and make it plastic for the potter's use. so have they made all things ready; they have set their design upon the wheel, and caused it to revolve in their thoughts, and with great skill they have fashioned it. Lo, there it stands finished, and fair to look upon. Yet at its very best it is nothing more than a potter's vessel. It may be of the purest clay, and of such exquisite workmanship that it shall enchant every man of taste, but it attaineth to be nothing more than an earthen vessel, and therefore woe unto it when the rod of iron falls upon it. Woe to all human societies and brotherhoods which are framed to resist the Lord. Mark the conflict and its end! It is brief enough. A stroke! Where is the hope of the Lord's adversary? Gone, gone, utterly gone; only a few potsherds remain. Oh for such a smiting of the apostacy of Rome! Oh for one touch of the iron rod upon the imposture of Mohammed! Oh, for a blow at Buddhism, and a back stroke at the superstition of Brahminism, and at all the idols of the heathen! Woe unto the gods of the land of Sinim in that day; a single stroke shall set the potsherds flying. Wherefore, then, should we fear, although they plot and plan; although a solemn conclave of cardinals be held, though the Pope fulminate his bulls, though the Sultan ordain that every convert to Christianity shall be put to death, though still the scoffers revile at Christianity, and say that it spreads not as once it did? A speedy answer shall confound them, or if not speedy yet the stroke shall be sure. Our King waits a while. He hath leisure. Haste belongs to weakness; His strength moves calmly. Only let Him be aroused and you shall see how quick are His paces. He redeemed the world in a few short hours upon the tree, and I warrant you that when He getteth that iron rod once fairly to work He will not need many days to ease Him of His adversaries, and make a clean sweep of all that set themselves against Him. If you want to see how it will be done, read, I pray you, Daniel ii. 31:—"Thou, O King, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay." It was a strange conglomeration: all the metallic empires are set forth as combined in one image; which image is the embodied idea of monarchial power, which has fascinated men even to this day. The prophet goes on to say, "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." And so it is to be: the vision is being each day fulfilled. The gospel stone, which owes nothing to human strength or wisdom, is breaking the image, and scattering all opposing powers. No system, society, confederacy, or cabinet can stand which is opposed to truth and righteousness. I, even I, that am but of yesterday, and know nothing, have seen one of the mightiest of empires of modern times melt away on a sudden as the rime of the morning in the heat of the sun. I have seen monarchs driven out of their tyrannies by the powers of a single man, and a free nation born as in an hour. I have seen states which fought to hold the negro in perpetual captivity subdued by those whom they despised, while the slave has been set free. I have seen nations chastened under evil governments, and revived when the yoke has been broken, and they have returned to the way of righteousness and peace. He who lives longest shall see most of this. Evil is short-lived. Truth shall yet rise above all. The Lord saith, overturn, overturn, overturn till He shall come whose right it is, and God shall give it to Him. Woe unto those that stand against the Lord and His anointed, for they shall not prosper. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

AN EARNEST INVITATION

"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."—Psalm ii. 12.

IT will not be needful for me this morning to be controversial in my discourse; for but two Sabbaths ago I addressed you from that text, "The mighty God," and endeavoured with the utmost of my ability to prove that Christ must be "very God of very God,"—co-equal and co-eternal with His Father. Without, then, attempting to prove that, let us drive onward towards the practical issue; for, after all, practice is the end of preaching; or, if ye will have it, I will put it into Herbert's words—

> "Attend sermons, but prayers most,
> Praying's the end of preaching."

And that too is in the text, for what lips can give the kiss of sincerity to the Son of God, save the lips of prayer. We drive onward, then, towards the practical conclusion. May God the Holy Spirit assist us.

Now it has sometimes been disputed among most earnest and zealous ministers, which is the most likely means of bringing souls to Christ; whether it is the thunder of the threatening, or the still small whisper of the promise. I have heard some ministers who preferred the first; they have constantly dwelt upon the terrors of the law; and they have certainly, many of them, been eminently useful; they have had Scripture for their warrant—"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." With "terrible things in righteousness" declaring the just anger and judgment of God against sin, they have alarmed those who were sitting at ease in a graceless state, and have thus been the means in the hands of God, of inducing them to flee from the wrath to come. Some, on the other hand, have rather decried the threatenings; and have dwelt almost entirely upon the promises. Like John, their ministry has been full of love; they have constantly preached from such texts as this—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,"—and such like. Now, these also have been eminently useful; and they too have had Scriptural warrant in abundance, for thus spake Christ's apostles full often, and thus spake Jesus Christ himself, wooing with notes of mercy, and melting with tones of love those whom the law's terrors would have hardened in their sins. My text, however, seems to be a happy combination of the two, and I take it, that the most successful ministry will combine both means of bringing men to Christ. The text thunders with all the bolts of God—"Lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." But it does not end in thunder; there comes a sweet soft, reviving shower after the storm; "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

This morning I shall endeavour to use both arguments, and shall divide my text thus:—First, *the command*, "Kiss the Son"; secondly, *the argument used*, "lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way"; and thirdly, *the benediction with which the text closes*—"Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him"; this benediction being a second reason why we should obey the commandment.

I. First, then, THE COMMAND—"Kiss the Son." This bears four interpretations. A kiss has divers meanings in it—progressive meanings. I pray that we may be led by grace from step to step, so that we may understand the command in all its fulness, by putting it in practice.

1. In the first place, it is a kiss of *reconciliation*. The kiss is a token of enmity removed, of strife ended, and of peace established. You will remember that when Jacob met Esau, although the hearts of the brothers had been long estranged, and fear had dwelt in the breast of one, and revenge had kindled its fires in the heart of the other; when they met they were pacified towards each other, and they fell upon each other's neck, and they kissed: it was the kiss of reconciliation. Now, the very first work of grace in the heart is, for Christ to give the sinner the kiss of his affection, to prove His reconciliation to the sinner. Thus the father kissed his prodigal son when he returned. Before the feast was spread, before the music and the dance began, the father fell upon his son's neck, and kissed him. On our part, however, it is our business to return that kiss; and as Jesus gives the reconciling kiss on God's behalf, it is ours to kiss the lips of Jesus, and to prove by that deed that we are "reconciled to God by the death of His Son." Sinner, thou hast hitherto been an enemy of Christ's gospel. Thou hast hated His Sabbaths; thou hast neglected His Word; thou hast abhorred His commandments and cast His laws behind thy back; thou hast, as much as lieth in thee, opposed His kingdom; thou hast loved the wages of sin, and the ways of iniquity better than the ways of Christ. What sayest thou? Does the Spirit now strive in thy heart? Then, I beseech thee, yield to His gracious influence, and now let thy quarrel be at an end. Cast down the weapons of thy rebellion; pull out the plumes of pride from thy helmet, and cast away the sword of thy rebellion. Be His enemy no longer; for, rest assured, He wills to be thy friend. With arms outstretched, ready to receive thee, with eyes full of tears, weeping over thine obstinacy, and with bowels moved with compassion for thee, He speaks through my lips this morning, and He says, "Kiss the Son"; be reconciled. This is the very message of the gospel—"The ministry of reconciliation." Thus speak we, as God hath commanded us. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." And is this a hard thing we ask of you, that you should be at friendship with Him who is your best friend? Is this a rigorous law, like the commands of Pharaoh to the children of Israel in Egypt, when He bids you simply strike hands with Him who shed His blood for sinners? We ask you not to be friends of death or hell; we beg you rather to dissolve your league with them; we pray that grace may lead you to forswear their company for ever, and be at peace with Him who is incarnate love and infinite mercy. Sinners, why will ye resist Him who only longs to

save you? Why scorn Him who loves you? Why trample on the blood that bought you, and reject the cross which is the only hope of your salvation? "Kiss the Son."

"Bow the knee, and kiss the Son,
Come and welcome, sinner, come."

That is the first meaning of the text—the kiss of reconciliation. The Spirit of God must work a change in man's heart before He will be willing to give this kiss, and it is my heart's desire, that by the words which shall be uttered this morning, the Spirit may bow the obdurate heart, and lead you to give Christ the kiss of reconciliation this very day.

2. Again, the kiss of my text is a kiss of *allegiance and homage*. It is an Eastern custom for the subjects to kiss the feet of the king; nay, in some instances their homage is so abject that they kiss the dust beneath his feet, and the very steps of his throne. Now, Christ requires of every man who would be saved, that he shall yield to His government and His rule. There are some who are willing enough to be saved and take Christ to be their priest, but they are not willing to give up their sins, not willing to obey His precepts, to walk in His ordinances, and keep His commandments. Now, salvation cannot be cut in twain. If you would have justification you must have sanctification too. If your sins are pardoned they must be abhorred; if ye are washed in the blood to take away the guilt of sin, you must be washed in the water to take away the power of sin over your affections and life. O, sinners, the command is, "Kiss the Son," bow your knee, and come and own Him to be a monarch, and say, "Other lords have had dominion over us; we have worshipped our lusts, our pleasures, our pride, our selfishness, but now will we submit ourselves to Thine easy yoke. Take us and make us Thine, for we are willing to be Thy subjects—

'Oh, sovereign grace our hearts subdue;
We would be led in triumph too,
As willing captives to our Lord,
To sing the triumphs of His Word.'"

You must give Him the kiss of fealty, of homage, and loyalty; and take Him to be your king. And is this a hard thing? Is this a rigorous commandment? Why look at Englishmen, how they spring to their feet and sing with enthusiasm—

"God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!"

And is it a hard thing for you and me to be bidden to cry, "God save King Jesus! Spread His kingdom! Let Him reign, King of kings and Lord of lords! Let Him reign in our hearts?" Is it a hard thing to bow before His gentle sceptre? Is there any cruelty in the demand, that we should submit ourselves to the law of right, and rectitude, and justice, and love? "His ways are ways of pleasantness and all His paths are peace." "His commandments are not grievous." "Come unto Me," saith the Lord, "and I will give you rest; take My yoke upon you"; it is not heavy; "take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." O sinner, leave that black monarch; turn your back upon the king of hell. May grace enable you now to flee away from him who deludes you to-day, and shall destroy you for ever; and come ye to the Prince Immanuel, the Son of God, and now declare yourselves to be the willing subjects of His blessed kingdom. "Kiss the Son." It is the kiss of reconciliation and the kiss of homage.

3. Again, it is the kiss of *worship*. They that worshipped Baal kissed the calves. It was the custom in the east for idolaters to kiss the god which they foolishly adored. Now the commandment is that we should give to Christ divine worship. The Unitarian will not do this: he says, "Christ is but a mere man"; he will not kiss the eternal Son of God. Then let him know that God will not alter His gospel to suit his heresy. If he rebelliously denies the Godhead of Christ, he need not marvel if in the last day Christ shall say—"But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before Me." It is no marvel if he who rejects the Godhead of Christ should find that he has built his house upon the sand, and when the rain descends, and the flood comes, his hope shall totter, and great shall be the fall thereof. We are bidden to worship Christ, and Oh how pleasant is this command, to kiss Him in adoration! It is the highest joy of the Christian to worship Jesus. I know of no thrill of pleasure that can more rejoice the Christian's breast and thrill his soul to music, than the song of—

"Worthy is He that once was slain,
The Prince of Peace that groan'd and died,
Worthy to rise, and live, and reign
At His Almighty Father's side."

Surely that shall be the very song of heaven, to sing "Worthy the Lamb," and yet again to shout louder still, "Worthy the Lamb! worthy the Lamb!" Well, sinner, thou art bidden to do this—to acknowledge Christ thy God. "Kiss the Son"; go to Him in prayer this very day; cast thyself on thy knees and worship Him; confess thy sin committed against Him; lay hold of His righteousness; touch the hem of His garment; adore Him by thy faith, trusting in Him; adore Him by thy service, living for Him; adore Him with thy lips, praising Him; adore Him with thy heart, loving Him, and surrendering thy whole being to Him. God help thee in this way to "kiss the Son."

4. There is yet a fourth meaning, and I think this is the sweetest of all. "Kiss the Son." Ah, Mary Magdalene, I need thee this morning! Come hither, Mary, thou shalt explain my text. There was a woman who had much forgiven and she loved much, and as a consequence, loving much she desired much the company and the presence of the object of her affection. She came to the Pharisee's house where He was feasting, but she was afraid to enter for she was a sinner; the Pharisee would repulse her, and tell her to go away. What did a harlot there, in the house of a holy Pharisee? So she came to the door, as if she would peep in and just get a glimpse of Him whom her soul loved. But there He lay at the table, and happily for her, the Pharisee had slighted Christ, he had not put Him at the head of the table, but at the end, and therefore His feet—laying backward as He reclined—were close against the door. She came, and oh! she could not dare to look upon His head; she stood at His feet, behind Him, weeping. And as she wept, the tears flowed so plenteously that she washed His feet—which the Pharisee had forgotten to wash—with her tears.

And then unbraiding her luxurious tresses, which had been the nets into which she had entangled her lovers, she began to wipe His feet with the hairs of her head, and stooping down she kissed His feet, and kissed them yet again. Poor sinner, thou that art full of guilt, if thou hast played the harlot, or if thou hast been a sinner in other ways, come, I beseech thee, to Jesus now. Look to Him, believe in Him,

> "Trust in His blood, for it alone
> Hath power sufficient to atone."

And this done, come thou and "kiss the Son"—kiss His feet with love. Oh, if He were here this morning, methinks I would kiss those feet again and again. And if any should enquire the reason, I would answer,

> "Love I much? I've much forgiven,
> I'm a miracle of grace."

Jesus, dost Thou permit me to kiss Thy feet with the kisses of affection? And may I pray like the spouse in the Canticles: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for Thy love is better than wine." May I so pray? Then, glory be to Thy name, I will not be slow in praying it. If I may be so highly favoured, I will not lose the favour through negligence and coldness of heart. Even now my soul gives the kiss of deep and sincere affection.

> "Yes, I love Thee and adore,
> Oh for grace to love Thee more."

"Kiss the Son." Do you see then the meaning of it? It is a kiss of reconciliation, a kiss of homage, a kiss of worship, and a kiss of affectionate gratitude. "Kiss the Son."

And what if in this great assembly there should be some soul that saith, "I will not kiss the Son, I owe Him nothing, I will not serve Him, I will not be reconciled to Him"? Ah! soul, there are tears for thee. Would God that all the people of Christ would weep for thee until thy heart were changed; for the terrible part of the text which we are to read belongs to thee, and ere long thou shalt know its fearful meaning. But may we not hope better things? Have we not somewhere in this great hall some poor trembling penitent, who with the tear in his eye is saying, "Kiss Him and be reconciled to Him!—Oh that I might! My fear is, sir, if I should try to draw near to Christ, He would say, 'Get thee gone, I will have nought to do with thee; thou art too vile, too hardened; thou hast too long resisted the Word, too long despised My grace—get thee gone.'" No, soul, Jesus never said that yet, and He never will. Whatever are thy sins as long as thou art in the body there is hope. However great thy guilt, however enormous thy transgressions, if thou art now willing to be reconciled, God has made thee willing, and He would not have put the will if He did not intend to gratify it. There is nothing that can keep thee from Christ if thou art willing to come. Christ casts out none that desire to be saved. There is in His heart enough for all that seek Him, enough for each, enough for evermore. Oh! think not that Christ is ever slower than we are. We never love Him before He loves us. If our heart loves Him, His soul loved us long ago, and if we are now willing to be reconciled to Him, let us rest assured that Jehovah's melting bowels yearn to clasp His Ephraims to His breast. May God bless this exhortation to every heart now present, and to Him be the glory.

II. This brings us to the second part of the text. "Kiss the Son"—and THE ARGUMENT is, "Lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little"; read it—"Lest He be angry." And can *He* be angry? Is He not the Lamb of God? Can a Lamb be angry? Did not He weep over sinners? Can *He* be angry? Did not He die for sinners?—can *He* be angry? Yes, and when He is angry, it is anger indeed. When He is angry it is anger that none can match. The most awful word I sometimes think in the whole Bible is that shriek of the lost. "Rocks, hide us! mountains, fall upon us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." What a fearful conjunction of terms—"the wrath of the Lamb?" Can you picture that dear face of His, those eyes that wept, those hands that bled, those lips that spoke such notes of love, such words of pity, and can you believe that one day those eyes shall know no tears, but shall flash with lightning; that those hands shall know no mercy, but shall grasp a rod of iron and break the wicked into pieces like potters' vessels; and those feet shall know no errands of love, but He shall tread upon His enemies, and crush them, even as grapes are trodden by the wine-pressers, and the blood thereof shall stain His garments, and as He comes up from their destruction, they shall ask Him, "Who is this that cometh"—not from Calvary, not from Gethsemane, but "Who is this that cometh from Edom"—the land of His enemies—"with dyed garments from Bozrah?"—the land of His stoutest foes—"this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?" And what shall be the answer? It is most terrible. Who is this that has trodden His enemies and crushed them?—"I that speak in righteousness, *mighty to save.*" Why, Jesus, if Thou hadst said, "Mighty to destroy," we might have understood Thee; but "mighty to save!"—and so He is—this gives the edge to the whole sentence, that when He shall destroy His enemies, He that is mighty to save will be mighty to crush, mighty to damn, mighty to devour, and rend His prey in pieces. I know nothing, I repeat, more fearful than the thought that Christ will be angry, and that if we live and die finally impenitent, rejecting His mercy and despising His sacrifice, we have good need to tremble at this sentence, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry." And now do you see again that if Christ once be angry, it must be all over with our hopes or our rest? We will suppose now some poor girl who has stepped aside from the paths of right. She has persevered in her iniquity despite many warnings. Friends rise up to help her, but they drop off one by one, for she becomes incorrigibly wicked. Others come to help her, but as often as they rise they fall again, for she sins, and sins, and sins again. There is, however, one who has oftentimes received her to his bosom, erring though she be—her father. He says, "Shall I forget the child I have begotten? Sinner she is, but she is still my child"; and often as she sins and goes away he will not reject her; he receives her to his house again; tainted and defiled, again he gives her the kiss of fond affection. At last she perseveres in her iniquity, and goes to such a length, that one day in her desperate despair, some one says to her, why not seek a friend to deliver you in this your awful hour of distress and anguish on account of sin? "Oh," says she, "I have none left." "But there is your father; have you not a father or a mother?" "Yes," says

she, "but he is angry, and he will do nothing for me." Then her last door is shut, and her hope is over. What wonder that—

> "Mad from life's history,
> Glad to death's mystery,
> Swift to be hurled—
> Anywhere, anywhere,
> Out of the world,"

she ends her life because her only helper is angry, and her hope is gone? Despair must seize her then, when her best, her only helper is angry with her. Let me give you another picture,—a simpler one. There is a dove long gone out of Noah's ark: suppose that dove to have been flying many hours till its wing is weary. Poor, poor dove! Across the shoreless sea it flies, and finds never a spot whereon its weary feet may rest. At last, it bethinks itself of the ark; it flies there, hoping there to find a shelter: but suppose it should see Noah standing looking through the window with crossbow to destroy it,—then where were its hope? Its only hope hath proved the gate of death. Now let it fold its wings and sink into the black stream, and die with all the rest. Ah! sinner, these two are but faint pictures of the desperateness of your despair when once He is angry, —He who is the sinner's friend, the sinner's wooer, He of whom we sometimes say,—

> "Jesus, lover of my soul,"

When He is angry, where, where, oh where can sinners hide? When He is angry, when He takes a bow and fits an arrow to the string, where is your shelter then?—where your defence and refuge? Sinners, "kiss the Son," bow before Him now, and receive His grace; acknowledge His sway, lest He be angry with you, and for ever shut you up in black despair, for none can give you hope or joy when once He is angry.

And now mark the effects of Christ's anger. "And ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." Let me give you a picture. Ye have seen the maid light the fire. At first it is the match, the spark, and there is a little kindling; a kindling but a little. What is that compared with the fire that is to succeed? Ye have heard of the prairie burning. The traveller hath lit his fire and dropped a spark—the fire is kindling but a little, and a small circle of flame is forming. Ye cannot judge what will be the mighty catastrophe when the sheet of flame shall seem to cover half the continent. And yet, mark you, our text says that "when God's wrath is kindled but a little" it is even then enough to utterly destroy the wicked, so that they "perish from the way." What a fearful thought it presents to us if we have but eyes to see it! It is like one of Martin's great pictures: it has more cloud in it than plain outline; it has in it great masses of blackness; there is only this little kindling and there is the sinner destroyed. But what is that! Black, thick darkness for ever. What must become of the sinner then, when the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone shall blow up Tophet till its flames reach above all thought, and till the fire burns, beneath, even to the lowest hell? His wrath is kindled but a little then. I find, however, Calvin, together with several other excellent commentators, gives another interpretation to this:—"In but a little," and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled very soon, or, "in but a little time." So it may be well translated without any violence whatever to the original. God's anger kindles very speedily when once men have rejected Him: when the period of their mercy is passed away, then comes the hour of their black despair, and His wrath is kindled in a little time. This should make each one of us think about our souls —the fact that God may take us away with a stroke, and a great ransom cannot deliver us. We had, last Sabbath-day, a terrible picture of how soon God can take away a man with a stroke. On our common, you will remember, at Clapham, a man sought shelter beneath a poplar tree, and in a moment a bolt fell from heaven and rent his body in pieces, and he died. I should not have marvelled if last night, when I was reading my text by the glare of the lightning, thinking it over amidst the roarings of the thunder, if many such deaths had occurred. God can soon take us away. But this is the wonder, that men will visit that tree by which their fellow died, and go away and be just as careless as they were before. You and I hear of sudden deaths, and yet we imagine *we* shall not die suddenly. We cannot think God's wrath will be kindled in a little time, and that He will take us away with a stroke. We get the idea that we shall die in our nests, with a slow and gradual death, and have abundance of time for preparation. O, I beseech you, let no such delusion destroy your soul. "Kiss the Son now, lest He be angry in a little while, and ye perish from the way." Now bow before Him and receive His grace.

However, I return to the old reading of the text, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." How terrible is the doom of the wicked! The little kindling of God's wrath kills them; what shall the eternal burnings be? Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall abide with everlasting burnings? There is a land of thick darkness and despair where dwelleth the undying worm, which in its ceaseless fold doth crush the spirits of the damned. There is a fire quick burning, that drieth up the very marrow of body and soul and yet destroyeth them not. There also is the pit that knoweth no bottom, the hopeless falling without a thought of ever coming to an end. There is a land where souls linger in eternal death, and yet they never die; crushed, but not annihilated; broken, but not destroyed; for ever, for ever, for ever, is the ceaseless wave which rolls its fresh tide of fire upon a shore of agony, whose years are as countless as the sands of the sea. And shall it be your lot and mine to dwell for ever with the howling spirits of the damned? Must these eyes weep the briny tear that cannot assuage thirst? Must these lips be parched with the infinite heat? Must this body be everlastingly tormented, and this soul, with all its powers, become a lake of grief into which torrents of Almighty wrath shall roll ceaselessly with black and fiery streams? O, my God, and can the thought be uttered—there may be some in this hall this morning, who ere long, shall be in hell? If you should see an arrow fitted to a string pointed in yon direction, would you think it a hard prophecy if I should say, that, ere long, the arrow would find its mark over yonder? "No," you would say, "it is but nature that it should go in the way in which it is directed." But, sinners, some of you are this day fitted on the bow of sin. Sin is the string that impels you forward. Nay, more than this. Some of you are whistling onward towards death, despair, and hell. Sin is the

path to hell, and you are travelling in it with lightning speed. Why need you think me harsh if I prophesy that you will get to the end ere long, and reap the harvest to your soul? Oh "kiss the Son," I beseech you; for if ye kiss Him not, if ye receive not His grace and mercy, perish ye must; there is no hope for you, desperate, without remedy, your end must be, if ye will not yield your pride and submit to Jesus. Oh! what language shall I use? Here were a task for Desmosthenes, if he could rise from the dead, and be converted, and preach with all his mighty eloquence, and exhort you to flee from the wrath to come. Here is a text that might exhaust the eloquence of the apostle Paul, while with tears running down his cheeks, he would plead with you to flee to Christ, and lay hold upon His mercy. As for me, I cannot speak my soul out. Would that my heart could speak without my lips to tell out the agony I feel just now concerning your souls. Oh, why will ye die? "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Will you make your beds in hell? Will you wrap yourselves about with flame for ever? Will you have the merriment of sin in this life, and then reap the harvest of destruction in the world to come? O, men and brethren, I beseech you by the living God, by death, by eternity, by heaven, and by hell; I implore you, stop! stop! and "kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way." Oh! the terrors of the Lord! who shall speak them? Last night, we saw, as it were, the back parts of the terrible God, when His skirts of light swept through the sky. He made clouds His chariot, and He did ride upon the wings of the wind. Sinners, can ye stand before the God of thunder? Can ye war against the God of lightning? Will ye resist Him, and despise His Son, and reject the offer of mercy, and dash yourselves upon His spear, and rush upon His sword? Oh, turn ye! turn ye now! Thus saith the Lord: "Consider your ways."

"Bow the knee, and kiss the Son;
Come, and welcome, sinner, come!"

III. And now give me your attention just a moment or two longer while with all earnestness I endeavour to preach for a little while upon THE BENEDICTION WITH WHICH THE TEXT CLOSES: "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." I have been beating the big drum of threatening, and now let us have the soft, sweet harp of David, of sweet, wooing benedictions. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Dost thou put thy trust in Him, my hearer? Beneath the wings of God we nestle, and we know of no security elsewhere. This is enough for us. Now the text says, that those that trust in Him are blessed; and I would observe, first, that they are *really* blessed. It is no fiction, no imaginary blessing; it is a real blessedness which belongs to those that trust in God: a blessedness that will stand the test of consideration, the test of life, and the trial of death; a blessedness into which we cannot plunge too deeply, for it is none of it a dream, but all a reality.

Again, those that trust in Him have not only a real blessedness, but they often-times have a *conscious* blessedness. They, know what it is to be blest in their troubles, for they are in their trials comforted, and they are blest in their joys, for their joys are sanctified. They are blest and they know it, they sing about it and they rejoice in it. It is their joy to know that God's blessing is come to them not in word only but in very deed. They are blessed men and blessed women.

"They would not change their blest estate
For all the world calls good and great."

Then, further, they are not only really blessed, and consciously blessed, but they are *increasingly* blessed. Their blessedness grows. They do not go downhill, as the wicked do, from bright hope to black despair. They do not diminish in their delights, the river deepens as they wade into it. They are blessed when the first ray of heavenly light streams on their eye-balls; they are blessed when their eyes are opened wider still, to see more of the love of Christ; they are blessed the more their experience widens, and their knowledge deepens, and their love increases. They are blessed in the hour of death, and, best of all, their blessedness increases to eternal blessedness,—the perfection of the saints at the right hand of God. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Time fails me to enter into this blessed benediction, and, therefore I pause and come back to my old work again, of endeavouring to reach you by earnest entreaty, while I urge you to "kiss the Son."

Sinner, you are bidden to trust in Christ this morning. Come, this is your *only* hope. Remember, you may do a hundred things, but you will be none the better. You will be like the woman mentioned in Scripture, who spent all her money on physicians, and was none the better, but, rather, grew worse. There is no hope for you but in Christ. Rest assured, that all the mercy of God is concentrated in the cross. I hear some talk about the uncovenanted mercies of God: there are no such things. The mercies of God are all emptied out into the covenant; God hath put all His grace into the person of Christ, and you shall have none elsewhere. Trust, then, in Christ,—so you shall be blessed, but you shall be blessed nohow else. Again, I urge you to "kiss the Son," and trust Christ, because this is the *sure* way. None have perished, trusting in Christ. It shall not be said on earth, nor even in hell shall the blasphemy be uttered, that ever a soul perished that trusted in Christ. "But suppose I am not one of God's elect," says one. But if you trust in Christ you are; and there is no supposing about it. "But suppose Christ did not die for me." But, if you trust Him, He did die for you. That fact is proved, and you are saved. Cast yourself simply on Him; dare it, run the risk of it; venture on Him, venture on Him, (and there is no risk.) You shall not find that you have been mistaken. Sometimes I feel anxiety and doubt about my own salvation; and the only way I can get comfort is this: I go back to where I began, and say,—

"I the chief of sinners am;"

I go to my chamber, and once more confess that I am a wretch undone, without His sovereign grace, and I pray Him to have mercy on me yet again. Depend on it, it is the only way to heaven, and it is a sure one. If you perish trusting in Christ, you will be the first of the kind. Do you think God would allow any to say, "I trusted in Christ and yet He deceived me; I cast my soul on Him, and He was not strong enough to bear me"? Oh, do not be afraid, I beseech you.

And I conclude now by noticing that this is an *open* salvation. Every soul in the world that feels its need of a Saviour, and that longs to be saved,

may come to Christ. If God hath convinced thee of sin, and brought thee to know thy need—come, come away; come, come away! come now; trust now in Christ, and thou shalt now find that blessed are all they that trust in Him. The door of mercy does not stand on the jar, it is wide open. The gates of heaven are not merely hanging on the latch, but they are wide open both night and day. Come, let us go together to that blessed house of mercy, and drive our wants away. The grace of Christ is like our street drinking fountains, open to every thirsty wanderer. There is the cup, the cup of faith. Come and hold it here while the water freely flows and drink. There is no one can come up and say it is not made for you; for you can say, "Oh, yes it is, I am a thirsty soul; *it is meant for me.*" "Nay," says the devil, "you are too wicked." No, but this is a free-drinking fountain. It does not say over the top of the fountain, "No thieves to drink here." All that is wanted at the drinking fountain, is simply that you should be willing to drink, that you should be thirsty and desire. Come, then,

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth,
Is to feel your need of Him."

He has given you this; come and drink; drink freely. "The Spirit and the bride say come; and let him that heareth say come; and whosoever is athirst, let him come, and take the water of life freely."

PLAIN DIRECTIONS TO THOSE WHO WOULD BE SAVED FROM SIN

"Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord."—Psalm iv. 4, 5.

DAVID was surrounded with many wicked and cruel enemies. They touched him in a tender place when they mocked his religion, and so turned his glory into shame. They invented all kinds of lies against him; but the worst of all was that they said, "There is no help for him in God." As much as to say, "God hath cast him off; therefore, let men cast him off. He that is forsaken of the Lord is not fit to sit upon the throne of Israel; let us set up Absalom in his place." This was malice indeed.

David first made his appeal to God in prayer. Herein he showed his wisdom. You can drive a better business at the mercy-seat than in the world's jangling markets. You will get more relief from the righteous Lord that from ungodly men. To enter into debate is never so profitable as to enter into devotion. Carry not your complaint into the lower courts, but go at once to the Court of King's Bench, where the Judge of all presides. Copy David, and David's Lord, who in the days of his flesh with strong crying and tears poured out his soul before the Father.

After David had prayed, he expostulated with his adversaries. The first showed his sonship towards God, the second his brotherliness towards men. There is nothing of bitterness in the words I have read to you: they have a kindly voice in them. If his foes had been at all reasonable, they would have listened to his pleadings; but it is to be feared they were otherwise minded. He urges them to cease from sin, and he teaches them the way to do so. In four sentences he helps them to escape from their evil ways, and to become better men. Had God's Spirit applied David's words to their consciences, they would have been pricked in their hearts, and there would have been no need for them to be smitten on the cheek-bone, that their cruel teeth might be broken. Upon these four precepts I would speak this morning as the Holy Spirit shall give me utterance, trusting, hoping, believing that many who desire a better life may find it while I speak. May God begin with them, that they may begin with God! I have no confidence in my own persuasions; yet, being called to use them, I trust in Him that sent me to make them effectual.

David mentions four things as helpful towards ceasing from sinning. The first is, *feel reverent awe:* "Stand in awe, and sin not." The second is, *use thoughtful self-examination:* "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." The third advice is, *make a right approach to God*—"Offer the sacrifice of righteousness": and the fourth is the greatest of them all: *exercise faith*—"Put your trust in the Lord." Here are four stepping stones across the filthy slough of sin; may you mark them well, and step from one to the other by the help of God's Spirit, till you reach the other shore, and stand on safe and clean ground!

I. First, FEEL REVERENT AWE: "Stand in awe." It might be translated, "Tremble, and sin not." Hardened sinners sin, and tremble not; penitent sinners tremble, and sin not. Gracious work in the heart usually begins with trembling. I cannot believe a man has been saved if he has never trembled before God because of the evil of sin. The old house of depraved nature shakes before it comes down. The returning prodigal must feel, "I am not worthy to be called thy son," or he will never be called a son. He seeks his father's face with much trembling, because he has so grievously offended.

Awe is not a common emotion nowadays. This is a flippant age. Men are rather triflers than tremblers. If there be any doctrine which has peculiar weight and solemnity about it, they try to pare it down to less terrible proportions. Sin is not exceeding sinful to them, nor its punishment exceeding terrible. They would not have us know the terrors of the Lord, though by these very terrors we persuade men. But true religion must have a savour of awe about it: "My heart standeth in awe of Thy word," is the expression of one that knows God, and is reconciled to Him. Let me say, then, to you who have been thoughtless and careless about your souls until now—we earnestly desire you to consider these words: "Stand in awe."

Remember, *there is a God:* whatever you may desire, or others may declare, there is a God who made you, and in whose hand your breath is. There is a God that sitteth in heaven, who beholdeth all the sons of men; and however much you may dislike the thought, there He is, and there He ever will be, and you will have to deal with Him, and He with you, before long.

God is everywhere present, at all times. He has seen all your evil ways, and heard all your hard speeches. No night is so dark as to hide from His eye; no chamber so retired as to shut Him out. He has even read your thoughts and imaginations. He notes all, and forgets nothing. All things are ever present to Him; the days of your youth and the years of your manhood lie open before Him like a book. If men could but realize that God is there, how could they dare to sin before His very eyes? If at this moment any one of my hearers who is without Christ could only be filled with this one thought, "Thou God seest me," surely he would stand in awe, and at least desire to sin no more. Well may the preacher speak very solemnly when he feels that he is surrounded with God, and that God is within him as well as around him! Well may his hearer tremble if he feels that all his thoughts are at this moment read by God! Stand in awe, I pray you, of God, who is now filling this house, and is in your own houses. Will you sin in God's presence? Can you blaspheme Him to His face? Will you disobey Him while His eyes are fixed upon you? I pray you stand in awe of the eternal God, in whom you live, and move, and have your being!

Remember that this God, who is everywhere, and sees everything, *is your Judge.* He is pure and holy, and cannot bear iniquity. He is angry with the wicked every day, and will surely visit them for their transgressions. Every sinful act shall have its recompense of reward. Do not doubt it. The world is all in a tangle now, but there will be a day when the Lord will draw out a straight thread for each man. To-day the wicked prosper, but God will turn their way upside down; and though the righteous be often under a cloud, He will bring forth their judgment as the noonday. Men respect an earthly judge; therefore, I pray you, stand in awe of the Judge of all the earth.

Do not forget also *that your God is almighty.* He has but to will it, and the strongest of us would be crushed more easily than a moth. There is no escaping from the Lord; neither the heights of Carmel nor the depths of the sea could afford shelter for a fugitive from the Lord. Neither can any resist Him, for none have any power apart from Him. You have heard His thunder, and trembled at the bolts of His lightning; behold how dreadful is God in arms! How dare you sin against a God so great? Stand in awe. Even holy Job, when he came near to the Lord, exclaimed, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." How can you feel Him near and not be filled with awe?

Stand in awe of God because *He is infinitely good.* To me personally, some little time ago, the Lord drew very near in a most special and memorable providence. As I saw the hand of the Lord stretched out so marvellously, I felt my very flesh creep, not with alarm, but with a joyful awe of One who could work so tenderly and condescendingly for His tried servant. I knew that He was God by His marvellously gracious care over me, and nearness to my soul in adversity. Verily Jehovah is God, and a great King above all gods. He is to be had in reverence of them that are round about Him. I know now why Jacob said at Bethel, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." He was filled with a holy dread and solemn awe because God had been so near. I therefore say to you—stand in awe of God, because He is infinitely great and good. The illustration which I quoted from my own personal experience, I could not withhold, because it is, even at this hour, one of the most vivid recollections of my life. God has dealt with me very graciously. Oh, His great goodness! A sense of it is overwhelming. We fear and tremble for all the goodness which the Lord makes to pass before us. Think of sin forgiven, of righteousness imputed, of spiritual life imparted, of that life preserved, supplied, nurtured. Think of providence with all mindful foresight, and abounding supplies. The love of God should make us reverent as angels, and humble as penitents. If the impudence of pride might dare to insult justice, yet it should scorn to injure love. There is forgiveness with God, that He may be feared: His grace, if not His glory, should command the reverence of the most obdurate hearts. I pray you stand in awe of God, and sin not. If thoughts of this kind could but dwell in men's minds, they would surely perceive that sin is a great wrong to the Lord, and they would flee from it, crying like Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

My dear hearers, stand in awe in reference to *a future state.* You do not doubt the truth which the Holy Spirit has revealed, that when you die you will not cease to be. There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust: "for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." Oh, that all persons would remember this wherever they go! I have heard of a soldier—I think he was employed in the survey of Palestine—who was in the valley of Jehoshaphat, outside Jerusalem, and someone remarked that it was reported by some that this valley would be the scene of the last judgment, and in that place the multitudes would be gathered. The soldier, hearing this, said, "What a crowd there will be! I shall be there, and I will sit on this stone." He sat down to realize the scene, and his imagination acted so powerfully that he seemed to himself to be among the throng, and to behold the great white throne. He was seen to swoon, and fall to the ground. Do you wonder? If any one of us could, in our inmost souls, behold that scene, should we not be overcome? I wish I could so speak this morning that some of you would picture that last tremendous day, for which all other days were made. Behold that *dies iræ*, that day of wrath, that day when justice will sit upon the throne! Behold it by anticipation, for it will soon be upon you in very deed. As surely as you live, you will live again: and for every act on earth you must give an account in that last assize. Trifle not, for the Judge is at the door. We may hear His trumpets before this day is over. Let not this thought be driven from you; rather welcome it, and let it abide in your minds: if you were to think of nothing else for a time you might be justified, since it is of such overwhelming importance that you prepare for your final state. Shall a man live and never think of the end of life? Can a man think it wise to occupy

himself with frivolities throughout the whole of his earthly existence? While he is shaping his eternal condition, will he do nothing else but sport? Will he never think of that day when his position shall be fixed by the verdict of the great Judge? O my dear hearers, do not forget that you have to live in a future state, and that you will see Him who died upon the cross, seated on the throne, in that day when all nations shall be gathered before Him, and He shall divide them, the one from the other, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. May the thought of the eternal reward also rest on your minds! Hear ye, even now, that word of the King to the righteous—"Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Hear, also, that dread sentence to those on His left hand, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Oh, think of these things, and "stand in awe, and sin not!" This awe is one of the strongest moral disinfectants: use it largely. There is no fear of your having too much of it. He that has no fear of God before His eyes sins with a high hand, but awe of the Lord leads to purity of life.

II. In the second place, David admonished the ungodly to practise THOUGHTFUL SELF-EXAMINATION. "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."

I am not trying, my dear hearer, to preach a sermon this morning, but I am longing to take you by the hand, and to lead you in the right way. I pray the Holy Spirit to make you willing to follow my gentle guidance. My dear friend, you are now asked *to think about yourself*—"commune with your own heart." When once men choose the way of evil, they run in it with their eyes shut. They do not wish to consider; it is easier to go blindly on. They will think about their worldly concerns, their profits and losses, their pleasures and amusements; but they refuse seriously to consider their condition before God. O my friend, think of what you are, and where you are, what you have done, what you are doing, what it will all lead to! Are you such a fool that you will not consider? Then put on the cap and bells, and wear motley, and take to your proper trade. And yet, even if you were a merry-andrew, it would become you sometimes to be wise as well as merry, and to take a look into the future, lest you have to take a leap in the dark at last.

Especially think of the state of your heart. This is the vital point. Are you right with God? Do you serve your Maker? Have you truly repented of former sin? Have you fled to Christ as your refuge? Have you been born again? Are you the subject of sanctifying grace? "Commune with your own heart" upon these essential points. He that would have his face clean must look in a glass to see his spots; and he that would have his heart clean must gaze into the looking-glass of God's Word, that he may discover his secret faults. Your heart may be diseased while your cheek seems ruddy with health. Look within you, man, and be not deceived as to the fountain of your being. Have you really passed from death to life? Does the Spirit of God of a truth dwell in you? Such questions as these are all-important; I pray you answer them as before the living God, without partiality or negligence.

Think by yourself, alone, and in quiet. Oh, how I wish I could induce you to spend an hour or two closeted with yourself! "Commune with your own heart upon your bed," at that time when companions are out of the way; when the jest is silenced, and the common talk is hushed. Get by yourself, when you think of yourself, or it will be an impossible task. Choose the hour of night, when all is still around you, and darkness lends its solemnity. You can forego a little natural sleep, if thereby you may be aroused from the sleep of spiritual death. The bed and sleep are instructive emblems of the grave and death: they may aid you in the serious work of examining your hearts. Remember that, as you put off your clothes and go to your bed, so you must put off your body and quit the scene of life's activities: are you ready for that undressing? Make your bed the place of your contrition, even as David did when he said, "All the night make I my bed to swim." The earth outside has its dews, let your heart have its tears.

Think by yourself, of yourself, and then *think for yourself.* You have been carried away by your companions; you have tried to think as they think. The general opinion of the age may have influenced you towards indifference. With a family round about you, you have looked at things too much in the light of business and personal benefit; but all this it will be wise to lay aside. As you will have to die alone, and to put in a personal appearance at the judgment-seat of Christ, it will be prudent to divest yourself of your surroundings, and "commune with your own heart." I commend this text most heartily to your immediate practice. If you are unsaved—think rather than sleep. The tendency of most men with regard to eternal things is to go to sleep, and let matters drift: I pray you do not so. I dare not let you take your rest while all is wrong with you. Sleep, if you like, in a house that is on a blaze; sleep, if you like, in a ship that is settling down, and rapidly sinking; but I charge you do not sleep while you are an unforgiven man, and your soul is nearing the eternal woe: "Commune with your own heart upon your bed": use your bed for seeking instead of sleeping. I remember the time when I dared not go to sleep, for fear I might wake up in hell. Many when under conviction of sin have at length resolved not to sleep until they found Christ. I wish that some such feeling as that would steal over you at this moment.

Keep on thinking *till you come to be still.* "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, *and be still.*" Do you know what that means? There comes a time with men whom God is saving when all grows quiet within them. Their old pleasures and desires are hushed; the voice of the outside world is still, and they hear in the silence of their souls "the still small voice" of conscience. Oh, that you were at this moment still enough to hear that warning note! Memory also commences her rehearsals: it tells of the past, and brings forgotten things before the soul. Oh, that all of you would remember and bethink yourselves that God requireth that which is past. Best of all, God speaks in the soul. It was at night, when young Samuel was on his bed, that the Lord said to him, "Samuel, Samuel"; and it is when the heart at last has grown still that God's voice of mercy is heard calling to the man by name. Oh, that in such a case you may have grace to answer, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!"

I beseech you, give yourselves space for thought, before thought becomes the worm of eternal misery to you. Remember, before you hear that Voice from

heaven which spoke to the rich man in hell, and said to him, "Son, remember." Ye slaves of fashion and frivolity, think, I pray you! Ye serfs of daily money-grubbing, rest a while, and hear what God the Lord shall speak to you! You can hardly hear the great bell of St. Paul's when the traffic is thundering around, but it sounds solemnly in the stillness of night. We who live in the more remote suburbs hear Big Ben of Westminster at night, but we seldom note it amid the stir and noise of the day. Do give an opportunity for the eternal voices to pierce the clamours of the hour. Do, for God's sake, and for your soul's sake, hear what wisdom teaches concerning everlasting things! O Lord, give grace to my dear hearers, that they may consider their ways, and turn unto Thy statutes!

III. Very briefly, let us note that David gives a third piece of advice, which in essence means APPROACH UNTO GOD ARIGHT—"Offer the sacrifices of righteousness."

Now, I do not quite know what David himself may have intended by it, but this is how I interpret it. Come to God; come to God in His own way; come as Israel came to the Tabernacle in the wilderness, bringing their sacrifices with them.

When they brought their sacrifices, the first thing they did was to lay their hand on the victim, and *make a confession of sin.* Come, then, with broken and contrite hearts unto the Lord. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." Own your shortcomings and transgressions. Do not cloak or excuse your sins. Get to your chamber, and tell the Lord what you have done. Pour out your hearts before Him: turn them upside down, as it were, and let all flow out, even to the dregs. Confess your pride and unbelief, your Sabbath-breaking, your dishonesty, your falsehood, your disobedience to parents, your every breach of the divine law; whatsoever you have done amiss, confess it before Him, and thus go to Him in the only way in which He can receive you, even as sinners owning your guilt.

Go also to the Lord with gracious desires to be rid of sin. Entreat reconciliation, saying, "I would no longer be what I have been. I throw down the weapons of my rebellion, I pluck out the plumes of my pride; O Lord, I stand before Thee, guilty, and I pray Thee forgive me, and then rid me of the tyrant evils which now rule me so terribly! Oh, that I may sin no more! If I have been a drunkard, help me from this day to relinquish the intoxicating cup; if I have been a swearer, wash out my mouth; may I, henceforth, speak nothing but that which will be acceptable to Thee! If I have been unchaste, cleanse my mind, that I may keep my body pure!" In this way come to God with contrite hearts. How much do I long that you may draw nigh to God with true repentance and hearty resolves to conquer sin!

The main thing, however, is to bring unto the Lord *the offering which He has divinely appointed and provided.* You know what that is. There is one sacrifice of righteousness without which you cannot be accepted. Come to God by faith in Jesus Christ, plead the precious blood of atonement, and say, "My Lord, for His dear sake who died upon the tree, receive Thy wanderer, and now be pleased to grant me that repentance and remission of sins which He is exalted to give." My hearers, am I talking so as to reach your hearts? If not, I do not want to talk any longer. I had far rather be silent lest I minister to your condemnation. Hearts that have forgotten your Lord till now, oh, may His Spirit constrain you to return to Him this day through the sacrifice of Jesus! If you come through Christ, you will never be cast out. The Father will receive any sinner that pleads the name of Jesus; and Jesus is willing that you should plead His name. He died on purpose to be the propitiation for our sins: God grant that you may accept Him as such!

Come to your God: this is the great necessity of the hour. Say, "I will arise, and go to my Father." If the prodigal had said, "I will rise, and go to my brother," he would have made a great mistake, for the elder brother would have shut the door in his face. Even if his brother had been of a kinder sort, he could not have forgiven the transgressor: his father alone could do that. Come, then, to your God with earnest prayer; for it prevails with heaven. Come also with humble praise; for it is much that you are yet alive, and not yet cast into the pit. Come to your God and Father, with the resolve henceforth to render Him your life's service saying, "O Lord our God, other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us: but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name!"

IV. I must now close with the fourth point, which is, in some respects, the most important of all: EXERCISE FAITH. When holy awe and thoughtful self-communion have led us to seek the Lord, then we are prepared for the great precept which follows. It is the command of the gospel in its Old Testament form: "Put your trust in the Lord." In whom should a man trust but in his God? It may seem reasonable to trust our fellow-creature; but, alas! man is a frail thing, and to lean upon him ensures a fall; it is, therefore, unreasonable to trust in the creature, but to rely upon the Creator is the dictate of pure reason. May God, the Holy Ghost, lead you at once to a childlike faith in our faithful God!

"Put your trust in the Lord." First, *trust Him as willing to receive you,* to forgive you, to accept you, and to bless you. Are you despairing? Do you say, "There is no hope?" "Put your trust in the Lord." Are you saying, "I am without strength, and, therefore, cannot be saved?" Why not? "Put your trust in the Lord." Does the evil one say that God will not receive you? "Put your trust in the Lord," who is infinitely gracious, and full of compassion. He saith, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Surely, you may trust in Him whose mercy endureth for ever.

Especially *trust in the Lord as He reveals Himself in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.* In Him you see love written out in capital letters. "Put your trust in the Lord" as having provided the one sacrifice for sin, whereby He has put away for ever all the sins of those who believe in Him. God is just, and the justifier of Him that believeth. Believe that the precious blood can make you whiter than snow, scarlet sinner as you are. Come with that daring trust which ventures all upon the bare promise of a faithful God. Say, "I will go in unto the King, and if I perish I perish." If you do not trust in Christ, you must be lost; therefore come and try the divine way of salvation. The Lord Jesus is God's unspeakable gift, freely bestowed on all who by faith receive Him. Dare to grasp what God holds out to you as the one hope of your spirit. Put your trust in the Lord, I beseech you. By His agony and bloody sweat, by His cross and passion, by His precious death and

burial, by His glorious resurrection and ascension, I entreat you to trust the Son of God, who has once appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Trust in the Lord, next, *that by the work of His Holy Spirit He can renew you.* The glorious Lord, who made the world out of nothing, can make something out of you yet. If you are given to anger, the Holy Spirit can make you calm and loving. If you have been defiled with impurity, He can make you pure of heart. If you have been grovelling, He can elevate you. I may be addressing a forlorn man, who thinks that nothing can be made of him. I tell you, you have no idea what God can do with you. He can put heavenly treasure in earthen vessels. He can set you at last among the heavenly choristers, that your voice, sweeter than that of angels, may be heard amongst their everlasting symphonies. He will even here put you among the children, and set you with the princes of His people. Believe that the Holy Ghost can create you anew, can raise you from your dead condition, and can make you perfect in every good work to do His will. Put your trust in the Lord for this.

In fine, "Put your trust in the Lord" *for everything.* Poor sinner, when you begin to trust God, you will look to Him mainly to put away your sin; but when that boon is received, you may go on to trust Him about all your affairs. You may look to Him concerning your poverty, your sickness, your bereavements, your children, your business; you may trust Him for time, and trust Him for eternity; trust Him about little things, trust Him about great things. Once under the shadow of His wings you are covered altogether; nothing is left out in the cold. To trust in God is to be your perpetual business, "For the just shall live by faith."

My closing theme is this—it has been asserted by certain of the modern school that we preach up salvation by a simple intellectual operation—salvation by merely believing a certain doctrinal statement. This is their way of stating, or mis-stating, justification by faith, which we do assuredly preach, and preach most distinctly and confidently. We are not responsible for their caricatures of our teaching, but we would be moved thereby to be more and more explicit. As far as faith is an intellectual operation, it is simple enough; but simple faith is no trifle. Fire is a simple element, but it has a measureless power. Connected with faith there are forces of the mightiest kind for influencing character and purifying life. Faith is the surest of all sin-killers: in fact, its tendency is to extirpate sin. The moral and spiritual change which accompanies faith, and grows out of it, is of the most remarkable kind. Faith's work in the soul is something to be wondered at, and to be admired to all eternity.

For, mark, when a man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, when he believes that Jesus so died for him that he is effectually redeemed, when he believes that the Lord Jesus has cleansed him, and that he is saved, the result upon his heart and life cannot be common-place. So divine a persuasion operates upon his whole nature. *He is filled with adoring gratitude,* and that gratitude breeds an *intense love,* which fervent love sets itself to work for the glory of God by the purification of the soul for sin. "My Jesus died because of my sin," says the pardoned sinner, "therefore no sin shall abide in my heart. Away, O sin! Away, for ever." Some favourite sin cries, "Let me lodge within thee," but he cries, "It cannot be, for I love Jesus." Sin slew our Saviour; how can we be on friendly terms with it? We hate it with perfect hatred. Sin pleadeth, "Is it not a little one?" But the grateful heart sees great evil in a little sin, since the great Father abhors all iniquity. If the little sin was not the spear which pierced the Lord, it helped to make the thorn-crown which tore His blessed brow, and therefore away with it, away with it.

> "The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from its throne,
> And worship only Thee."

Nothing creates more indignation and revenge against sin than a grateful sense of "free grace and dying love." Surely this is no mean help towards moral purification.

Faith in God is effective for the noblest ends upon the soul because *it elevates the mind.* The man who is hoping to be saved by his own works and efforts begins on earth and ends there; but the habit of looking up to God is in itself a blessing. It is something to have learned to look beyond this dunghill of fallen humanity, in which no one will ever find a pearl. It is something, I say, to wait upon God because your expectation is from Him. Trust in the sacred Trinity teaches us to be familiar with higher and better things than we can find in ourselves, or in this poor world. A hold of heaven is a help towards drawing us there. I find that those who do not put their trust in the Lord are by no means spiritual men, nor men whose conversation is in heaven; but the faith which they despise—puts our foot on that ladder the top of which reaches up to God.

Faith in God *brings new ideas of God's demands.* When we do not know God, we read His law, and judge it to be harsh. "This is too strict; this is too holy. How can we obey this hard law?" But when we have faith in God, we correct our estimate, and judge that these laws of our heavenly Father are all meant for our good. He only forbids what would harm us, and He only commands what is most truly for our benefit. By faith we look upon the law as a loving directory—a chart of life's voyage showing what channel to follow, and what rock to avoid. "His commandments are not grievous." He takes from us no real pleasure, and imposes no crushing burden. To form so much better an estimate of God's law is a great moral change, is it not? Must it not greatly affect the man's behaviour?

The man who puts his trust in the Lord *sees the pleasures of sin in a new light*; for he sees the evil which follows on them, by noting the agonies which they brought upon our Lord, when He bare our sins in His own body on the tree. Without faith a man says to himself, "This sin is a very pleasant thing, why should I not enjoy it? Surely I may eat this fruit, which looks so charming, and is so much to be desired." The flesh sees honey in the drink, but faith at once perceives that there is poison in the cup. Faith spies the snake in the grass, and gives warning of it. Faith remembers death, judgment, the great reward, the just punishment, and that dread word—eternity. Faith sees the end as well as the beginning. Faith, while the feast is going on, reminds the revellers of the reckoning. Faith feels that she cannot buy the transient joys of earth at the countless cost of an immortal soul. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Faith destroys the power of temptation. When Satan says, "You are in trouble, and here is an easy way of escape: only do a little wrong, and you will get a great good." "No," says faith, "it is God's business to get me out of my trouble, and I will not go to the devil for his aid." "Ah!" says Satan, "everybody else does so!" Faith answers, "I have to do with nobody but God, and that which is right." Ah, brethren! if Satan should offer us all the kingdoms of this world if we would do his bidding, true faith would baffle him by saying, "What canst thou offer me? I have all these things already; for all things are mine in Christ Jesus my Lord." When faith is in its true place, covering the believer, all the wicked suggestions of the evil one are caught upon it and quenched by it, like fiery darts which fall upon a shield. We are preserved from temptation by the buckler of faith.

Moreover, faith is always attended with a new nature. That is a point never to be forgotten. No man has faith in God of a true kind unless he has been born again. Faith in God is one of the first indications of regeneration. Now, if you have a new and holy nature, you are no longer moved towards sinful objects as you were before. The things that you once loved you now hate, and, therefore, you will not run after them. You can hardly understand it, but so it is, that your thoughts and tastes are totally changed. You long for that very holiness which once it was irksome to hear of, and you loathe those very pursuits which were once your delights. When the Lord renews us it is not half done; it is a total and radical change. If there were no work of the Holy Spirit connected with faith, and if faith were nothing more than human assent to truth, we might be blameworthy for preaching salvation through it; but since faith leads the van in the graces of the Spirit of God, and turns the rudder of the soul, we are more and more concerned to place faith where God places it, and we say without hesitation, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Remember you will thus be saved from the power of sin, and from the practice of sin by being saved from the love of sin. O brothers and sisters, I am not afraid to preach to you justification by faith alone! Look to Jesus and live! I would bid the sinner come to Jesus just as he is, and take Him to be his complete salvation. We do not preach to you the hope of going to heaven, and yet keeping your sins: indeed, till sin is quitted, there can be no heaven. Our Lord Jesus has opened a hospital, and into it He receives all manner of sick folk; yet He does not receive them that they may continue sick, but that He may heal them, and make them whole. He receives the sinful that He may make them holy. He saves men by changing their natures, and infusing into them a heavenly life. Come, then, ye leprous in heart, come ye to Him whose touch can make you clean! Come, ye with withered limbs, incapable of holy exercise: He can, with a word, restore you! Come hither, ye blind, for He will give you sight! Yea, rise, ye dead, for He shall give you life! Repentance and remission are twin gifts which He is exalted to bestow. Come ye now to Him, and receive out of His fulness!

The thought of death is constantly forced upon me by the largeness of this congregation, and the fact that there seldom passes a week but what some one among you is taken away. Soon your bodies will lie beneath the greensward, and your souls will be in the eternal state. In due time you will stand where your past will be revived; for the books shall be opened, and you will be judged out of the things which are written in those books. What a record you have written within the Book of remembrance, to be read aloud in that day! Oh, ye ungodly ones, what will you then do? Christ-rejecting sinner, how will you bear to hear those items read before the assembled world? If from this pulpit I were to read out certain incidents of your past lives, I do not suppose you would get up to go out, for that would convict you; but you would want to go very badly. How, then, will you endure to have your sins laid bare by the hand of God, while every eye beholds them? How will you bear the shame and everlasting contempt which will be the result of your true character being blazoned abroad? How infinitely good it will be if all your past offences shall be blotted out! How joyful to be wholly absolved by the Lord of pardons! If by believing in Christ Jesus you receive a change of nature, and live a different life, and stand at the last day accepted in the Beloved, what bliss it will be! What joy will be yours when Jesus comes, when His smile shall light up the universe, and when He shall acknowledge you before the angels of God! You were with Him in His humiliation, you shall be with Him in His exaltation; you loved Him and served Him here below, you shall sit upon His throne, and reign with Him for ever and ever. Ah! then, whatever little you may have suffered for His sake will be as nothing in comparison with the exceeding weight of glory. Whatever struggling of heart and pain of soul you felt in escaping from the sin which enthralled you will be your joy when the result is seen in your eternal perfection. The bliss of beholding the face of our Beloved will be heaven enough for us. Even now I feel eager to quit this feeble body at the bare thought of being with the Bridegroom of my soul.

> "Mine eyes shall see Him in that day,
> The God that died for me;
> And all my rising bones shall say,
> Lord, who is like to Thee?"

May you and I behold our Redeemer when He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth! Amen.

JOY, JOY FOR EVER

"But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them: let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee."—Psalm v. 11.

"THE Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." There is an ancient difference which He has made in His eternal purpose; and this is seen in every item of the covenant of grace. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself"; but it is also written, "The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight; Thou hatest all workers of iniquity." You that have believed are of the house of Israel, and heirs according to promise; for they that are of faith are the true seed of faithful Abraham. See that ye make manifest this difference by the holiness of your lives. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." Evermore display this difference by the joyfulness of your spirits. Let not noisome cares invade you; for we read, "I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there." Fear not that the wrathful judgment of God will fall indiscriminately; for we read, "Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail." The servants of the Lord should wear the royal livery: that livery is made of the fine cloth of holiness, trimmed with the lace of joy. Take care that you exhibit both holiness of character and joyfulness of spirit; for where these two things are in us, and abound, they make us that we be not barren nor unfruitful. To us there should be joy, strikingly to contrast with the unrest of the unbeliever. Over all the land of Egypt there was darkness which might be felt, even thick darkness, for three days: "They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." If it be so with you, that the Lord has given you the light of joy, let your faces shine with it. If you walk in the light as God is in the light, go forth and let men see the brightness of your countenances, and take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus, and have learned of Him His gracious calm, as well as His holiness. "Rejoice in the Lord alway." Your Lord desires that your joy may be full. He gives you a joy which no man taketh from you: it is His legacy. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

The subject for this morning is joy, the joy of faith, the joy which is the fruit of the Spirit from the root of trust in God. May we not only talk about it at this hour, but enjoy it now and evermore! It is pleasant to read, and hear, and think about joy; but to be filled with joy and peace through believing is a far more satisfying thing. I want you to see not only the sparkling fountain of joy, but to drink deep draughts of it; yes, and drink all the week, and all the month, and all the year, and all the rest of your lives, both in time and in eternity. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

I. First, let us speak a little upon THE KIND OF JOY WHICH IS ALLOTTED TO BELIEVERS: "Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them: let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee."

Note, first, concerning this joy, that *it is to be universal to all who trust:* "Let *all those* that put their trust in Thee rejoice." This is not only for the healthy, but for the sickly; not only for the successful, but for the disappointed; not only for those who have the bird in the hand, but for those who only see it in the bush. Let all rejoice! If you have but a little faith, yet if you are trusting in the Lord, you have a right to joy. It may be, your joy will not rise so high as it might do if your faith were greater; but still, where faith is true, it gives sure ground for joy. Oh ye babes in grace, ye little children, you that have been newly converted, and sadly feel your feebleness, yet rejoice; for the Lord will bless them that fear Him, "both small and great"! "Fear not, thou worm Jacob." "Fear not, little flock." There is a joy which is as milk to nourish babes—a joy which is not as meat with bones in it; for the Lord addeth no sorrow therewith. The little ones of the flock need not vex themselves concerning the deep things of God; for there is joy in those shallows of simple truth where lambs may safely wade. The joy of the Lord is softened down to feeble constitutions, lest it overpower them. The same great sea which floods the vast bays also flows into the tiny creeks. "Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice." You, Miss Much-afraid, over yonder, you are to rejoice! You, Mr. Despondency, hardly daring to look up, you must yet learn to sing. As for Mr. Ready-to-halt, he must dance on his crutches, and Feeble-mind must play the music for him. It is the mind of the Holy Ghost that those who trust in the Lord should rejoice before Him.

This joy, in the next place, is to be *as constant as to time as it is universal as to persons.* "Let them *ever* shout for joy." Do not be content that a good time in the morning should be followed by dreariness in the afternoon. Do not cultivate an occasional delight, but aim at perpetual joy. To be happy at a revival meeting, and then go home to groan, is a poor business. We should "feel like singing all the time." The believer has abiding arguments for abiding consolation. There is never a time when the saint of God has not great cause for gladness; and if he never doubts and worries till he has a justifiable reason for distrust, he will never doubt nor worry. "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again"—what? "alway," and yet does the apostle say, "and again"? Yes, He would have us rejoice, and keep on rejoicing, and then rejoice more and more. Brethren, go on piling up your delights. You are the blessed of the Lord, and His blessing reaches "unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills."

Next, *let your joy be manifested.* "Let them ever *shout* for joy." Shouting is an enthusiastic utterance, a method which men use when they have won a victory, when they divide the spoil, when they bear home the harvest, when they tread the vintage, when they drain the goblet. Believers, you may shout for joy with unreserved delight. Some religionists shout, and we would not wish to stop them; but we wish certain of them knew better what they are shouting for. Brethren, since you know whom you have

believed, and what you have believed, and what are the deep sources of your joy, do not be so sobered by your knowledge as to become dumb; but the rather imitate the children in the temple, who, if they knew little, loved much, and so shouted in praise of Him they loved. "Let them shout for joy." A touch of enthusiasm would be the salvation of many a man's religion. Some Christians are good enough people: they are like wax candles, but they are not lighted. Oh, for a touch of flame! Then would they scatter light, and thus become of service to their families. "Let them shout for joy." Why not? Let not orderly folks object. One said to me the other day, "When I hear you preach I feel as if I must have a shout!" My friend, shout if you feel forced to do so. (Here a hearer cried, "Glory!") Our brother cries, "Glory!" and I say so too. "Glory!" The shouting need not always be done in a public service, or it might hinder devout hearing; but there are times and places where a glorious outburst of enthusiastic joy would quicken life in all around. The ungodly are not half so restrained in their blasphemy as we are in our praise. How is this? They go home making night hideous with their yells: are we never to have an outbreak of consecrated delight? Yes, we will have our high days and holidays, and we will sing and shout for joy till even the heathen say, "The Lord hath done great things for them."

This joy *is to be repeated with variations.* One likes, in music, to hear the same tune played in different ways. So here you have it. "Let them rejoice. Let them ever shout for joy. Let them be joyful in Thee." There is no monotony in real joy. In the pretence of mirth one grows dull; but in living joy there is exhilaration. Commend me to the springing well of heavenly joy: its waters are always fresh, clear, sparkling, springing up into everlasting life. Joy blends many colours in its one ray of light. At times it is quiet, and sits still beneath a weight of glory. I have known it weep, not salt drops, but sweet showers. Have you never cried because of your joy in the Lord? Sometimes joy labours for expression till it is ready to faint; and anon it sings till it rivals the angels. Singing is the natural language of joy; but oftentimes silence suits it even better. Our joy abides in Christ, whether we are quiet or shouting, whether we fall at our Lord's feet as dead, or lean on His bosom in calm delight.

This joy is logical. When I was a child, and went to school, I remember learning out of a book called "Why and Because." Things one learns as a child stick in the memory; and therefore I like a text which has a "because" in it. Here it is: "Let them ever shout for joy, *because* Thou defendest them." Emotions are not fired by logic; and yet reasons furnish fuel for the flame. A man may be sad, though he cannot explain his sadness, or he may be greatly glad, though he cannot set forth the reasons for his joy. The joy of a believer in God has a firm foundation: it is not the baseless fabric of a vision. The joy of faith burns like coals of juniper, and yet it can be calmly explained and justified. The joyful believer is no lunatic, carried away by a delusion: he has a "because" with which to account for all his joy—a reason which he can consider on his bed in the night-watches, or defend against a scoffing world. We have a satisfactory reason for our most exuberant joy: "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." Philosophers can be happy without music, and saints can be happy despite circumstances. With joy we draw water out of deeper and fuller wells than such as father Jacob digged. Our mirth is as soberly reasonable as the worldling's fears.

Once more, the happiness is *a thing of the heart;* for the text runs thus—"Let them that *love Thy name* be joyful in Thee." We love God. I trust I am speaking to many who could say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Is it not a very happy emotion? What is sweeter than to say, with the tears in one's eyes,—"My God, I love Thee!" To sit down and have nothing to ask for, no words to utter, but only for the soul to love—is not this heavenly? Measureless depths of unutterable love are in the soul, and in those depths we find the pearl of joy. When the heart is taken up with so delightful an object as the ever-blessed God, it feels an intensity of joy which cannot be rivalled. When our whole being is steeped in adoring love, then heaven comes streaming down, and we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. I feel I am talking in a poor way about the richest things which are enjoyed by saintly men. Many of you know as much about these matters as I do, perhaps more. But my soul doth even now magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour. Although I feel unworthy and unfit to speak to this vast throng, yet I have a great sympathy with my text, for I am "glad in the Lord."

"Oh, what immortal joys I feel,
And raptures all divine;
For Jesus tells me I am His,
And my Beloved mine!"

If you sit before the Lord at this time, and indulge your souls with an outflow of love to God and His Son Jesus Christ, and at the same time perceive an inflowing of heavenly joy, it will not much matter how the poor preacher speaks to your ear, for the Lord Himself will be heard in your soul, and heaven will flood your being.

II. Now I come to the second head, wherein we will consider THE GROUND AND REASON OF HOLY JOY. I am bound to speak upon this matter; for I have told you that the joy of the believer is logical, and can be defended by facts; and so indeed it is.

For, first, *the believer's joy arises from the God in whom he trusts.* "Let all those that put their trust *in Thee* rejoice." When, after many a weary wandering, the dove of your soul has at last come back to the ark, and Noah has put out his hand and "pulled her in unto him," the poor, weary creature is happy. Taken into Noah's hand and made to nestle in his bosom, she feels so safe, so peaceful! The weary leagues of the wild waste of waters are all forgotten, or only remembered to give zest to the repose. So, when you trust in God, your soul has found a quiet resting-place, a pavilion of repose! The little chick runs to and fro in fear. The mother hen calls it home. She spreads her soft wings over the brood. Have you never seen the little chicks when they are housed under the hen, how they put out their little heads through the feathers and peep and twitter so prettily? It is a chick's heaven to hide under its mother's bosom. It is perfectly happy; it could not be more content; its little chick nature is brimful of delight. Be this thy joy also, "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt

thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." My nature gets all its wants supplied, all its desires gratified, when it rests in God. Oh, you that have never trusted God in Christ Jesus, you do not know what real happiness means! You may search all the theatres in London, and ransack all the music-halls, and clubs, and public-houses, but you will find no happiness in any of their mirth, or show, or wine. True joy dwells where dwells the living God, and nowhere else. In your own home with God, even though that home be only a single room, and your meal be very scanty, you will see more of heaven than in the palaces of kings! Have God for your sole trust and you shall never lack for joy.

Our joy arises next *from what the Lord does for us.* "Let them shout for joy, because *Thou defendest them.*" God always guards His people, whoever may attack them. "The Lord is thy keeper." Angels are our guardians, providence is our protector; but God Himself is the Preserver of His chosen. "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." No fortress guards the soldier so well as God guards His redeemed. The God of our salvation will defend us from all evil, He will defend our souls. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

Further, *our joy arises out of the love we have towards our God.* "Let them that *love Thy name* be joyful in Thee." The more you love God, the more you will delight in Him. It is the profusion of a mother's love to her child which makes her take such delight in it. Her boy is her joy because of her love. If we loved Jesus better, we should be happier in Him. You do not, perhaps, see the connection between the two things; but there is a connection so intimate, that little love *to* Christ brings little joy *in* Christ, and great love *to* Christ brings great joy *in* Christ. God grant that in a full Christ we may have a full joy. Do you see what I mean? When a man comes to God in Christ and says, "This Saviour is my Saviour, this Father is my Father, this God is my God for ever and ever"; then he has everything, and he must be joyful. He has no fear about the past—God has forgiven him; he has no distress about the present—the Lord is with him; he is not afraid about the future—for the Lord hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If you understand my text, and put it in practice, you possess the quintessence of happiness, the essential oil of joy. He that hath joy in his barn floor may see it bare; he that hath joy in his wine vats may see them dry; he that hath joy in his children may bury that joy in the grave; he that hath joy in himself will find his beauty consume away; but he that hath joy in God drinketh from "the deep which lieth under"; his springs shall ever flow, "in summer and in winter shall it be."

I have pointed to the deep sources from which the joy of the believer wells up; but I must also add, it is by faith that this joy comes to us. *Faith makes joyful discoveries.* I speak to those of you who have faith. When you first believed in Christ you found that you were saved, and knew that you were forgiven. Some little while after, you discovered that you were chosen of God from before the foundation of the world. Oh, the rapture of your soul, when the Lord appeared of old unto you, saying, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee"! The glorious doctrine of election is as wines on the lees well refined to those who by faith receive it; and it brings with it a new, intense, and refined joy, such as the world knows nothing of. Having discovered your election of God, you looked further into your justification; "for whom He called, them He also justified." What a pearl is justification! In Christ the believer is as just in the sight of God as if he had never sinned: he is covered with a perfect righteousness, and is accepted in the Beloved. What a joy is justification by faith, when it is well understood! What bliss also to learn our union to Christ! Believers are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Because He lives, we shall live also. One with Jesus! Wonderful discovery this! Equally full of joy is our adoption! "Beloved, now are we the sons of God"; "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Faith thus heaps fuel on the fire of our joy; for it keeps on making discoveries out of the Word of the Lord. The more you search the Scriptures, and the nearer you live to God, the more you will enjoy of that great goodness which the Lord has laid up in store for them that fear Him. Though "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him"; yet "He hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit"; and thereby He puts gladness into our hearts more than increasing corn and wine could bring.

Furthermore, *faith gives cheering interpretations.* Faith is a prophet who can charmingly interpret a fearsome dream. Faith sees a gain in every loss, a joy in every grief. Read aright, and you will see that a child of God in trouble is on the way to greater blessing. Faith views affliction hopefully. Sorrow may come to us, as it did to David, as a chastisement for sin. Faith reads—"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Better to be chastened with God's children here than to be condemned with the world hereafter. Faith also sees that affliction may be sent by way of discovery, to make the man know himself, his God, and the promises better. Faith perceives that affliction may be most precious as a test, acting, as doth the fire, when it shows what is pure gold and what is base metal. Faith joys in a test so valuable. Faith spies out the truth, that affliction is sent to develop and mature the Christian life. "Ah, well!" saith Faith, "then, thank God for it. No trial for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it worketh out the peaceable fruit of righteousness in those that are exercised thereby." Faith sees sweet love in every bitter cup. Faith knows that whenever she gets a black envelope from the heavenly post-office, there is treasure in it. When the Lord's black horses call at our door, they bring us double loads of blessing. Up to this moment I, God's servant, beg to bear my unreserved testimony to the fact that it is good for me to have been afflicted. In spiritual life and knowledge and power, I have grown but little except when under the hand of trouble. I set my door open, and am half-inclined to say to pain and sickness and sadness, "Turn in hither; for I know that you will leave a blessing behind. Come, crosses, if you will; for you always turn to crowns." Thus faith glories in tribulations also, and in the lion of adversity finds the honey of joy. I have said that trial comes to us as chastise-

ment, as we see in the case of David; as a discoverer of grace, as we see in Abraham; or as a test, as we see in Job; or as a preventive, as in the case of Paul, who wrote, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." In every tribulation God is moved by love to His people, and by nothing else. If He cuts the vine with a sharp knife, it is because He would have fruit of it. If He whips His child till he cries like David, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," it is for his profit, that he may learn obedience by the things which he suffers. All things work together for the believer's good, and so faith interprets sorrow itself into joy.

Moreover, *faith believes great promises.* This opens other wells of joy I cannot stop to quote them to you this morning: the Book of the Lord is full of them. What more can the Lord say than He hath said? The promises of God are full, and as varied as they are full, and as sure as they are varied, and as rich as they are sure. "Exceeding great and precious promises." When I wrote *The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith* I was at no loss to find a promise for every day in the year; the difficulty was which to leave out. The promises are like the bells on the garments of our Great High-priest for ever ringing out holy melodies. When a man gets a promise fairly into the hand of faith, and goes to God with it, he must rejoice. The children of the promise are all of them worthy to be called Isaac, that is, "Laughter"; for God hath made him to laugh who lives according to promise. To live on the promises of man would be starvation; but to live on the promises of God is to feed on fat things full of marrow.

Above all, *faith has an eye to the eternal reward.* She rejoices in her prospects. She takes into her hand the birds which to others are in the bush. To be with Christ in the glory-land is the joy of hope, the hope which maketh not ashamed. Our hope is no dream: as sure as we are here to-day, we who are trusting in Christ will be in heaven before long; for He prays that we may be with Him where He is, and may behold His glory. Let us not wish to postpone the happy day Shall our bridal day be kept back? Nay, let the Bridegroom speedily come, and take us to Himself. What a joy to know that this head shall wear a crown of glory, and these hands shall wave the palm branch of victory! I speak not of myself alone, my brethren, but of you also, and of all them that love His appearing. There is a crown of life laid up for you, which the righteous Judge will give you. Wherefore, have patience a little while. Bear still your cross. Put up with the difficulties of the way, for the end is almost within sight.

> "The way may be rough, but it cannot be long:
> So we'll smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

May the Lord give us the ears of faith wherewith to hear the bells of heaven ringing out from afar over the waters of time!

Faith has always reason for joy, since God is always the same, His promises are the same, and His power and will to fulfil are the same. In an unchanging God we find unchanging reasons for joy. If we draw water from the well of God, we may draw one day as well as another, and never find the water abated; but if we make our joy to depend in part upon creatures and circumstances, we may find our joy leak out through the cracks in the cistern. Last Sunday morning I cried out to you, "Both feet on the rock! Both feet on the rock!" and the words led one poor heart to try the power of undivided faith in God. This is the road to joy, and there is no other. Drink waters from thine own fountain, and do not gad abroad after others. Is not the Lord enough for thee? Is it not sufficient to say, "All my fresh springs are in Thee"? Neither life, nor death, nor poverty, nor sickness, nor bereavement, nor slander, nor death itself, shall quench thy joy if it be founded in God alone.

III. We will look, for a minute or two, into a third matter, which is THE FAILURES REPORTED CONCERNING THIS JOY.

I think I hear somebody say, "It is all very well for you to tell us that believers are joyful, and have logical reasons for gladness; but some of them are about as dull as can be, and create dulness in others." I am obliged to speak very carefully here, for I am afraid that certain Christians give cause for this objection.

Let me say to some of you who love to raise objections, *What do you know about this joy?* Are you unbelievers? Well, then, you are out of court: you are not competent to judge. The griefs of believers you do not know, and with their joy you cannot intermeddle. You have no spiritual taste or discernment, and what judgment can you form? A genuine believer may be as happy as the angels, and yet you may not know his joy, because you are not in the secret. You have not a spiritual mind, and the carnal mind cannot discern spiritual things. I would have you speak with bated breath when you talk on this matter. When a blind man goes to the Royal Academy, his criticisms on the pictures are not worth much; but they are quite equal in value to yours when you speak of spiritual things. You cannot know what joy in the Lord may mean; for, alas! you are a stranger to such heavenly things.

Alas! *some professors of religion are mere pretenders,* these have no joy of the Lord. To carry out their pretence, these persons even imagine that it is necessary to pull a long face and to talk very solemnly, not to say dismally. Their idea of religion is, that black is the colour of heaven. But, dear friends, we cannot prevent hypocrites arising; it is only a proof that true religion is worth having. You took a bad half sovereign the other night, did you? Did you say, "All half sovereigns are worthless, I will never take another"? Not so: you became more careful, but you were quite sure that there were good half sovereigns in currency; for else people would not make counterfeit ones. It would not pay anybody to be a hypocrite unless there were enough genuine Christians to make the hypocrites pass current. Therefore, do not say too much about hypocritical weepers, lest you slander true men.

Next, remember that *some persons are constitutionally sad.* They cried as soon as they were born; they cried when they cut their teeth; and they have cried ever since. Their spirits are very low down, and when the grace of God gets into their hearts it lifts them a great deal to bring them up to a decent level of joy. Think of what they would have been without it. Many would have died in despair, if it had not been for faith. The grace of God has kept them up, or they would have lost their reason. I

am sorry there should be persons who have bad livers, feeble digestions, or irritated brains; but there are such. Pity them, even if you blame them. They must not so pity themselves as to make an excuse for their unbelief; but we must remember that often the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.

When you have met with Christians who are not happy, did it never strike you that *their depression might only be for a time* under very severe trial? You may go to the South of France, where the days are so sunny, and you may happen to be there for a couple of days only, and it may rain all the time: it would be unfair on that account to say that it is a gloomy place. So it may be that the Christian is under extreme pressure for the time, and when that is moderated, he will be very joyful. I do not excuse his loss of joy; but, still, there is a November of fogs in the year of most men. Judge no man by the day, but watch his spirit on a larger scale, and see whether he does not usually delight himself in God.

Moreover, I would like to say a very pointed thing to some people who charge the saints with undue sadness. *May you not be guilty of making them so?* There is an unkind, morose, wicked, drinking husband, and he says, "My wife's religion makes her miserable." No. It is not her religion, but her husband. You are enough to make twenty people unhappy: you know you are; and therefore do not blame the poor woman, if, when she sees you, the tear is in her eye. Alas! when she thinks of your going down to hell, and knows that she will be parted from you for ever, the more she loves you the more sad she is to think of you. "Oh," says some wild boy here, "my mother is wretched!" I do not wonder; I should be wretched too, if you were my son. If any of you are living ungodly lives, it makes your parents' hearts ache to see you going headlong to perdition. Is it not abominable that a man should make another miserable, and then blame him for being so? If you were but saved, how your mother's face would brighten up! If your father saw his boy turn to the Lord, he would be as happy as the birds in spring. Speak tenderly on this matter lest you accuse yourself.

If you say that some Christians are unhappy, *must you not also admit that many of them are very happy?* I was once waited upon by an enthusiast who had a new religion to publish. Numbers of people have a crack which lets in new light, and this man was going to convert me to his new ideas. After I had heard him, I said, "I have heard your story, will you hear mine?" When I talked to him of my lot and portion in the love of a covenant God, and the safety of the believer in Christ, he said, "Now, sir, if you believe all this, you ought to be the happiest man in the world." I admitted that his inference was true; but then I said to him, what rather surprised him, "So I am; and I am going to be more so all the rest of my life." If a man is chosen of God from before the foundation of the world, is redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, is quickened by the Holy Ghost, and renewed in the spirit of his mind, is one with Christ, and on his way to heaven; if he is not happy, he ought to be. Surely, we ought to rejoice abundantly, dear friends, for ours is a happy lot. "Happy are the people whose God is the Lord."

If God's people are not happy at times, *it is not their faith which makes them unhappy*—ask them. It is not what you believe that makes you unhappy, it is your want of faith, is it not? If a man begins to doubt, he begins to sorrow: so far as his faith goes, he has joy. Oh, for more faith! Faith does create joy. We can answer all objections by the fact that "we that have believed do enter into rest."

IV. I close by mentioning THE ARGUMENTS FOR ABOUNDING IN JOY. You cannot argue a man into gladness, but you may possibly stir him up to see that which will make him happy.

First, you see in my text *a permit* to be glad: "Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice." You have here a ticket to the banquets of joy. You may be as happy as ever you like. You have divine permission to shout for joy. Yonder is the inner sanctuary of happiness. You cry, "May I come in?" Yes, if by faith you can grasp the text, "Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice." "But may I be happy?" asks one. "May I be glad? May I? Is there joy for me?" Do you trust in the Lord? Then you have your passport; travel in the land of light.

But the text is not only a permit, it is *a precept.* When it says, "Let them shout for joy," it means that they are commanded to do so. Blessed is that religion wherein it is a duty to be happy. Come, ye mournful ones, be glad. Ye discontented grumblers, come out of that dog-hole! Enter the palace of the King! Quit your dunghills; ascend your thrones. The precept commands it: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

We have here more than a permit and a precept, it is *a prayer.* David prays it, the Lord Jesus prays it by David. Let them rejoice, let them be joyful in Thee! Will He not grant the prayer which He has inspired by causing us to rejoice through lifting upon us the light of His countenance? Pray for joy yourself, saying with David, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation."

The text might be read as *a promise:* "All those that put their trust in Thee shall rejoice." God promises joy and gladness to believers. Light is sown for them: the Lord will turn their night into day.

Listen to the following line of argument, which shall be very brief. You only act reasonably when you rejoice. If you are chosen of God, and redeemed by blood, and have been made an heir of heaven, you ought to rejoice. We pray you, act not contrary to nature and reason. Do not fly in the face of great and precious truths. From what you profess, you are bound to be joyful.

You will best baffle your adversaries by being happy. David talks about them in both these psalms; but he does not fret, he simply goes on rejoicing in God. "They say; they say": let them say! "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." But the attack is cruel. No doubt it is, but the Lord knows all about it. Do not cease to rest in Him. If your heart is full of God's love, you can easily bear all that the enemy may cast upon you.

Abound in joy, for then you will behave best to those who are round about you. When a man is unhappy, he usually makes other people so; and a person that is miserable is generally unkind, and frequently unjust. It is often dyspepsia that makes a man find fault with his servants and wife and children. If a man is at peace with himself, he is peaceful with others. Get right within, and you will be right without. One of the best specifics for

good temper is communion with God, and consequent joy of heart.

You yourself also, if you are happy, will be strong: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." If you lose your joy in your religion, you will be a poor worker: you cannot bear strong testimony, you cannot bear stern trial, you cannot lead a powerful life. In proportion as you maintain your joy, you will be strong *in* the Lord, and *for* the Lord.

Do you not know that if you are full of joy you will be turning the charming side of religion where men can see it? I should not like to wear my coat with the seamy side out: some religionists always do that. It was said of one great professor, that he looked as if his religion did not agree with him. Godliness is not a rack or a thumbscrew. Behave not to religion, as if you felt that you must take it, like so much physic, but you had rather not. If it tastes like nauseous physic to you, I should fear you have got the wrong sort, and are poisoning yourself. Believe not that true godliness is akin to sourness. Cheerfulness is next to godliness. "When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast." Weed out levity, but cultivate joy. Thus will you win other hearts to follow Jesus.

Remember, that if you are always joyful, you are rehearsing the music of the skies. We are going there very soon, let us not be ignorant of the music of its choirs. I should not like to crowd into my seat, and hear the choirmaster say, "Do you know your part?" and then have to answer, "Oh, no, I have never sung while I was on earth; for I had no joy in the Lord." I think I shall answer to the choirmaster, and say, "Yes; I have long since sung, 'Worthy is the Lamb,'"

> "I would begin the music here,
> And so my soul shall rise:
> Oh, for some heavenly notes, to bear
> My passions to the skies!"

With joy we rehearse the song of songs. We pay glad homage now before Jehovah's throne. We sing unto the Lord our gladsome harmonies, and we will do so as long as we have any being. Pass me that score, O chief musician of the skies, for I can take it up and sing my part in bass, or tenor, or treble, or alto, or soprano, as my voice may be. The key is joy in God. Whatever the part assigned us, the music is all for Jesus.

May some of you that have never joyed in Jesus Christ learn how to praise Him to-day by being washed in His precious blood! You that have praised Him long, may you learn your score yet more fully, and sing in better tune henceforth, and for evermore! Amen.

TURN OR BURN

"If he turn not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow and made it ready."—Psalm vii. 12.

"If the sinner turn not, God will whet His sword." So, then, God has a sword, and He will punish man on account of his iniquity. This evil generation hath laboured to take away from God the sword of His justice; they have endeavoured to prove to themselves that God will "clear the guilty," and will by no means "punish iniquity, transgression and sin." Two hundred years ago the predominant strain of the pulpit was one of terror: it was like Mount Sinai, it thundered forth the dreadful wrath of God, and from the lips of a Baxter or a Bunyan, you heard most terrible sermons, full to the brim with warnings of judgment to come. Perhaps some of the Puritanic fathers may have gone too far, and have given too great a prominence to the terrors of the Lord in their ministry: but the age in which we live has sought to forget those terrors altogether, and if we dare to tell men that God will punish them for their sins, it is charged upon us that we want to bully them into religion, and if we faithfully and honestly tell our hearers that sin must bring after it certain destruction, it is said that we are attempting to frighten them into goodness. Now we care not what men mockingly impute to us; we feel it our duty, when men sin, to tell them they shall be punished, and so long as the world will not give up its sin we feel we must not cease our warnings. But the cry of the age is, that God is merciful, that God is love. Aye; who said He was not? But remember, it is equally true, God is just, severely and inflexibly just. He were not God, if He were not just; He could not be merciful if He were not just, for punishment of the wicked is demanded by the highest mercy to the rest of mankind. Rest assured, however, that He is just, and that the words I am about to read you from God's Word are true—"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God"; "God is angry with the wicked every day"; "If He turn not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for Him the instruments of death; He ordaineth His arrows against the persecutors." Forsooth, because this age is wicked it is to have no hell; and because it is hypocritical it would have bnt feigned punishment. This doctrine is so prevalent as to make even the ministers of the gospel flinch from their duty in declaring the day of wrath. How few there are who will solemnly tell us of the judgment to come. They preach of God's love and mercy as they ought to do, and as God has commanded them; but of what avail is it to preach mercy unless they preach also the doom of the wicked? And how shall we hope to effect the purpose of preaching unless we warn men that if they "turn not, He will whet His sword?" I fear that in too many places the doctrine of future punishment is rejected and laughed as a fancy and a chimera; but the day will come when it shall be known to be a reality. Ahab scoffed at Micaiah, when he said he should never come home alive; the men of Noah's generation laughed at the foolish old man, (as they thought him), who bid them take heed, for the world should be drowned; but when they were climbing to the tree-tops, and the floods were following them, did they then say that

the prophecy was untrue? and when the arrow was sticking in the heart of Ahab, and he said, "Take me from the battle, for I must die"; did he then think that Micaiah spoke an untruth? And so it is now. Ye tell us we speak lies, when we warn you of judgment to come; but in that day when your mischief shall fall on yourselves, and when destruction shall overwhelm you, will you say we were liars then? Will ye then turn round and scoff, and say we spake not the truth? Rather, my hearers, the highest meed of honour will then be given to him who was the most faithful in warning men concerning the wrath of God. I have often trembled at the thought that, here I am standing before you, and constantly engaged in the work of the ministry, and what if, when I die, I should be found unfaithful to your souls, how doleful will be our meeting in the world of spirits. It would be a dreadful thing if you were able to say to me in the world to come, "Sir, you flattered us; you did not tell us of the solemnities of eternity; you did not rightly dwell upon the awful wrath of God; you spoke to us feebly and faintly; you were somewhat afraid of us; you knew we could not bear to hear of eternal torment, and therefore you kept it back and never mentioned it!" Why, methinks you would look me in the face and curse me throughout eternity, if that should be my conduct. But by God's help it never shall be. Come fair or foul, when I die I shall, God helping me, be able to say, "I am clear of the blood of all men." So far as I know God's truth I will endeavour to speak it; and though on my head opprobrium and scandal be poured to a ten-fold greater extent than ever, I'll hail it and welcome it, if I may but be faithful to this unstable generation, faithful to God, and faithful to my own conscience. Let me, then, endeavour—and by God's help I will do it as solemnly and as tenderly as I can—to address such of you as have not yet repented, most affectionately reminding you of your future doom, if you should die impenitent. "If he turn not, He will whet His sword."

In the first place, *what is the turning here meant?* In the second place let us dwell on the *necessity there is for men's turning, otherwise God will punish them;* and then thirdly, let me remind you of the *means whereby men can be turned from the error of their ways, and the weakness and frailty of their nature amended by the power of divine grace.*

I. In the first place, my hearers, let me endeavour to explain to you the NATURE OF THE TURNING HERE MEANT. It says—"if he *turn* not He will whet His sword."

To commence, then. The turning here meant is *actual*, not fictitious—not that which stops with promises and vows, but that which deals with the real acts of life. Possibly one of you will say, this morning "Lo, I turn to God; from this time forth I will not sin, but I will endeavour to walk in holiness; my vices shall be abandoned, my crimes shall be thrown to the winds, and I will turn unto God with full purpose of heart"; but, mayhap, to-morrow you will have forgotten this; you will weep a tear or two under the preaching of God's word, but by to-morrow every tear shall have been dried, and you will utterly forget that you ever came to the house of God at all. How many of us are like men who see their faces in a glass, and straightway go away and forget what manner of men they are! Ah! my hearer, it is not thy promise of repentance that can save thee; it is not thy vow, it is not thy solemn declaration, it is not the tear that is dried more easily than the dew-drop by the sun, it is not the transient emotion of the heart which constitutes a real turning to God. There must be a true and actual abandonment of sin, and a turning unto righteousness in real act and deed in every-day life. Do you say you are sorry, and repent, and yet go on from day to day, just as you always went? Will you now bow your heads, and say, "Lord, I repent," and in a little while commit the same deeds again? If ye do, your repentance is worse than nothing, and shall but make your destruction yet more sure; for he that voweth to his Maker, and doth not pay, hath committed another sin, in that he hath attempted to deceive the Almighty, and lie against the God that made him. Repentance to be true, to be evangelical, must be a repentance which really affects our outward conduct.

In the next place, repentance to be sure *must be entire.* How many will say, "Sir, I will renounce this sin and the other; but there are certain darling lusts which I must keep and hold." O sirs, in God's name let me tell you, it is not the giving up of one sin, nor fifty sins, which is true repentance; it is the solemn renunciation of every sin. If thou dost harbour one of those accursed vipers in thy heart, thy repentance is but a sham. If thou dost indulge in but one lust, and dost give up every other, that one lust, like one leak in a ship, will sink thy soul. Think it not sufficient to give up thy outward vices; fancy it not enough to cut off the more corrupt sins of thy life; it is all or none which God demands. "Repent," says He; and when He bids you repent, He means repent for all thy sins, otherwise He never can accept thy repentance as being real and genuine. The true penitent hates sin in the race, not in the individual—in the mass, not in the particular. He says, "Gild thee as thou wilt, O sin, I abhor thee! Aye, cover thyself with pleasure, make thyself gaudy, like the snake with its azure scales—I hate thee still, for I know thy venom, and I flee from thee, even when thou comest to me in the most specious garb." All sin must be given up, or else you shall never have Christ: all transgression must be renounced, or else the gates of heaven must be barred against you. Let us remember, then, that for repentance to be sincere it must be entire repentance.

Again, when God says, "If he turn not, He will whet His sword," He means *immediate* repentance. Ye say, when we are nearing the last extremity of mortal life, and when we are entering the borders of the thick darkness of futurity, then we will change our ways. But, my dear hearers, do not delude yourselves. It is few who have ever changed after a long life of sin. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" If so, let him that is accustomed to do evil learn to do well. Put no faith in the repentance which you promise yourselves on your death beds. There are ten thousand arguments against one, that if you repent not in health, you will never repent in sickness. Too many have promised themselves a quiet season before they leave the world, when they could turn their face to the wall and confess their sins; but how few have found that time of repose! Do not men drop down dead in the streets—aye, even in the house of God? Do they not expire in their business? And when death is gradual, it affords but an ill season for repentance. Many a saint has said on his death-bed, "Oh! if I had now to seek my God, if I had now to cry to Him for mercy, what would become of me? These pangs are enough, without the

pangs of repentance. It is enough to have the body tortured, without having the soul wrung with remorse." Sinner! God saith, "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, when your fathers tempted Me and proved Me." When God the Holy Spirit convinces men of sin, they will never talk of delays. You may never have another day to repent in. Therefore saith the voice of wisdom, "Repent now." The Jewish rabbis said, "Let every man repent one day before he dies, and since he may die to-morrow, let him take heed to turn from his evil ways to-day." Even so we say; immediate repentance is that which God demands, for He hath never promised thee that thou shalt have any hour to repent in, except the one that thou hast now.

Furthermore; the repentance here described as absolutely necessary is *hearty* repentance. It is not a mock tear; it is not hanging out the ensigns of grief, whilst you are keeping merriment in your hearts. It is not having an illumination within, and shutting up all the windows by a pretended repentance; it is the putting out of the candles of the heart; it is sorrow of soul which is true repentance. A man may renounce every outward sin, and yet not really repent. True repentance is a turning of the heart as well as of the life; it is the giving up of the whole soul to God, to be His for ever and ever; it is a renunciation of the sins of the heart, as well as the crimes of the life. Ah! dear hearers, let none of us fancy that we have repented when we have only a false and fictitious repentance; let none of us take that to be the work of the Spirit which is only the work of poor human nature; let us not dream that we have savingly turned to God, when, perhaps, we have only turned to ourselves. And let us not think it enough to have turned from one vice to another, or from vice to virtue; let us remember, it must be a turning of the whole soul, so that the old man is made anew in Christ Jesus; otherwise we have not answered the requirement of the text—we have not turned unto God.

And lastly, upon this point, this repentance must be *perpetual*. It is not my turning to God during to-day that will be a proof that I am a true convert; it is forsaking of my sin throughout the entire of my life, until I sleep in the grave. You need not fancy that to be upright for a week will be a proof that you are saved; it is a perpetual abhorrence of evil. The change which God works is neither a transitory nor a superficial change; not a cutting off the top of the weed, but an eradication of it; not the sweeping away of the dust of one day, but the taking away of that which is the cause of the defilement. In old times, when rich and generous monarchs came into their cities they made the fountains run with milk and wine; but the fountain was not therefore a fountain of milk and win always; on the morrow it ran with water as before. So you may to-day go home and pretend to pray; you may to-day be serious, to-morrow you may be honest, and the next day you may pretend to be devout, but yet if thou return, as Scripture has it, "like the dog to its vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire," your repentance shall but sink you deeper into hell, instead of being a proof of divine grace in your hearts.

It is very hard to distinguish between legal repentance and evangelical repentance; however, there are certain marks whereby they may be distinguished, and at the risk of tiring you, we will just notice one or two of them; and may God grant that you may find them in your own souls! Legal repentance is a fear of damning: evangelical repentance is a fear of sinning. Legal repentance makes us fear the wrath of God; evangelical repentance makes us fear the cause of that wrath, even sin. When a man repents with that grace of repentance which God the Spirit works in him, he repents not of the punishment which is to follow the deed, but of the deed itself; and he feels that if there were no pit digged for the wicked, if there were no ever-gnawing worm, and no fire unquenchable, he would still hate sin. It is such repentance as this which every one of you must have, or else you will be lost. It must be a hatred of sin. Do not suppose, that because when you come to die you will be afraid of eternal torment, therefore that will be repentance. Every thief is afraid of the prison; but he will steal to-morrow if you set him free. Most men who have committed murder tremble at the sight of the gallows-tree, but they would do the deed again could they live. It is not the hatred of the punishment that is repentance; it is the hatred of the deed itself. Do you feel that you have such a repentance as that? If not, these thundering words must be preached to you again,—"If he turn not, He will whet His sword."

But one more hint here. When a man is possessed of true and evangelical repentance—I mean the gospel repentance which saves the soul—he not only hates sin for its own sake, but loathes it so extremely and utterly that he feels that no repentance of his own can avail to wash it out, and he acknowledges that it is only by an act of sovereign grace that his sin can be washed away. Now, if any of you suppose that you repent of your sins, and yet imagine that by a course of holy living you can blot them out—if you suppose that by walking uprightly in future you can obliterate your past transgressions—you have not yet truly repented; for true repentance makes a man feel, that

> "Could his zeal no respite know,
> Could his tears for ever flow,
> All for sin could not atone,
> Christ must save, and Christ alone."

And if it is so killed in thee that thou hatest as a corrupt and abominable thing, and wouldst bury it out of thy sight, but that thou feelest that it will never be entombed, unless Christ shall dig the grave, then thou hast repented of sin. We must humbly confess that we deserve God's wrath, and that we cannot avert it by any deeds of our own, and we must put our trust solely and entirely in the blood and merits of Jesus Christ. If ye have not so repented, again we exclaim in the words of David, "If you turn not, He will whet His sword."

II. And now the second point; it is a yet more terrible one to dwell upon, and if I consulted my own feelings I should not mention it; but we must not consider our feelings in the work of the ministry, any more than we should if we were physicians of men's bodies. We must sometimes use the knife, where we feel that mortification would ensue without it. We must frequently make sharp gashes into men's consciences, in the hope that the Holy Spirit will bring them to life. We assert, then, that there is a NECESSITY that God should whet His sword and punish men, if they will not turn. Earnest Baxter used to say, "Sinner! turn or burn; it is thine only

alternative: TURN OR BURN!" And it is so. We think we can show you why men must turn, or else they must burn.

1. First we cannot suppose the God of the Bible could suffer sin to be unpunished. Some may suppose it; they may dream their intellects into a state of intoxication, so as to suppose a God apart from justice; but no man whose reason is sound and whose mind is in a healthy condition can imagine a God without justice. Ye cannot suppose a king without it to be a good king; ye cannot dream of a good government that should exist without justice, much less of God, the Judge and King of all the earth, without justice in His bosom. To suppose Him all love, and no justice, were to undeify Him, and make Him no longer God; He were not capable of ruling this world if He had not justice in His heart. There is in man a natural perception of the fact, that if there be a God, He must be just; and I can scarcely imagine that ye can believe in a God without believing also in the punishment of sin. It were difficult to suppose Him elevated high above His creatures, beholding their disobedience, and yet looking with the same serenity upon the good and upon the evil; you cannot suppose Him awarding the same meed of praise to the wicked and to the righteous. The idea of God, supposes justice; and it is but to say justice when you say God.

2. But to imagine that there shall be no punishment for sin, and that man can be saved without repentance, is to fly in the face of all the Scriptures. What! Are the records of divine history nothing? And if they be anything must not God have mightily changed, if He doth not now punish sin? What! did He once blast Eden, and drive our parents out of that happy garden on account of a little theft, as man would style it? Did He drown a world with water, and inundate creation with the floods which He had buried in the bowels of this earth? And will He not punish sin? Let the burning hail which fell on Sodom tell you that God is just; let the open mouth of the earth which swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, warn you that He will not spare the guilty: let the mighty works of God which He did in the Red Sea, the wonders which He wrought on Pharoah, and the miraculous destruction which He brought on Sennacherib, tell you that God is just. And it were perhaps out of place for me in the same argument to mention the judgments of God even in our age; but have there never been such? This world is not the dungeon where God punishes sin, but still there are a few instances in which we cannot but believe that He actually did avenge it. I am no believer that every accident is a judgment; I am far from believing that the destruction of men and women in a theatre is a punsihment upon them for their sin, since the same thing has occurred in divine service to our perpetual sorrow. I believe judgment is reserved for the next world; I could not account for providence if I believed that God punishes here. "Those men upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you nay." It has injured religion for men to take up every providence, and say, for instance, that because a boat was upset on the Sabbath-day it was a judgment on the persons that were in it. We assuredly believe that it was sinful to spend the day in pleasure, but we deny that it was a punishment from God. God usually reserves His punishment for a future state; but yet, we say, there have been a few instances in which we cannot but believe that men and women have been by Providence in this life punished for their guilt. I remember one which I scarcely dare relate to you. I saw the wretched creature myself. He had dared to imprecate on his head the most awful curses that man could utter. In his rage and fury he said he wished his head were twisted on one side, that his eyes were put out, and that his jaws were made fast: but a moment afterwards the lash of his whip—with which he had been cruelly treating his horse—entered his eye, brought on first inflamation, and then lock-jaw, and when I saw him he was just in the very position in which he had asked to be placed, for his head was twisted round, his eye-sight was gone, and he could not speak except through his closed teeth. You will remember a similar instance happening at Devizes, where a woman declared that she had paid her part of the price of a sack of meal, when she had it in her hand, and immediately dropped down dead on the spot. Some of these may have been singular coincidences; but I am not so credulous as to suppose that they were brought about by chance. I think the will of the Lord was in it. I believe they were some faint intimations that God was just, and that although the full shower of His wrath does not fall on men in this life, He does pour a drop or two on them, to let us see how He will one day chasten the world for its iniquity.

3. But why need I go far to bring arguments to bear on you, my hearers? Your own consciences tell you that God must punish sin. You may laugh at me, and say that you have no such *belief*. I do not say you have but I say that your conscience tells you so, and conscience has more power over men than what they think to be their belief. As John Bunyan said, Mr. Conscience had a very loud voice, and though Mr. Understanding shut himself up in a dark room, where he could not see, yet he used to thunder out so mightily in the streets, that Mr. Understanding used to shake in his house through what Mr. Conscience said. And it is often so. You say in your understanding, I cannot believe God will punish sin"; but you know He will. You would not like to confess your secret fears, because that were to give up what you have so often most bravely asserted. But because you assert it with such boast and bombast, I imagine you do not believe it, for if you did, you would not need to look so big while saying it. I know this, that when you are sick none sooner than you cry out for mercy. I know that when you are dying you will believe in a hell. Conscience makes cowards of us all, and makes us believe, even when we say we do not, that God must punish sin.

Let me tell you a story; I have told it before, but it is a striking one, and sets out in a true light how easily men will be brought in times of danger to believe in a God, and a God of justice too, though they have denied Him before. In the backwoods of Canada there resided a good minister, who one evening, went out to meditate, as Isaac did, in the fields. He soon found himself on the borders of a forest, which he entered, and walked along a track which had been trodden before him; musing, musing still, until at last the shadows of twilight gathered around him, and he began to think how he should spend a night in the forest. He trembled at the idea of remaining there, with the poor shelter of a tree into which he would be compelled to climb. On a sudden he saw a light in the distance among the trees, and imagining that it

might be from the window of some cottage where he could find a hospitable retreat, he hastened to it, and to his surprise, saw a space cleared and trees laid down to make a platform, and upon it a speaker addressing a multitude. He thought to himself, "I have stumbled on a company of people, who in this dark forest have assembled to worship God, and some minister is preaching to them, at this late hour of the evening, concerning the kingdom of God, and His righteousness"; but to his surprise and horror, when he came nearer, he found a young man declaiming against God, daring the Almighty to do His worst upon him, speaking terrible things in wrath against the justice of the Most High, and venturing most bold and awful assertions concerning his own disbelief in a future state. It was altogether a singular scene; it was lighted up by pine-knots, which cast a glare here and there, while the thick darkness in other places still reigned. The people were intent on listening to the orator, and when he sat down thunders of applause were given to him; each one seeming to emulate the other in his praise. Thought the minister, "I must not let this pass; I must rise and speak; the honour of my God, and His cause demands it." But he feared to speak, for he knew not what to say, having come there suddenly; but he would have ventured, had not something else occurred. A man of middle age, hale and strong, rose, and leaning on his staff he said, "My friends, I have a word to speak to you to-night, I am not about to refute any of the arguments of the orator; I shall not criticize his style; I shall say nothing concerning what I believe to be the blasphemies he had uttered; but I shall simply relate to you a fact, and after I have done that you shall draw your own conclusions. Yesterday, I walked by the side of yonder river; I saw on its floods a young man in a boat. The boat was unmanageable; it was going fast towards the rapids; he could not use the oars, and I saw that he was not capable of bringing the boat to the shore. I saw that young man wring his hands in agony; by-and-by he gave up the attempt to save his life, kneeled down and cried with desperate earnestness, 'O God! save my soul! If my body cannot be saved, save my soul.' I heard him confess that he had been a blasphemer, I heard him vow that if his life were spared he would never be such again; I heard him implore the mercy of heaven for Jesus Christ's sake, and earnestly plead that he might be washed in His blood. These arms saved that young man from the flood; I plunged in, brought the boat to shore, and saved his life. That same young man has just now addressed you, and cursed his Maker. What say you to this, sirs!" The speaker sat down. You may guess what a shudder ran through the young man himself, and how the audience in one moment changed their notes, and saw that after all, whilst it was a fine thing to brag and bravado against Almighty God on dry land, and when danger was distant, it was not quite so grand to think ill of Him when near the verge of the grave. We believe there is enough conscience in every man to convince him that God must punish him for his sin; therefore we think that our text will wake an echo in every heart—"If he turn not, He will whet His sword."

I am tired of this terrible work of endeavouring to show you that God must punish sin; let me just utter a few of the declarations of His Holy Word, and then let me tell you how repentance is to be *obtained*. O sirs! ye may think that the fire of hell is indeed a fiction, and that the flames of the nethermost pit are but popish dreams; but if ye are believers in the Bible ye must believe that it cannot be so. Did not our Master say, "Where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." You say it is metaphorical fire. But what meant He by this—"He is able to cast both *body* and soul into hell"? Is it not written, that there is reserved for the devil and his angels fearful torment? and do you not know that our Master said, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment"; "Depart, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?" "Yes," you say, "but it is not philosophical to believe that there is a hell; it does not consort with reason to believe there is." However, I should like to act as if there were, even if there is no such place; for as the poor and pious man once said, "Sir, I like to have two strings to my bow. If there should be no hell I shall be as well off as you will; but if there should, it will go hard with you." But why need I say "if?" You know there is. No man has been born and educated in this land without having his conscience so far enlightened as to know that to be a truth. All I need to do is to press upon your anxious consideration this thought:—Do you feel that you are a fit subject for heaven now? Do you feel that God has changed your heart and renewed your nature? If not, I beseech you lay hold of this thought, that unless you be renewed all that can be dreadful in the torments of the future world must inevitably be yours. Dear hearer, apply it to thyself, not to thy fellow-men, but to thine own conscience, and may God Almighty make use of it to bring thee to repentance.

III. Now briefly what are the MEANS of repentance? Most seriously I say, I do not believe any man can repent with evangelical repentance of himself. You ask me then to what purpose is the sermon I have endeavoured to preach, proving the necessity of repentance? Allow me to make the sermon of some purpose, under God, by its conclusion. Sinner! thou art so desperately set on sin, that I have no hope thou wilt ever turn from it of thyself. But listen! He who died on Calvary is exalted on high "to give repentance and remission of sin." Dost thou this morning feel that thou art a sinner? If so, ask of Christ to give thee repentance, for He can work repentance in thine heart by His Spirit, though thou canst not work it there thyself. Is thy heart like iron? He can put it into the furnace of His love and make it melt. Is thy soul like the nether millstone? His grace is able to dissolve it like the ice is melted before the sun. He can make thee repent, though thou canst not make thyself repent. If thou feelest thy need of repentance, I will not now say to thee "repent," for I believe there are certain acts that must precede a sense of repentance. I should advise you to go to your houses, and if you feel that you have sinned, and yet cannot sufficiently repent of your transgressions, bow your knees before God and confess your sins: tell Him you cannot repent as you would; tell Him your heart is hard; tell Him it is as cold as ice. You *can* do that if God has made you feel your need of a Saviour. Then if it should be laid to your heart to endeavour to seek after repentance, I will tell you the best way to find it. Spend an hour first in endeavouring to remember thy sins; and when conviction has gotten a firm hold on thee, then spend another hour—where? At Calvary, my hearer. Sit down and read that chapter which contains the history and mystery of the God that loved and died;

sit down and think thou seest that glorious Man, with blood dropping from His hands, and His feet gushing rivers of gore ; and if that does not make thee repent, with the help of God's Spirit, then I know of nothing that can. An old divine says, " If you feel you do not love God, love Him till you feel you do : if you think you cannot believe, believe till you feel you believe." Many a man says he cannot repent, while he is repenting. Keep on with that repentance, till you feel you have repented. Only acknowledge thy transgressions; confess thy guiltiness ; own that He were just if He should destroy thee ; and say this, solemnly—

" My faith doth lay its hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin."

Oh ! what would I give if one of my hearers should be blessed by God to go home and repent ! If I had worlds to buy one of your souls, I would readily give them, if I might but bring one of you to Christ. I shall never forget the hour when I hope God's mercy first looked on me. It was in a place very different from this, amongst a despised people, in an insignificant little chapel, of a peculiar sect. I went there bowed down with guilt ; laden with transgression. The minister walked up the pulpit stairs, opened his Bible, and read that precious text, " Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth ; for I am God, and beside Me there is none else " ; and, as I thought, fixing his eyes on me, before he began to preach to others, he said, " Young man ! look ! look ! look ! You are one of the ends of the earth ; you feel you are ; you know your need of a Saviour ; you are trembling because you think He will never save you. He says this morning, ' Look ! " Oh, how my soul was shaken within me then ! What ! thought I, does that man know me, and all about me ? He seemed as if he did. And it made me " look ! " Well I thought, lost or saved, I will try ; sink or swim, I will run the risk of it ; and in that moment I hope by His grace I looked upon Jesus, and though desponding, downcast, and ready to despair, and feeling that I could rather die than live as I had lived, at that very moment it seemed as if a young heaven had had its birth within my conscience. I went home no more cast down ; those about me, noticing the change, asked me why I was so glad, and I told them that I had believed in Jesus, and that it was written, " There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Oh ! if one such should be here this morning ! Where art thou, thou chief of sinners, thou vilest of the vile ? My dear hearer, thou hast never been in the house of God perhaps these last twenty years ; but here thou art, covered with thy sins, the blackest and vilest of all ! Hear God's Word. " Come now, let us reason together ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool, and though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow." And all this for Jesus' sake ; all this for His blood's sake ! " Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved " ; for His word and mandate is, " He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; he that believeth not shall be damned."

GOOD CHEER FOR THE NEEDY

" For the needy shall not always be forgotten : the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever."—Psalm ix. 18.

THESE words will fall upon different ears with quite different effects. If any of you are, in the Scriptural sense, "poor and needy," God the Holy Spirit will enable you to see much in these gracious sentences ; but if you fancy that you are " rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," you will care nothing whatever for such words as these. You know right well that the value of a text to any soul depends upon the condition of that soul. I know not how many stars may be visible at the present moment ; I do not think that I even looked up at them before I came here, and perhaps you have not ; but to the mariner, who wants to know his position when far out upon the sea, even one lone star gleaming amid the cloud-rack may be very precious. So, if you are among the poor and needy ones, the light in this text will be most joyful to your heart ; but if you are not among them, perhaps you will scarcely condescend to look up to see its light. When Richard I, was shut up within the gloomy walls of a foreign prison, you remember that he heard a song sung by his faithful friend, who was traversing all Europe, as a troubadour, to try to find him. There were many ears that heard that strain ; and, possibly, some of the listeners had noticed the sweetness of the music ; yet there was nothing very special in it to them ; but the imprisoned king, when he heard that song, could sing the refrain to it, and, therefore, it had a peculiar value to him, for it re-opened his intercourse with the world outside, and ultimately led to his release. So, it may be that my text has a refrain that you do not know ; and if it is so, you will not care for it ; but if your heart is very poor,—if you are consciously very needy,—if you are reduced to spiritual destitution, then these simple words, " The needy shall not alway be forgotten ; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever," will awake echoes in your soul which will be the means of bringing you great joy.

Here let me remark what a blessed thing it is to be poor in spirit and down among the lowly in heart. The best things come to those who are in such a condition. Up there, on the mountain tops, you are in a conspicuous but very cold position. If there are any storms about, they will be sure to gather around the mountain's brow ; but if there be water-brooks, they will be sure to flow down there in the quiet seclusion of the valley, where the nourishing grass grows for the feeding of the sheep. He who dwells in the Valley of Humiliation, lives in a place where he may delight himself with safety ; because he is certain, while he abides there, to give all the glory for his delights to his God. It is not a land that every man chooseth ; it lies too low for some

men's tastes. There are those who love the high places of the earth, where they can exalt themselves; but he who is wise will choose to be numbered amongst the hungry whom the Lord filleth with good things, and not among the rich whom He sendeth away empty. He will delight to be reckoned among those that are of low degree, whom God exalteth, even the humble and the meek; and he will not wish to be gathered with the proud, against whom the Lord has registered His solemn declaration that He will stain the pride of their glory.

If you look at our text as it stands, it bears, first of all, the literal and natural meaning that God will take care of the poor and needy. As a general rule, they are forgotten. In the regulations of many kingdoms, no provision whatever has been made for the poor. Christianity has done much to cause modern governments to make some recognition of the rights of the poor and needy, and also to provide to some extent for them; yet this provision is often handed out to them with great coldness and sternness. Our poor laws are not, even with the best intentions, always administered justly; while there are lands where everything seems to be done to increase the riches of the rich, and to make the poor still poorer. Well, it will not always be so; there are better days coming for you that are despised, and poor, and needy. You need not fight, and strive, and be envious, and make discord; there is One in heaven who is your Helper, and He is coming down to earth again; and when He cometh, "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." The reign of Jesus Christ, though it may seem to be long in beginning, will assuredly come at the appointed time; and when it cometh, then all tyranny and oppression and wrong-doing shall be speedily ended. "In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." In His days shall no man be robbed of his rights,—no man be down-trodden,—no man be oppressed. Behold, the Lord hath laid help upon One who is mighty; He hath exalted One chosen out of the people. His coming is the world's hope; His appearing will be the signal for the world's deliverance from all that is opposed to Him and to His gospel.

But I am going to take our text in a spiritual sense, and refer it to those who are "poor and needy" in the Scriptural meaning of those words. This is a description that is very frequently applied to the people of God. They have been taught by the Spirit of God, to realise their poverty; they know it, and they confess it. They also feel that they have many needs; indeed, they seem to themselves now to have more needs than they ever had before; and were it not for the infinite fulness which is treasured up in Christ, the very thought of their needs would crush them, and drive them to despair. "Poor and needy" is a fair and full description of all those who have been taught of the Lord to see themselves as they really are in His sight.

I want to give some good cheer to the poor and the needy, and my text seems to me to refer to three pairs of things which concern them. First, it speaks of *two bitter experiences which will come to an end*; then, *two sad fears which are removed by the text*; and, thirdly, *two precious promises which are given to us in the text.*

I. First, there are TWO BITTER EXPERIENCES, which many of God's people—nay, all God's people—have more or less had, especially if they happen to be poor and needy in temporal things as well as in spiritual.

The first bitter experience is that *they have been forgotten.* The text says, "The needy shall not alway be forgotten," plainly implying that they have been forgotten;—forgotten by those who used to know them; forgotten by those who fed at their table, and who lauded and flattered them in the days of their high estate. They do not know you now. You are the same, but your coat is different, your house is different, your purse is different; and, therefore, though they loved you,—oh, so fervently!—their love is gone now because the various adjuncts, which, after all, were the real ground of their love, have departed. The leaves are withering, so the swallows, which gathered in the summer, are all gone before the winter comes. Many friends are of that sort; their friendship withers like the leaves of autumn; and, like the swallows, they are gone to find other summers somewhere else. If you become prosperous again, and get another summer, they will come back, and seek to ingratiate themselves with you again. Like dogs, they will follow you as long as you have a bone to give them; but, unlike many dogs, they will not stay with you even when you have nothing to bestow upon them. If you are a poor man, who was once better off, you have passed through this bitter experience, I have no doubt, and have been forgotten because your circumstances have changed.

Possibly, you have been forgotten ever since you have been a Christian. While you were self-righteous, like other men, they knew and respected you. You helped to keep each other's self-righteousness up, just as tradesmen, with their accommodation bills, help to keep each other financially afloat. But you suddenly became poor in spirit; you began to see that you needed a better righteousness than your own. They called you melancholy; and no wonder that they did, for you were indeed melancholy. You were very uncongenial company for them; you used to heave a deep sigh when they would rather have heard a noisy laugh; and now that you have gone right over, as they say, to the Puritanic party, and left their merry-making, they have forgotten you,—they do not know you,—they look down upon you, and despise you. They say, sometimes, "You are a canting hypocrite," and they have other equally pretty names that they apply to you. If they remember you, it is that they may scoff at you; but they say they have forgotten you, and it is a great mercy if they have; and it will be another great mercy if you also forget them. There is a message, in the forty-fifth Psalm, which may be addressed to you: "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." You are to go without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach, and to be forgotten by your former friends and acquaintances because of your religion. It will be a painful ordeal to you, but you may go through it without any very serious loss.

Possibly, too, dear friends, you have often thought that you have been forgotten in the arrangements of God's people, since you have come among them. You are so needy, perhaps in pocket, but certainly in spirit, that when arrangements have been made for the help and relief of others, you fancy that you

have been overlooked. Do not be quite certain that it is so, for I have known some poor people, who have been a little too sensitive on those points, and have suspected unkindness when everything has been really planned for the best. Do not be ready to misjudge your fellow-Christians if they are better off than you are. As it would be a sin, on their part, to be proud, it would be equally a sin, on your part, to be envious. It would be wrong for them to be unkind to you, but it would be just as wrong for you to be unkind to them by thinking that they are unkind when they are not. Still, I should not wonder if it does sometimes happen that you fancy yourself forgotten even in the arrangements that are made in connection with the house of God.

So, too, you may have had the experience of seeming to be forgotten in various regulations which are passed by your fellow-Christians. For instance, someone has been declaring the proportion that every Christian should give to the cause of God out of his substance. It has been laid down by some, as a hard and fast rule, that nobody should give less than a tenth,—a good rule, mark you, and a rule applicable to nearly everybody; but, sometimes, there is a needy saint, who says, "I could not spare a tenth from my poor pittance; I can scarcely spare a penny from the little that I have, so this rule presses hardly upon me." Well, then, give what you feel to be right, and do not trouble about the matter. When we speak to various classes, we cannot always mention the exceptions; you know that there are exceptions to all rules, and we do not wish any rule to press hardly upon any one. The poor widow gave her two mites, and so may you; but do not fret and worry, though I have no doubt it sometimes pains you when, in such utterances, you seem to be forgotten.

It is also very painful to a Christian, who is poor and needy in spirit, when, in the preaching of the gospel, there seems to be nothing for the poor lame sheep, for the halting, for those that are weak-kneed, for those that are ready to perish. I have heard sermons, which have related to very glorious experiences, in which I have taken some delight; but I have felt, all the while, "I wonder what the poor weaklings of the flock think of this, when they hear about this experience, and are told that they can have it if they like, and that they must have it, or else they have no real saving faith at all." At such a time, my mind always goes to those who can only touch the hem of the Saviour's garment, or say to Him, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." My witness is that some of the best children in the whole family of God never have the enjoyment of full assurance; but they are so careful, so watchful, so sensitive, that their very sadness of heart drives them close to Christ. They seem to be so conscious of their own weakness, and so afraid of sinning against God, that, though in them there is not the perfect love that casteth out fear,—I wish it were:—yet I would be the last to condemn them. There is One, who will not condemn them; even He who carries the lambs in His bosom, and who is tender and pitiful to all the weak ones in His flock. We must mind, when we are preaching experience, that we do not so put the experience of the strong as to make it the standard for the weak. That is almost as wrong as to make the experience of the weak to be the standard of the strong, as some have done. The fact is, there is no experience that is a real standard of the Christian life except the experience of a change of heart, and of simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, dear heart! I know what you mean when, after listening to a sermon, you have said, "Alas, I am forgotten! There seems nothing there for me. There are no crumbs for those who have lost their teeth, and have only sore gums; there is no bread and milk for the children. It is all rounds of beef,—strong meat for grown-up men; but, woe is me, there is nothing that I can eat." I should not wonder if that is what you have felt; but, if so, do not feel it any longer, "for the needy shall not alway be forgotten."

And, peradventure, up till now, you have even experienced a forgetfulness on the part of providence as you have understood the term. Others of your family have risen in the world, but you have not. Your friends have set up in business, and have done well; but you have not. You have sought to obtain a competence, but you have not secured it yet. You wished, at any rate, to get out of financial trouble; but you are in it still, and you are apt to fear that when the Lord distributes His favours, He forgets you;—at least, so far as His providential mercies are concerned. Well, now, let this fear be gone, I pray you; let this bitter experience come to an end. Believe that you are not forgotten, after all, by Him who is in heaven, and who beholdeth all His people; and if you have experienced, in some measure, a sort of forgetfulness, real on the part of man, but never real on the part of God, do believe that it will not last for ever.

The second painful experience is that *you have been disappointed*, as well as fancied that you have been forgotten. Our text says, "The expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever," which implies that it has perished sometimes.

Now, dear friend, I know that, if you are a Christian, you have had some of your expectations that have perished, and a good many of them, too. Why, you expected, at one time, to find your own way to heaven,—you expected that your own righteousness would make you acceptable to God, and that you could do everything that was necessary to gain His favour. That foolish expectation has perished for ever, has it not? Your self-righteousness is such a mass of filthy rags that you never mean to try to patch those old rags together, and make them into a garment to wear in the sight of God.

Then, you thought that you might expect, when you believed in Jesus Christ, that you would have perfect peace directly. Yet, possibly, you did not have it. Believer as you were, you had to live by faith, without much experience of inward joy. And you also expected that you would never be troubled any more with any sort of bitter experiences, certainly not with any sins. You had lost your burden at the foot of the cross, and you meant to go singing all the way to heaven; in fact, you imagined that you were to ride there, in a carriage, in a most luxurious and delightful style, having two heavens,—one here, and another hereafter. That expectation has not been realized, has it? You have found that the way to heaven is a rough road, that there are many hardships in the pilgrim's pathway, and that there are giants to be fought and slain. Alas, also, there are sins within that have to be contended with from day to day.

Perhaps you had even entertained some very high expectations that you were going to be one of

the brightest stars that ever shone among the spiritual constellations of God. Oh, what wonders you were going to do! You were going to be the leader amongst the people of God. There would be no diminution of zeal in you; no lack of life in you; no declension from grace in you; no neglected prayer in you. You would be the very paragon of virtue; you would push the world before you, and drag the Church behind you. I do not know how high your expectations soared; but I should not wonder if some of them have perished before now, and you have come down to be, even in your own estimation, a very ordinary sort of person; in fact, you have continued to grow smaller and smaller ever since you have known Christ, till now you have come down to be nothing, and you are on the way to being less than nothing; and you will be wonderfully near the mark when you get down to that point.

How many human expectations turn out to be mere wind! As I studied my text, turning it over and over again, it occurred to me that the needy, the poor, are generally the people who have the greatest expectations. I have talked with many poor men, and I have found, over and over again, that they have a great, great-uncle, somewhere or other, who may leave them a lot of money some day; or else they think they are entitled to property somewhere, only the lawful owner keeps them out of it! They have proofs that there was someone in their family who left—well, I do not know whether it was not some millions of money, that now lie in the Bank of England, and they are expecting to get them! Ah, he that butters his bread with such expectations will find it very dry; and he who waits till expectations of that kind are fulfilled will, I am afraid, find that he is waiting in vain. But poor people generally have plenty of expectations; and, as a rule, those expectations come to an end. This is a part of the bitter experience of life, and always will be; so, let us bear it patiently, for our text assures us that our disappointment shall only be temporary.

II. Now, in the second, there are TWO SAD FEARS, WHICH THE TEXT REMOVES.

The first sad fear is that, perhaps, *we may be for ever forgotten of God.* Oh, what a sad day it would be for us if God should ever forget us! You remember what varied experiences David had. Once he wrote, "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled." At another time, he wrote, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" Ah, that is how the greatest saints have to talk sometimes; but what a fall in the barometer that indicates! From being up there at "set fair," it has gone down to "much rain" and "storms." "Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." This fear will come to the child of God at certain times; it may take this shape;—"What if God should forget me in my present trouble? None but He can get me out of it. I am so bowed down and distressed that, without divine consolation, I know that I shall surely sink in the deep waters; yet the consolation does not come, the help I need does not arrive. I cannot see any way of escape, and I am as much in perplexity now as I was six months ago. I have made it a matter of prayer, and waiting on the Lord; but I sometimes fear that He has forgotten me. What shall I do if He never helps me? If it had not been the Lord who was on my side, I should long ago have sunk into despair; but what shall I do if He deserts me now? I can never escape out of this difficulty without Him."

Possibly, the believer is not so much in temporal trouble as burdened under a sense of sin. He used to feel joy and peace through believing in Christ; but he has wandered away from fellowship with his God, and God is walking contrary to him because he is walking contrary to God. He is dwelling under his Father's frown; he is smarting under his Father's rod. Now he says within himself, "What will happen to me if He should never again give me the kiss of reconciliation?" He cries, "Deal mercifully with Thy servant, O Lord, and restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation!" Yet still he walks in darkness, and sees no light. He is under a cloud, and his cry is, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him whom my soul loveth!" There comes to his heart the horrible fear that God has forsaken him. It is a horrible fear, but it is quite unfounded; there is no real reason for it. God cannot forget His chosen ones, whom He has graven upon the palms of His hands; and though a woman may forget her sucking child, God cannot forget any of His people, sorrowful or sinful though they may be.

Then, too, this thought will come: "I am sick; my health is failing; I have less strength every day; and, soon, I shall have to go through the cold river of death; and what if, then, I should be without my God? It will be hard to suffer, and harder still to die,—to leave the warm precincts of this house of clay, and, as a disembodied spirit, to be launched into an unknown world; what if there should be no guardian angels around my dying bed, and no Saviour to receive my departing spirit? What if, after all, my hope should turn out to be a delusion, my faith a fiction, and my experience a dream?" I do not wonder, when such thoughts as these cross your minds, that you should feel distressed, as hundreds before you have been, "who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." But our text is a blessed cure for this sad fear: "For the needy shall not alway be forgotten."

The other dreadful fear is, *lest, after all, your expectation should perish.* Your expectation, beloved, is that, since you have trusted in God, you shall never be confounded;—and that, because you have relied upon the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you shall be numbered with His saints in glory everlasting. Yet, sometimes, you sorrowfully say, "Shall I hold on to the end? Shall I be able to persevere? I am so weak, so unstable, so apt to slip and slide, that I fear what will happen to me. Will my hope endure to the end?" Then you look around, and see the strong temptations that beset your path; you live, perhaps, where there are few Christians to help you, and where everything seems to go against your progress in the divine life; and you say, "I shall surely one day fall by the hand of the enemy. How can I hope to outlive these many perils and dangers?"

Possibly, your constitutional temperament is a hindrance to you, and you cry, "Woe is me, because I have such corruptions within,—such a fierce temper,—such a cold heart,—such a penurious disposition. Can I ever, after all, be fashioned into the likeness of my Lord? Can such gritty granite as my soul is made of be ever melted down, and run into the divine mould, or be turned like wax to the

divine seal?" It does make you fear and tremble; especially when trials come, the like of which you never saw before; and you say, "My expectation will perish. I thought that, by God's grace, I should leap over a wall, and break through a troop; I hoped that I should continue to trust in the Lord even though all creature aid should fail; but now I tremble and fear. I have run with the footmen, and they have wearied me; what shall I do when I have to contend with horses; and, above all, what shall I do in the swellings of Jordan?" Well, now, this is the sort of fear that arises in the hearts of God's children; yet that fear need not be entertained for a single moment. It is your duty and privilege to shut it out of your heart, for thus saith the Lord, "The expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever."

III. Now I come to our third and last point,—TWO PRECIOUS PROMISES ARE HERE GIVEN TO US.

The first is given to the needy, and it declares that *they shall not always be forgotten*. Possibly, some of you think that you have been forgotten in the arrangements of providence. Listen, troubled one. If you can only wait with patience, and stand still, and see the salvation of God, you will find that the needy shall not always be forgotten. Have you never noticed how a father carves for a large family? You do not expect him, at a single stroke, to carve enough to fill every plate, do you? There is a little child who is ill, so there must be a suitable portion sent away for that one; and, likely enough, that will be the first portion sent from the table. Then the father serves his other children according to a certain order which he has in his own mind, and there must be some who come after the others. I have known carvers keep someone waiting till they have reached the most juicy part of the meat; they only made him wait till they could give him something specially choice; so, if you are kept waiting for your portion, you will not lose anything by waiting a while. Patience is rewarded in due season. If ships are longer on their voyage, we expect them to bring home all the richer freight. If the trees are slower than usual, this year, in putting forth their buds,—if the peach blossoms or the apricots are not visible as in other seasons,—let us hope that it will be all the better for the ultimate fruit-bearing of the trees. Be thou content to come last rather than first, for sometimes last is best, and "there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." Poor as thou art, thou shalt not always be forgotten; there is a portion in reserve for thee,—even for thee.

Thou shalt not be forgotten at the mercy-seat. Thou hast been there many times without receiving an answer to thy petitions. Perhaps, poor heavy heart, thou hast prayed seven times, and no reply has yet come. Possibly, thou hast gone to thy God as often as the poor widow went to the unjust judge, and thou hast gone as importunately as she went; but, so far, there has been no sweet relief such as thy soul longed for. Yet thou shalt not be alway forgotten; so, continue in prayer. If the promise tarry, wait for it; for, in due season, the answer shall surely come.

Thou shalt not always be forgotten in the Word. Thou hast been reading it, yet no promise has seemed to comfort thee. In fact, as thou turnest over the pages of thy Bible, thou findest bitter things recorded there, as if they were written against thyself. But read on; read on; and, one of these days, thou wilt come to a passage that will seem to leap up out of the Scriptures to meet thee. It will woo thee, the very sight of it will fascinate thee, and thou wilt say, "The Lord hath spoken this message to my soul, and I bless and praise His holy name."

Thou shalt not always be forgotten from the pulpit. Perhaps there is someone here, who has long been listening to the gospel, and who sorrowfully says, "I find that others are comforted, but I am not. God seems to give a portion to all the rest of His people, but none to poor me. Alas! I come and I go, but it seems to be all in vain. I love to go where I see others getting a blessing, yet I find no comfort there for myself." Well, thou shalt not always be forgotten; God will bid His servant drop a handful on purpose for thee. Perhaps this very text is a message to thy heart just now.

Thou shalt not always be forgotten at the Lord's table. You have gone there hoping that He, who often reveals Himself to His servants in the breaking of bread, will be pleased to manifest Himself to you at His own table; yet you have not had a smile from Him. You have sat with others at the King's table, but the King Himself did not seem to sit there with you. You ate the bread, but you did not spiritually feed upon His flesh. You drank the wine but you did not spiritually drink His precious blood. Well, you shall not alway be forgotten. If you are really trusting in Jesus, there are brighter days yet in store for you. The King shall yet bring you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you shall be love; and you shall see such changes that you shall sing,—

> "My mourning He to dancing turns,
> For sackcloth joy He gives,
> A moment, Lord, Thine anger burns,
> But long Thy favour lives."

And you shall not always be forgotten in the service that you are rendering unto God. You have not yet seen a soul converted through your instrumentality, but you shall not always be forgotten in that respect. And in the sufferings that you are called to bear for Christ's sake, you shall not always be forgotten. Patience will yet have her perfect work, and the suffering will end when it has accomplished its purpose. You are persecuted and despised, perhaps, but you shall not always be forgotten; you shall yet learn the sweetness of being reproached for Christ's sake. You may seem to be forgotten for a little while, but you shall not really be so. God, the Holy Spirit, will not forget you; He will sustain instruct, illuminate, and console you. God the Son will not forget you. He paid too high a price for you, ever to forget you. You are His bride; He loves you as He loves Himself. You are part and parcel of Himself, so He will never forget you. And God the Father will not forget you. You have been His from all eternity, and He has "begotten you again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead." You will die soon; but Jesus will not be forgotten, for the holy angels will carry you you home to heaven. The rich man died, and was buried, with many waving plumes over his mourning coach. His will was read, his property was squabbled over, and there was an end of him; everybody there forgot him. But the angels carried Lazarus home to Abraham's bosom. They had not forgotten Lazarus. The dogs had licked his sores, but the angels very loved him. The dunghill was his couch, he of

Abraham's bosom was his throne. If you are a believer in Jesus, you are not forgotten up in glory. Rowland Hill, when he was very old, used to like to go and see aged people when they were dying, and he used to say to them, "When you get to heaven, give my love to the three glorious Johns up there, and be sure to tell them that poor old Rowley hopes they have not forgotten him." There is no fear that they will forget any of you who are going there. There is a crown in heaven which will fit nobody's head but yours, and that crown must hang as a useless thing until you get there to wear it. There is a mansion in glory that nobody but you can inhabit; and you cannot suppose that it will be allowed to stand empty for ever, can you? Oh, no; you must be there to occupy it; and you may rest assured that He who is preparing the place for His people, will bring His people to it, for He has not gone to heaven to prepare a place for His people without resolving that His people shall not perish on the way thither.

"The needy shall not alway be forgotten." They will be specially remembered when Christ comes, and He says to them, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." They will be remembered as they enter into the joy of their Lord; and then, throughout the eternal ages, they will never be forgotten of Him. They may well bear whatever comes upon them now in the anticipation of the glory that is yet to be revealed.

The other promise in our text is that "*the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever.*" What is your expectation,—you who have believed in Jesus, yet who feel very poor and needy? You have been expecting to get peace, have you not? You shall have it, in due time. A friend said to me, quite recently, "Supposing a person has believed in Jesus, but does not feel immediate peace, what then? Is that person to believe that he is saved? What is his evidence that he is?" I replied, "God says that whosoever believeth in His Son is not condemned, so I need not ask to have peace within my soul in order to corroborate the declaration of God. I am bound to take the truth of God as it stands, and believe myself to be saved, whether I feel any peace or not. If I will do this, then I shall have the peace; but if I say that I will not believe myself saved till I feel peace, then I am not really believing God at all; but I am asking Him to give me peace to corroborate His evidence, as if the evidence in the Word were not strong enough to satisfy me." Dear friend, it may be that you have not yet enjoyed peace because your faith is not as simple and as clear as it should be. But if you are really poor and needy, and cast yourself on the promises of God, you may depend upon it that the expectation that you have rightly founded upon the gospel shall not be disappointed. You shall have peace; yes, and you shall have perfect peace one day. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus."

You are expecting, too, that you shall triumph over sin. God has promised that sin shall not have dominion over you. It may struggle very hard, and, for a while, you may seem to be under its power; nay more, you may come under its power in a measure, but it never shall reign over you. Sin may, for a time, conquer a part of Mansoul; but it can never conquer the citadel of the heart; so rest assured of that. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," and you shall yet feel the power of holiness, and the mighty work of the Eternal Spirit in your soul. "The expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever."

You have been expecting, too, to get out of trouble; well, you shall get out of trouble. You have been expecting to see good come out of evil; well, good will come out of evil. I cannot tell you when you shall be delivered, but delivered you shall be, for thus it is written, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." One of these days, you will receive a warrant that will set you free from all trouble for ever and ever. How soon it may come, I cannot tell; but, till it does, you may patiently wait and quietly hope for the salvation of God.

You have also been expecting to enjoy the full assurance of faith; and your expectation, in that respect, shall not perish for ever. The Lord will make your faith to grow; every day's experience will help to establish it, and even your difficulties and troubles will tend to strengthen it. If a boy is apprenticed to a blacksmith, I should not wonder if, for months, his arm aches dreadfully through swinging the big hammer; but keep on, boy, keep on! Your muscles will grow hard, your sinews will get braced, and you will become strong just where you need to be strong. So, dear friend, shall it be with your faith, you shall become strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.

You expected to have very special spiritual joys, did you not? You expected that your soul would be made like the chariots of Ammi-nadib, did you not? You expected to be in such a condition that, whether in the body or out of the body, you could not tell. Well, you shall realize all that in due season, for God will reveal it unto you when it seems good in His sight. As for myself,—and I may speak also for all who love the Lord,—I am expecting to be with Him where He is, to behold His glory. I am expecting to be like Him, and to overcome, and sit with Him upon His throne, even as He has overcome and has sat down with His Father upon His throne. And, brothers and sisters, if this is your expectation, it shall not perish for ever, but it shall be blessedly realized. I have told you before some of the last words of my venerable grandfather, but I may venture to repeat them to you. One of my uncles said to him, "You know, father, that hymn of Dr. Watts,—

> "'Firm as the earth Thy gospel stands,
> My Lord, my hope, my trust;
> If I am found in Jesus' hands,
> My soul can ne'er be lost.'"

"Ah, James!" he replied, "I do not like the metaphor that Dr. Watts uses there, 'Firm as the earth.' Why, the earth is sinking from under my feet; I want something much firmer than that. I like better what the Doctor says when he sings,—

> "'Firm as *His throne* His promise stands,
> And He can well secure
> What I've committed to his hands,
> Till the decisive hour.'"

"That will do for me now, James," said the dying saint; "that is divine sovereignty. The Lord is King; and, as surely as He is King, and sits upon His throne, so surely will He fulfil His promise to a poor feeble worm like me, so I shall behold His face with joy."

THOUGHT-READING EXTRAORDINARY

"Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble: Thou wilt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear."—Psalm x. 17.

NOTICE at the outset the logic of this verse. It is very simple, very forcible, very accurate logic. It runs thus: "Thou hast," "Thou wilt." "Lord, *Thou hast* heard the desire of the humble: *Thou wilt* prepare their heart." When you know that the Lord God is immutable, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," you may conclude without mistake that what He has done He is prepared to do again. The argument from the past to the future would be a sorry one if you were dealing with fallible man; for what man has done is no sure guarantee of what he may do; he is such a creature of freaks and whims: but when you have to deal with the Eternal God, who is faithful and true, and changes not, you may reckon with safety that the thing which has been is the thing which shall be. Well did the apostle say, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us."

On looking at the text again you will see that the same blessed logic is carried a step further; for you read, "Thou wilt," and then again, "Thou wilt": "Thou wilt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear." Faith first of all concludes that God will bless because of former blessings, and then she is so sure of her conclusion that upon it she is prepared to build up a further confidence. This is a noble faith, worthy of imitation; but it is by no means common;—not a hundredth part so common as it ought to be. To doubtful minds it is difficult even to infer the future from a present fact immediately before their eye; but to the believing heart it is an easy thing to do something more than that, namely, to draw an inference of hope from a former inference of hope. Faith builds a sure abode with invisible stones. She expects because she has experienced, and experiences already what she expects. Why not? Is not faith the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen? Since that which we believe is sure, it is worthy to be the foundation of further faith. We are very fond of that

> "And a 'new song' is in my mouth,
> To long-loved music set;
> Glory to Thee for all the grace
> I have not tasted yet."

By such language we praise God for mercy not yet received; and our text suggests another practical use of "things not seen as yet," namely, to make them, as apprehended by our faith, the basis of a still higher confidence in God. This is to be built up on our most holy faith. Rest assured that this is not constructing castles in the air; for our faith is no delusion, but is made of solid, substantial stuff, before which even the supposed infallibilities of science are trifles light as air. Because our Good Shepherd has made us to lie down in green pastures, we argue that there is no cause for fear though we walk through the valley of death-shade, and from that we surely gather that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. Such reasoning is as accurate as the demonstrations of geometry. The Lord will never leave us to be ashamed of our hope. Learn this logic and it will stand you in good stead in times of distress, when nothing but certainty will sustain you. The Lord is good, and therefore He will be good: He will keep the feet of His saints, and because He will do this we shall enter His palace with joy.

Apply this logic to prayer. God has answered prayer, and therefore He will answer it. Of this first statement many of us are witnesses. The evidences of that truth are with us in daily experience; we have proofs of the power of prayer as innumerable as the stars of heaven. Because the Lord has heard us out of His holy place we infer that He will still hear us, and therefore as long as we live we call upon Him. This is no casual thing, but it is Jehovah's perpetual name and standing memorial—the God that heareth prayer. Never while the earth endureth will He forsake the throne of grace and turn a deaf ear to the cries of His suppliant Israel.

The subject of this morning is thus introduced to you. It is necessary that you pray, for the needy must cry to their helper; and it is profitable that you pray, for the bosoms of suppliants are filled with benedictions. It is not a vain thing to wait upon God; it is your comfort, your strength, your life. If you seek honour it should be your delight to pray; for nothing is more ennobling than to win the ear of the Lord of all. A man admitted to audience with the Most High is honoured in an unspeakable degree.

We shall speak this morning in the way of five observations drawn from our text. May each one be made profitable to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. Our first observation is written upon the surface of the Scripture before us—THE LOWLIEST FORM OF PRAYER MAY BE MOST TRUE AND ACCEPTABLE. And what is that lowliest form of prayer? Is it not described in the text? "The desire of the humble." It is not the prayer of the serene faith of Abraham, nor the wrestling of energetic Jacob, nor the intercession of prevailing Moses, nor the pleading of holy Samuel, nor the commanding cry of Elias shutting and opening heaven: it is only a desire—a motion of the heart towards good things; and yet the Lord hears it. Indeed, the lowliest form of prayer may be the truest; for the essence of all real prayer is desire. Words are but the habitation of prayer, the living tenant is desire. We see from our text that desires are prevailing prayers; for the Lord has made a point of hearing them: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Other forms of prayer may be attractive to man, and yet they may have no influence whatever with the living God; but this manner of supplication has been successful from of old, even as it is written,—"He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him," and again, "The desire of the righteous shall be granted." In fact, prayer is desire, as our poet puts it,—

> "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
> Utter'd or unexpress'd;
> The motion of a hidden fire,
> That trembles in the breast."

The lowest form of true prayer secures the ear of the Highest, and what more is needed?

Observe, it is only *a desire*: "the desire of the

humble." A desire may be altogether unattended by speech. The suppliant may not be able to put his desire into words at all: he may be too sorrowful, his emotion may choke his utterance; he may be too quiet, and so may be quite unversed in the use of speech. He may be only able to pour forth groanings that cannot be uttered, and tears whose eloquence is silent; yet God is pleased to hear the desire which lacks expression. Many prayers are very prettily expressed; in fact, they are expressed so grandly that their tawdry fineries will not be tolerated in heaven. Those prayers will never enter heaven's gate which are meant to catch the applause of man. God will say, "They were meant for men, and let men have them." He does not stoop to accept man's leavings, and if a prayer is meant to be a feast for man, God will not be a second-rate guest at its table. On the other hand, many sincere persons condemn themselves because they cannot offer public prayer as their brethren do: they even tremble, perhaps, to pray before their families, and this is a grief to them. I think, if they are men, they should prove their manhood by overcoming such diffidence. I would urge them to make the attempt with much resolution and perseverance; but should they fail in it through positive inability, there will be cause for regret, but no reason for self-condemnation. There may be more prayer in the silent than in the fluent. God has heard prayers which nobody else could possibly have heard, because there was no vocal sound about them. So quick is the ear of God that He heareth that which is not properly the subject of hearing: the true prayer which abides in silence shall not meet with a silent God.

This desire may not be recommended by any conscious attainments on the part of the offerer. The man may reach far in his desire, but he may have attained to little beyond. He may have a wealth of desire and a poverty of everything else, and yet he may be heard of the Lord. Possibly his confession may run thus,—"I desire to be humble, but I lament my pride; I desire to be strong in faith, but I mourn my unbelief; I desire to be fervent, but I sigh over my lukewarmness; I desire to be holy, but I confess my transgressions; I desire my prayer should be such as God can accept, but I fear that I waver, or ask amiss." Now such a confession, if penitently presented, will not prevent our obtaining the promise; for the Lord hath heard the desire of the humble. If your heart seethes and boils with desires, the steam thereof will rise to heaven. If your stock-in-trade is made up of empty vessels, and little else, the Lord can deal with you as He did with the prophet's widow, "who had empty vessels not a few." Your little oil of grace He can multiply till every vessel is filled to the brim.

Have you desires?—great, hungry, thirsty desires? Then bring them to the Lord. Are your desires as insatiable as the horse-leech, which is always sucking, but which always craves for more, crying, ever, "Give, give, give?" Then say with David, "All my desires are before Thee," and be assured that the Lord satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Be comforted if your desires are awake. You are praying, and your cry is being heard: you shall yet say, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Your desires have voices of their own: they knock hard at heaven's door, and it shall be opened unto them.

Note again, that this desire may be unaccompanied by any confident expectation. When you pray you ought to believe the promise and expect its fulfilment. It is the duty and the privilege of every suppliant to believe that when he prays in the name of Jesus he must and shall be heard. But sometimes humility, which is a good thing, is attended by a want of faith, which is an evil thing; and this much hinders prayer. Humility is deceived by unbelief, and so it gives way to the dark thought that its poor feeble prayer will not speed with God. I fear that in some cases this want of expectancy is an effectual barrier to prayer, and prevents its being answered; but it is forgiven to naturally despondent, heavily-laden spirits, whose fears are not so much doubts of God as a deeply humiliating judgment of themselves. It is not so much the case that their faith is sinfully defective as that they have a painfully acute sense of their own unworthiness; and so when they cry they hope that the Lord will hear them, and they mean to wait upon Him till He does; but they are sore afraid. They will go nowhere else, for other hope they have none but that which lies in the free grace and sovereign mercy of God; but yet they do not exercise that happy expectancy which the sure promise warrants their enjoying. My brethren, I would chide your unbelief, but I would still encourage your desires; for that desire which God hears is not to be despised. The text saith, "Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble," and the Lord will yet hear your humble sighs and groans; and you shall be surprised to find the Lord doing for you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or even thought. May your faith grow exceedingly, being fed upon the heavenly food which the Lord deals out to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

This leads me to observe that this commencing form of prayer which the Lord nevertheless hears, is here further described as "*the desire of the humble.*" It has this advantage about it, that it is free from pride. Some men's prayers, if they were to pray them as their foolish heart really desires, would be requests that they might be made famous. Startle not when I say it,—I fear that many men proudly ask to be humble: they desire to be humble in order that they may be admired for it. I have no doubt whatever that some professors seek great grace that they may be highly thought of and greatly set by in the market of the church. Have we not all found that in the rushing stream of our earnest zeal there will be some back-water, which runs not towards God but towards ourselves? Have we not even striven to win souls that we might be notable as soul-winners? Aye, and have we not sought to glorify God that we might shine in the reflection of that glory? "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," has been the language of many a Jehu. Oh, it is hard to keep out pride. This psalm says much concerning the proud man and the oppressor, whom God abhors, and will surely visit in judgment; and then shines forth this bright word, like a lone star in a dark night. Never was precious pearl found in a rougher oyster-shell. May the Lord keep us humble if we are so, and make us humble if we are not so. I believe every Christian man has a choice between being humble and being humbled. Now, to be humble is a sweet thing; there is no lovelier spot on the road to the celestial city than the Valley of Humiliation: he that lives in it dwells among flowers and birds, and may sing all day long, like the shepherd boy whose song ran thus,—

> "He that is down need fear no fall,
> He that is low no pride;
> He that is humble ever shall
> Have God to be His guide."

If you do not choose to be humble you will have to be humbled; and that is not at all a desirable thing. To be humbled is to be sorely smitten and made to suffer shame in the estimation of your fellow-men, both ungodly and godly. Certain persons who have carried their heads very high have struck them against the beam, and have had to go with bruised foreheads for the rest of their lives. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Therefore may God help us to offer before Him "the desire of the humble."

"The desire of the humble" is saturated with a gospel spirit, and therefore is acceptable with the God of all grace. Pride seems born of the law, though I scarce know why it should be; for the law censures and condemns. Humility is the child of the gospel, and is brought up upon the knees of grace. If thou wouldst be a child of God thou must be lowly in thine own esteem. If thou wouldst be heard in prayer thou must come to God as needy and empty. Low thoughts of ourselves are the companions of prevailing prayers. No man may expect to receive out of the fulness that is treasured up in Christ Jesus until he is willing to confess his own poverty. Grace for grace will be given only to those who feel need upon need; all successful pleadings must find their argument in free grace. We must never urge claims against the Lord as though He were our debtor; for then mercy will not treat with us: we have appealed unto the Cæsar of justice and unto Cæsar we must go. Let us have done with merits and deserts, and let this be our cry, "For Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake, and for Thy Son's sake, hear Thou the voice of my prayer." This is the proper gospel spirit; but if we plead in any other fashion, we shall be sent empty away.

Still, this "desire of the humble" is apt to be somewhat restricted and straitened. If we contract our desires to the measure of our deserts, they will shrivel into nothing; for our deserts are less than nothing. It is ill to pray according to your sense of what you have a right to ask. You have a legal right to ask for nothing but justice, and who among us can abide its action apart from Jesus? "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" You had better pray according to God's command, and that runs thus: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The truest humility is that which is immediately obedient to the gracious precept, and accepts without a question that which the Lord so freely gives. We have a natural right to nothing; but when the Lord commands us to open our mouth wide, He thereby gives us a covenant right to all things. Yet, dear brother, if your humility should cramp your desire, if you feel as if you would desire a great boon but dare not, still it is a desire.

If you say, "I see the sweetness of the mercy, but it seems too good for such a soul as mine;" yet I spy at the back of your humility a true and strong desire, and I pray that the Lord may hear that desire and answer thee for His mercy's sake. Forget not this first truth—that what seems to be the lowest form of prayer is, nevertheless, true prayer.

II. Our second point is full of comfort to those who have begun to pray. GOD IS QUICK TO HEAR THE LOWLIEST PRAYER: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." *This must be a divine science,*—this art of hearing desires. We have heard a good deal lately about thought-reading. I give no opinion of that matter among men; but here is a wonderful instance of it with the Lord. "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." This kind of desire-reading is the prerogative of God alone. He knows our desires even when we do not know them ourselves. Sitting in this Tabernacle you are desiring, but it is quite impossible for the person sitting next to you to know your wishes, and it is quite as well, perhaps, that it is so. Certain it is that the servant of God, Eli himself, fresh from the shrine of the Most High, could not read Hannah's desire. Her lips were moving, and one would think if anything would be learned it might be from the moving of the lips; but Eli thought her drunken, and therefore chattering to herself, and so he rebuked her. Was it not a mercy for Hannah that God heard her humble desire, and knew all about it? Beloved, the Lord is reading your thought now: my dear sister, your groaning out of the very deeps has ascended to the heights. You would not like to tell your inward feelings: perhaps your secret is too painful to be told: never mind, God's ear is so quick that He can hear your desires. Wonderful art! We should be very glad if the Lord had promised to hear us when we speak; but He has gone far beyond that, and He hears the unspeakable and unutterable. Was there ever power and pity like to this? Be comforted, you that are full of desires this morning, and are sitting here with hearts ready to break, crying in your spirit, "Oh, that the Lord would hear me! Oh, that He would give me peace! Oh, that the days of my mourning were ended! Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" Do not sink in despair, there is no reason for fear; your case is among the most hopeful, for it is the way of the Lord to hear the desire of the humble.

It is an art which has been exercised by God in all ages; He does not merely possess the power, but He exercises it. I like my text for putting it in the past tense: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." It is a matter of frequent fact, and not merely a possible event. It is not the bare assertion of a power, but the record of a deed. All along through history, wherever gracious men have lived, their hearts have talked with God as well without words as with them. The pulsings of human spirits God has heard as surely as if they had been loud as the beat of drum. The sigh of the soul has come up before Him as clearly as if it had been the note of a clarion. The Lord's ear is never heavy, He is not weary of the feebleness and faultiness of the poor man's petition. Still the Lord heareth in the day of trouble, and the name of the God of Jacob defends us.

> "When God inclines the heart to pray,
> He hath an ear to hear;
> To Him there's music in a groan,
> And beauty in a tear."

To-day let this be told; it ought not to be buried in ungrateful silence; it is mentioned in the text, let it be mentioned in your conversation. If some here present had the opportunity, we could tell you how God has heard our desires, and how at times before the desire has actually been formed in the soul the answer has come, according to that word, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." We had a desire laid upon our heart which we never communicated to any living person except the living God, and we carried that desire in our heart for weeks and months, constantly allowing it to burn in our bosom, and frequently letting it break out in groans and broken cries: and in due time our sighing reached the heart of God. As surely as we have sown in prayer we have in due season

reaped a harvest of blessing. Our Lord even in Gethsemane was heard in that He feared—sure pledge to all His redeemed that they shall be heard in their hour of darkness. Happy are they who dwell in God, for they may have what they please at the mercy-seat. Is it not written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart"? Has it not been so with you, O ye who abide under the shadow of the Almighty? I charge you, then, abundantly to utter the memory of His great goodness. Fail not to tell your experience of the Lord's faithfulness; for God loses much glory, and poor sinners and saints, too, lose much encouragement to pray when children of God are silent about their success at the throne of grace. O, I wish I could be the means of stirring some this morning to pray the prayer of faith while sitting here. You may say, "I will pray when I get home." You may do so, if you please; but I am urging you to something more speedy. Remember the publican: it was in God's house that he prayed; though he did not dare to lift his eyes to heaven, yet he sighed in his soul this prayer,—"God be merciful to me a sinner," and he went down to his house justified rather than the other. I do not ask you to withhold that prayer till you reach home: would it not be a grand thing to be saved here, and to go home justified? You shall have that unspeakable blessing now if your desire be a true one, and you pour it out at once before the Lord believingly. He has heard the like many times, and is prepared to hear you in the same manner. Why should not this first Sunday in October be a day of grace unto your souls? "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." This is an accepted time; the Spirit of God is near. If God is now inclining you to pray, do not resist the gentle movement of His Spirit, but let your prayer come forth, encouraged by the sweet language of my text. Say you unto the prayer-hearing God, "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble. Why shouldest Thou not hear my desire at this hour, and bless me, even me also, O my Father?"

III. Thirdly, we will remark that THE HEART IS THE MAIN MATTER IN PRAYER. That is clearly shown in the text: "Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Desires are the fruit of the heart. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." When God comes to deal with men in a way of grace, His first business is to prepare their hearts; so that most assuredly the state of the heart is of prime importance. The heart is the source, the seat, and the essence of supplication. Prayer with the heart is the heart of prayer: the cry of our soul is the soul of our cry.

Without the heart prayer is a wretched mockery. There is as much grace in the bark of a dog or the grunt of a swine as in a form of prayer if the heart be absent; and God is as likely, nay, more likely, to hear the cry of ravens and young lions, than to regard prayers uttered in chapels or churches, meeting-houses or cathedrals, if the mind be not in earnest. Do not say, "I read my collect this morning"; you may read fifty collects, and be none the better: do not say, "I went through the prayer which I learned from a godly mother"; you may go through it twenty thousand times, and yet never pray once. Unless the heart speaks with God, thou hast done nothing for thine own good with all thy paternosters or other goodly words; nay, thou mayest have done something to thine own hurt in all this pretence of praying. I fear that much so-called public prayer is nothing better than presumptuous sin. If your child should come to you and ask a favour in an affected voice, would you notice him? If, instead of saying, "Dear father, I want so-and-so," he should take up a book and intone such words as these, "Dearly beloved father, I have to request of thee that thou in thy great affection wilt give unto me such and such things," you would not regard his nonsense. You would say, "Come, boy, what do you want? Tell me plainly"; and if he continued to intone, you would drive him out of the room, perhaps with the aid of your foot. I fear that this praying in sing-song is the most fearful mockery God ever hears. Fancy Peter, when he was beginning to sink, intoning, "Lord, save me." When the heart really gets to speak with God, it cannot talk in affected tones; it throws such rubbish overboard. But cannot a man pray with his heart and yet use a written prayer? Certainly he can. Many have done so for years. If you cannot walk without your crutches, I would sooner you walked with them than not at all. Still, it is not the best words put together by the most devout men that ever lived, nor the holiest language composed extemporaneously by yourself, that can make up prayer if the heart be gone. Words are seldom more than the baggage of prayer. Language at best is but the flesh in which prayer is embodied: the desire of the heart is the life of the prayer. See thou to thy heart, for God sees to it: "Thou wilt prepare their heart." Sometimes the Lord puts words into men's mouths: He says, "Take with you words, and come unto Me." and thus He prepares words for their use; but in general the main concern with God is that the heart be prepared to plead with Him.

Without the heart prayer is a nullity, and *when there is but little heart, prayer is a failure.* He that prays with little desire asks God to refuse him. If you go through your prayer, and your mind is wandering up and down about a thousand vanities, your desires are feeble, and your supplication will effect little. Prayer must be fervent to be effectual, it must be ardent to be acceptable. If the utter failure of your prayer would not greatly grieve you, and if its success would not much gratify you, then depend upon it you will have to wait long at mercy's wicket ere it will admit you. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Importunity is indispensable: our Lord has given us many parables to that effect. To play at praying will never do: heart and soul must be fully awake; for no sleepy prayer can enter heaven. We must praise God with our whole heart, and we must pray in the same manner. If a double-minded man may not expect to receive anything of the Lord, neither may a half-hearted man. Above all things, keep thine heart with all diligence if thou wouldest speed at the throne.

Success comes to the prayer of a glowing heart. When the soul grows warm, and the spirit is fervent, and desires are strong, then, brother, do not spare thy prayers. We are not always in that condition, let us pray much when we are. We are bound to prepare ourselves for prayer; but I believe the best qualifications are strong desires and intense longings. No preparation for food is equal to intense hunger. You have the best sauce with your meat when you are hungry. It will be your wisdom when your desires are sharp-set to pray more than you ordinarily do. You cannot always pray alike; but when good times come use them. When a fair wind fills the sails of desire, then make all possible headway. Set apart

a longer season for private devotion when the soul is all alive and active in it. At another time you may have to try very hard and make but small progress, for the chariot wheels may be taken off: let it not at such a time be a source of regret that you wasted a happier season. Cease not to obtain blessings beyond number both for thyself, for the church, and for a perishing world; but take heed that thy heart be found greatly exercised with longings of soul before God.

IV. Fourthly, GOD HIMSELF PREPARES THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." I am greatly rejoiced by this statement that God will prepare our hearts to pray, because it is a most *important* business on which so much depends. On the heart the whole machinery of life depends, and it needs preparing, especially for devotion. You cannot spring out of bed and on every occasion pray in a moment without thought or reflection: you cannot say to yourself, "I have just been listening to ungodly talk; and now I am going to pray." It will be poor, pitiful praying which springs up from the barren soil of thoughtlessness. We need preparation in coming into the courts of the Lord's house: the soul had need put her shoes from off her feet because the place is holy. But this preparation is often as *difficult* as it is needful; and therefore it is a great mercy that our God undertakes to work it in us. Surely none but the Lord can prepare a heart for prayer. One old writer says it is far harder work to raise the big bell into the steeple than to ring it afterwards. This witness is true. When the bell is well hung you can ring it readily enough; but in that uplifting of the heart lies the work and the labour. Before musicians begin to play, they attend to their strings and see that their instruments are in order; you wish that the operation could be dispensed with, but it cannot be, and it is one of the most needful parts of the musician's work. Until he has learned to tune his instrument, what does he know? Until he has tuned it, what can he do? I wish we were all made ready, as a people prepared for the Lord.

These processes by which the heart is prepared *may have commenced far back*. Our gracious God may have prepared the heart of a man to pray to-day by a work which He wrought upon him, or for him, twenty years ago: the Lord may be working a man up to a certain prayer by years of sorrow or joy. The poet who composes a sonnet may not be able to tell you why the inspiration came to him at that particular moment; for it may have been the outcome of his soul throughout the whole of his life. That which the songster threw into words to-day may have lain hidden in his soul from his boyhood. He was not prepared for penning his stanzas then, but his after-life trained him to speak in numbers, and to clothe noble thoughts in the dress of attractive language. So may it be with our prayers: they may be the juice of a life-vintage, the ripened harvest of youth and manhood. In any case, God prepares the heart to be blest when He is prepared to bless it.

One of the most difficult things in preparation for prayer is the *restraining of loose and wandering thoughts*. I do not know how perfect brethren keep themselves free from every evil thought, for I find myself defeated often when I would shut out these vile intruders. Honestly, I may express my belief that these carnal boasters have as many vain thoughts as other people. The ravenous birds will come down upon the sacrifice, even when Abraham offers it, and it costs infinite pains to drive them away. Intruding thoughts surround us like a plague of flies: they are here, and there, and everywhere. It is well, indeed, that God should prepare our hearts; for in this one point our weakness is complete. Egypt suffered from a plague of flies, which all Pharaoh's armies could not drive away; but when the Lord heard the prayer of Moses, it is said, "The Lord removed the swarms of flies: there remained not one." That was a deliverance indeed: truly this was the finger of God. When the Lord comes to prepare His people's hearts by His Spirit, He chases away every wandering thought, so that there remains not one. The tradition says of Solomon's temple that though much meat was consumed there, and this naturally attracts flies, yet there was never a fly in the holy place. I wish it were so with our holy place! Oh, that it might be so that whenever we pray all evil thoughts may be driven out. This is a miracle, and none can perform it but the Lord our God. "Thou wilt prepare their heart."

Next, the Lord prepares His people's hearts by *giving them a deep sense of what they want*. I know your grief, and your temptation, and your misery, and the crying out of your spirit under the lashes of conscience; but all this is right, thus you are instructed in the art and mystery of supplication. Nobody cries to Christ so well as the man who is beginning to sink. Jonah's cry in the whale's belly was the most intense prayer he ever prayed. When the iron enters into your soul, then you cry unto the Lord in your trouble. A sentence of death in your own soul is a mighty quickener of supplication; when your spirit is overwhelmed with sorrow, then look up to Christ, the Saviour, and find Him to your soul's joy. Our desires are apt to sleep, but when the Lord by His Spirit reveals to us our spiritual poverty, we long, and pine, and sigh for spiritual blessings.

When a man out of the anguish of his heart cries for mercy, then he begins to search out and *lay hold upon the promise*. To bring the promise to remembrance is a part of the Holy Spirit's work: He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Oh, how blessedly a man can pray when he gets hold of a promise, when he is sure that God hath a blessing in store for him, when he is positive that the Lord is faithful to His covenant, and will not withhold any good thing from him. The Lord also works in us *strong faith, holy perseverance, and high expectancy*, and in all these ways He prepares our hearts to pray.

Nor is this all: the text does not say that God will only prepare the heart to pray, but it says, "Thou wilt prepare the heart," and this is a wider work, making ready for other matters besides prayer. He will prepare the heart to receive the answer, for many of us are not as yet ready to enjoy what God is ready to bestow. Do you want anything which Jesus can give you? Give your heart up to the Holy Spirit, that He may prepare you to seek the blessing, and prepare you to receive the blessing when the time comes for the Lord to grant it. "Thou wilt prepare their heart"; this is wonderful condescension on God's part, and on our part we ought to feel the utmost encouragement to prepare our own hearts for earnest supplication.

V. Lastly, PRAYER FROM PREPARED HEARTS MUST BE HEARD. "Thou wilt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear." I wish you would join these two sentences together in your minds, and carry them home with you. Let the two bells ring in harmony: "Thou wilt prepare their heart: Thou

wilt cause Thine ear to hear." Ring them over and over again; and let their blended music linger in your ear.

First, *if God has had love enough to prepare your heart to pray, He has grace enough to give you the blessing.* The more difficult thing of the two is not to give the blessing, but to prepare your heart to cry for it: if He has done the one He will certainly do the other.

Consider *the truthfulness and the faithfulness, and the goodness of God,* and you will see that it is not possible that He should teach a man to pray for a blessing which He will not give. I cannot imagine any one of you tantalising your child by exciting in him a desire that you do not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then, when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick, if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray He means you to receive. You find a holy desire in your heart; the Lord put that desire into your heart, and for the honour of His infinite majesty, lest He stain His goodness and dishonour His great name, He must hear you. With what comfort would I address those here who are beginning to pray. I know I speak to some who are uneasy, unrestful; you tell us you are seeking peace, that day and night a desire for salvation occupies the entire chamber of your soul. Well, this did not come from your own nature; neither the devil nor the old Adam has taught you to pray. Dear hearer, be sure that the great Father who is moving you to cry to Him is hearing you—He is inclining His ear to catch the faintest moan of your spirit. Believe that He is hearing you. Cast yourself at the feet of His dear Son. Behold the wounds of Jesus; let these invite you to draw nigh to God. I know of no such eloquent mouths as the wounds of the dying Lord. Let them persuade you to come to Jesus, to trust, to rest at His dear feet; for since He has inclined your heart to pray He is about to hear you and bless you. The Lord be with you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

AN IMMOVABLE FOUNDATION

"If the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"—Psalm xi. 3.

WE are walking along through the vineyard of this psalm, plucking the clusters on the right hand and on the left, when suddenly, with a tremendous roar, the "if" of our text, like a young lion, leaps out upon us. What shall we do with it? Let us play the man, like Samson, and read it as though it were a kid, and doubtless we shall find honey in it, and shall have again to put forth our riddle, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." These "ifs" are terrible lions, but when grace enables us to slay them, they become good storehouses for sweetness. As the children of Israel spoiled the Egyptians and made themselves rich from the spoils of their oppressors, both when they left Egypt and after the passage of the Red Sea, so let us gather riches of comfort and arms for future warfare from this "if," which threatens to enthral the mind of the Christian and hold him in chains of fear and doubt. It comes to us as a keen shaft from the camp of the foe, but by the grace of God we will fit it to our string, and with the arms of faith shoot it back again, and may God in mercy guide it to the joints of some foeman's harness. This "if" may have a bitter taste at first, but I am persuaded that it will have a wholesome effect upon us to use it, yea, it will yield some spiritual sustenance to our souls. We will welcome its searching and shaking power now, as it will only tend to prepare us for the time when the four winds may come upon our house, and the blast of the terrible one be as a storm against the wall. If we use this giant battering ram "if" now, it will show us our weakness and our strength, so that we may correct the one and rejoice over the other.

We shall take this "if" in two ways; first, we shall consider it as *an "if" which is nothing but an "if";* and secondly, we shall consider it as *an "if" which is a great deal more than an "if."*

I. We shall first CONSIDER THIS "IF" AS BEING NOTHING BUT AN "IF."

"If the foundation be removed, what can the righteous do?" My brethren, there are certain spiritual foundations which God has laid in Zion which never can be removed. There are certain foundations against which the gates of hell cannot prevail, which time cannot shake, and which eternity will only confirm. If we venture to speak of these foundations being removed, it can only be in hypothetical terms, and with the word "if," for there must always be in our souls the conviction that the foundation of God stands sure.

I will mention a few of these foundation-things which we know cannot be removed, but we will ask the question, if they should be removed, what then?

First we will take the *foundation-book.* This Word of God, this revelation of Himself which He has made to us by prophets and by seers, by apostles and by evangelists, and by His own dear Son,—this book we believe to be true even in its jots and tittles. Whatever form of thought we may adopt as to the method of inspiration, we believe this book to be inspired throughout, and we accept all its utterances as the teachings of the Most High. From the first word of it to the last we give our "unfeigned assent and consent" to it, as being nothing less and nothing more than the word of Jehovah, the Lord our God, to us. But if it should not be so, what can the righteous do then? If after all, the attacks of modern sceptics should have some force in them; if they can dislodge part of the Word of God from its sure resting place; if first one stone shall topple from the summit of the battlements, and then another shall be loosened from the parapet, and by-and-by its enemies should come to work with their great bars upon the very lowest and most valuable stones in the wall,—what then? What if the Rock should be a delusion;

what if it should be false? Ah! then, my brethren, what *can* the righteous do? Oh! better had it been for us that we had never been born, than that the Bible should not be true, for here is the only balm that heals the wounds that sin has made, here is the only bread that satisfies the hungering of our spirits. If that be not true, O God, why didst Thou create us, and wherefore didst Thou suffer such a book as that to come across our path to mock us, supplying as it does all that hope can desire, and all that our deepest interests can crave after? O, cruel God, to permit so sweet a dream to charm us even for a while, if it be not true! But oh, beloved, we come back with a sacred recoil to this—it is true, and if for no other reason, because it so suits the craving of our inward consciousness, because it so uplifts us out of the natural beggary and meanness of our condition, puts us on such a heavenly footing, makes us commune with the Most High, and fills us with such rapt and heavenly thoughts! It must be true, or else what could we do? Cling, then, to the divine authority of the Scriptures with a death grip! Let those give up the inspiration of the Bible who can afford to do so, but you and I cannot. Let those cast away the sure promise of God who have got something else to comfort them, who can go to their philosophy or turn to their self-conceit. But as for you and for me, it is a desperate matter for us if this Book be not true, and therefore let us be ready to defend it at all hazards, and if need be to die for it, for oh! brethren, it were better to die, that Book being true, than to live, that Book being false. It were better for us that all the miseries of this life should fall upon us, that Book being an unmoved foundation, than for all the joys of life to be ours if that Book be once taken away. Clasp it to your heart; enfold it in your bosoms; hold it as the very core of your life's comfort, and the very strength of your existence, remembering that if that be removed there is nothing for the righteous to do but despair and die. I hope we shall ever sing,

> "Should all the forms which men devise
> Assault my soul with treacherous art,
> I'll call them vanity and lies,
> And bind this Bible to my heart."

But now we turn from the foundation-Book to *the foundation-doctrine*. What is the foundation-doctrine? I shall not shock any one of you if I say that it is admitted by all evangelical Christians that the standing or falling in the church is that of justification by faith. The church which holds that doctrine is in the body; the church which is tampering with that doctrine is not in the body. I will not merely say the church that is not holding it, but the church that is not holding it in the most distinct form, is not to be acknowledged as a part of the body of Christ; for this is such a truth that it must not be hidden, and to obscure those words, legible in their own light—"Believe and live"—is to commit high treason against the majesty of God, and to make one self an outlaw from God and from mercy.

The great standing or falling doctrine, then, is this—"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God"; "Therefore we are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law." We hold that it is of faith that it might be of grace through Christ Jesus. Holding this truth, that every soul who believes in Christ is thereby made a partaker of the merit of His passion and is saved, what joy and peace are opened up to us! Some of us live in a sense of pardon. O! brethren, this is a river to swim in, when we can sing—

> "Now freed from sin I walk at large,
> My Saviour's blood my full discharge;
> At His dear feet my soul I lay,
> A sinner saved, and homage pay."

Oh! the blessedness—as Ainsworth translates it—"The heaped-up blessedness of the man whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." Oh! the blessedness of being justified by faith, and of possessing peace with God! But if that be removed, what can the righteous do? My brethren, the righteous can do nothing; they can do nothing, but they must at once give up their peace, give up their joy, give up their hopes, and then give up existence altogether. This one thing I know; though I have preached my Master's gospel with perpetual industry, and have sought to honour Him, yet I have no more hope of heaven apart from the merits of Christ than the greatest criminal that is banished from his country for his crimes; and that poor wretch who was till lately under sentence of death for many murders, would have as good a hope of entering into eternal life as the best among you were it not for this precious doctrine—that is to say, she would have no hope, and you would have no hope either, for we are all alike shut up under condemnation; good or bad, righteous or unrighteous, we are all alike condemned under the law of God, and there would be no more hope for one than for another if this doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ were not true. We are all in this one boat together—I mean as many of us as have believed; the weakest cannot sink unless the ship goes down, and the strongest cannot float unless the ship should bear them. If this foundation were removed, I will ask you grey-haired saint, hoary with many years of service, what could *you* do? You bow your head and say, "Alas! my master, what could I do but die in despair?" I would ask the bravest of Christ's apostles, the most earnest and indefatigable of the servants of the living God, what could they do if salvation be not the result of faith in Christ, and they would reply unanimously, "We were of all men the most miserable, if our only hope were gone!" But oh, brethren, we will come back to this, that it is by faith in the blood of Jesus that we are saved. For this doctrine let us be prepared to bear any reproach, and for the spread of this doctrine let us make any exertions. Let us publish it to every wind; let us invoke the help of every wave to bear it abroad! My brethren and sisters, help those of us who are engaged in telling out this precious truth of salvation by faith, and then proclaim it far and wide yourselves. Distribute it in printed form; speak of it with your warm and loving lips! Tell it, tell it the wide world over, that there is a foundation already laid in Zion, a corner-stone elect and precious, and that "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ the righteous," and that "whosoever believeth in Him is not condemned."

We will now go a step further. We have had the foundation-Book and the foundation-doctrine, and now we come to *the foundation-fact*. The fact upon which our faith rests is this, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The great fact on which genuine faith rests is this, that "the Word

was made flesh and dwelt among us," and that having taken upon Himself the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of man, He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, for us. The great truth which makes the gospel worth proclaiming, is the truth that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," that Christ also hath suffered for sin, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God"; "Who Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree"; "For the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." In one word, the great fact on which the Christian's hope rests is *substitution*. The vicarious sacrifice of Christ for the sinner, Christ suffering for the sinner, Christ's being made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, Christ offering up a true and proper expiatory and substitutionary sacrifice in the room, place, and stead of as many as the Father gave Him, who are recognised by their trusting in Him,—this is the cardinal fact of the gospel. Now, if this be true, what will we not do? Do? Why, we will sing of Christ in time, and sing of Him in eternity. We will sit at the foot of His cross and

"View the flowing
Of the Saviour's precious blood;
With divine assurance knowing
He has made our peace with God."

We will praise Him when we get to heaven, and sing, "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His blood." But—oh! horrible "but!"—if this be not true, if God was never incarnate, if God never did in the person of His Son Jesus bleed and die, if no atonement was ever made for human guilt; then howl because thereof! Let each man put his hands upon his loins as a woman in travail, and let sorrow pierce the heart of every child of Adam, for sin must be punished, and if it was never punished in Christ it must be punished upon each one of us. Wrath, and a certain terrible looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation—these are all that awaits us. "As when a man wipeth a dish and turneth it," saith the prophet, even so will it be with us, wiped out and turned upside down, if it were not true that Christ died. As when the potter with a rod of iron breaks the vessel into shivers, so should we too be broken into shivers, but each particle to be full of pain and covered with grief, if it were not that Jesus died. Oh! if this foundation were removed what could we do? But it cannot be removed! We know it; we rest on it; we trust in it; and our joy is to hold it, to understand and to study it, to be actuated and moved by it in every part of our life and conversation, but if it were removed what could the righteous do? There is just now, and there has been for many years, a direct attack made upon the doctrine of the atonement. Men cannot bear substitution. They gnash their teeth at the thought of the Lamb of God bearing the sin of man. Ah! but we will proclaim it in defiance of them, and hurl it in their teeth; we will neither dilute it, nor change it, nor fritter it away in any shape or fashion. It shall still be Christ a positive substitute, bearing human guilt, and suffering in the stead of men, for if this be not so what could we do? We cannot, dare not give it up, for it is our life.

I have thus given you three matters, and now just a word upon another point, namely,—*the foundation-work*. The blood of Jesus, brethren, must be applied by the Spirit of divine grace, and the foundation of our inward confidence must be in the work of grace in our own souls. Now, the foundation in us was laid in repentance, and in faith in Christ, and we have gone on to build thereon, much I am afraid, of wood, hay, and stubble, but still, something of gold, and silver, and precious stones. Now, if the grace of God could cease to work, if the eternal love of Jehovah could be removed and if the effectual might of the Holy Spirit's arm could be withdrawn, what could you and I do? Would it not be as hard to get to heaven by the gospel as by the law if it were not for the work of grace in us? Brethren, Calvary is no nearer to heaven than Sinai, if the Spirit of grace work not in us. If Christ be not crucified in us, His being crucified for us will be of no avail; we must have Christ formed in us the hope of glory. Now, what say you, brethren? Suppose this foundation-work were all removed, what could you do? Do? Why, the brightest of you would become as smoking flax without light; you who are pure as crystal now in your daily life, would become like a polluted stream; you who now are the delight and joy of the church of God, would be as reprobate silver cast out, or as salt that has lost its savour, and is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill.

We must ever keep in mind that we are only channels for grace, we are not even pools and reservoirs, we must have a continual supply of Divine gifts. We must have an abiding union with the fountain of all good, or we should soon run dry, and only as fresh streams flow into us are we kept from becoming mere dry beds of sand and mire, but we *know* that He will never fail us. This spring is high up in heaven near the eternal throne, and it ripples down through the means of grace from the God of all grace, and we receive daily of His fulness, grace for grace. Joyful truth for us, that because He lives we must live also. Till Jesus bows His head in death, we, the living members of His mystic body, can never droop or fail. His might is our strength, His resources our never-failing supply. And we, through His Spirit, are daily tended and sustained.

"Oh! to grace, how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be!"

Were that grace once gone what should I do? Hold fast, then, to that which ye have received, that no man take your crown. Cling to the doctrine of the work of the Spirit with a death-grip! Never give it up. Having begun in the Spirit, do not seek to be made perfect in the flesh. Do not look to excitement; do not let your faith stand in the wisdom of the speech of man, but in the power of God, and in the invincible might and majesty of the Holy Ghost; for if you go anywhere else, the foundation will be removed, and then what can you do? O God! Thou hast begun the good work, and Thou wilt carry it on, and perfect it unto the day of Christ. This foundation shall not be removed.

Once more, there is also *a foundation-hope*. Something which we may, I think, call a foundation, since our joy and our peace very much depend upon it. You and I possess to-night, dear friends, a hope which is sometimes called "a blessed hope," and at another time "a good hope." It is a hope partly that Christ may come, a hope that when He cometh, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." It is a hope that whether He cometh in our

life-time or not, yet, if we fall asleep, we shall sleep in Jesus. We have a hope that sometimes bursts out into a song, and then we tune it in warbling such as this :—

" On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie."

Or sometimes it is—

" Jerusalem ! my happy home !
Name ever dear to me ;
When shall my labours have an end,
In joy, and peace, and thee ? "

Or, perhaps it is—

" Jerusalem the golden,
With milk and honey blest ;
Beneath thy contemplation
Sink heart and soul oppress ;
We know not, oh ! we know not,
What joys await us there ;
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare."

At any rate, whatever notes we may use to warble out the hope, the hope is still the same.

" It is the hope, the blissful hope,
Which Jesu's grace has given ;
The hope when days and years are past,
We all shall meet in heaven."

Now, if that were removed, what could we do ?

" What is there here that I should wait ?
My hope's alone in Thee ;
When wilt Thou open glory's gate,
And take me up to Thee ? "

" Whom have I in heaven but Thee ? there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee." Take heaven away, and the world to come, and what a desert drear, what blackness and darkness, what a gulf of mad despair it would speedily become ! But, oh ! brethren, that foundation cannot be removed ! Because He lives, we shall live also. " Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory. That hope abideth sure and stedfast ; let us think of it more than we do. Let us plume our wings of flight every now and then. Come, ye birds of heaven, ye eaglets of God ; how is it that ye keep below upon the earth, as though ye had no wings ? Come, plume your callow pinions and begin to fly. The clouds are your atmosphere ; beyond there is the blue empyrean, where all is fair and clear. Up with you ! Up, nearer to God, nearer to eternity, nearer to your home, nearer to your everlasting mansion. Remember, that you

" Nightly pitch your moving tent
A day's march nearer home,"

and let the thought that you shall soon be

" For ever with the Lord "

come over your hearts, and sweep like the touch of some master-harper's hand, as he sweeps the ten-stringed instrument, and wakes it up to thunders of sacred melody. Be glad in the Lord, ye righteous, and shout for joy, ye upright in heart ; for this foundation cannot be removed, and ye need not fear.

II. And now we change our note for a few minutes. Let us TAKE THIS " IF " AS BEING SOMETHING MORE THAN AN " IF."

The foundations may be removed, not the spiritual foundations at all, but the temporal foundations. The foundations of civil government, the foundations of commerce, the foundations of one's estates, the foundations of trust between man and man, these may be removed ; they have been grievously and terribly shaken during the last few days. War may arise. There seem to be many indications of a coming tempest, and when the eagles are gathered together to the prey, the fight will probably thicken, and instead of a few combatants, it may be that there will be a multitude of nations engaged in a terrible slaughter, and the foundations of the various kingdoms of Europe may be removed. Revolution too may come. We remember 1848, and some of you, perhaps, are old enough to go farther back than that, to dates when revolutions were the order of the day. There are some who are always putting on their blue spectacles, and who can see very wonderful revolutions here. May their heads never ache before their predictions come to pass, but still these things may occur, for men are men, and if they should, what then ? If the foundations should be removed, what would the righteous do ? A panic has come, and man does not trust his fellow man, but plays the fool, the wild lunatic in the street, destroying commerce for the sake of commerce, and to get gain himself destroying the tree that bears the fruit. I suppose no greater proof of folly could have been known in the nineteenth century than might have been seen last Friday in Lombard Street. If any one had whistled for a thousand fools, he need not have travelled a thousand yards, but might have found them on the spot. Now, if there should be such a thing, there may be ground for all this fear, for the foundations of human things are not made by God ; they are only man's management, and consequently they may be shaken, but what then ? I am going to suppose the very worst ; that the social fabric is rocking like the walls of old Jericho, and that the very foundations are falling ; I will even suppose that the corner-stone is being removed. What then ? What can the righteous do ?

Well, he can do as well as another man, and he can do a great deal better. Let me tell you what he can do. The first thing he can do, if the worst comes to the worst, is that *he can bear it with a holy equanimity.* He can say, " The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." If the ship be wrecked his treasure is not aboard it. He knows that if the bank should break he will only part with some of his odd spending-money, but his true treasure is up there ; not in an iron chest, where the burglar can break through, but

" Hid with Christ in God
Beyond the reach of harm " ;

so that if the worst comes, he can still fold his arms and say, " It is written, ' I will never leave and never forsake thee ' ; and so long as I have bread to eat and raiment to put on, so long will I bless the name of the Lord Most High from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same." Now, dear friends, do you prove this if it should happen to you. Do not do as the worldling does, who puts his hand to his fevered brow and says, " I am a ruined man ! " you cannot be a ruined man. Do not say, " I have lost

my all!" you cannot lose your all; your all is Christ, and Christ is not to be lost. Just accept the blow; kiss the rod; touch the hand that smites, and say, "Blessed be Thou, my Father, for it is the Lord."

Then the Christian not only bears the worst patiently; but the next thing he can do is *to hope for the best cheerfully*. I think if there is any man who can see clearest even a spot of blue sky it should be the Christian! "Oh!" saith he, "things are not what they seem; the dark cloud hath a silver lining; light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." It is very much in the struggle of life to keep a brave heart; and you, Christian, have many arguments for so doing. Wherefore bow thy head at yonder crested billow, as though thou shouldest be drowned by it? O man, it will only wash thy face; it is all that it will do for thee, and thou shalt lift thy brow when the spray has cleared it towards heaven, and shalt see thy God the better because the dirt is washed out of thine eyes. Therefore, look cheerfully for something bright in the midst of the darkness. Out of all this apparent loss, God can bring for you true gain in spiritual things. You may part with things temporal with equanimity, if they are likely to be restored to you transmuted by God's alchemy into things spiritual and eternal. If God takes away from His people, He can restore again, as in the case of Job, twice as much as they had before, in worldly goods even, and with these a gracious work of His Spirit in the heart, which is more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold. Adam was laid asleep, and God took a rib, and made it into a help-meet for him. If God shall take anything from you, yea, though it lies near your heart, do not mourn as one that has no hope; in patience possess your soul, rest on the Lord, for He will bring it to pass that out of all this shall come a spiritual life-power, which in after days shall gladden your heart, and make you the joyful parent of much good to others in this world of sin and woe. Christ became poor that He might make many rich, and in His poverty He was as a sheep before its shearers dumb, and opened not His mouth. His prayer was, "Not My will, O Father, but Thine be done"; so may we hold our peace, if God hath done it; never charge God foolishly, but say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do? Why, they can do one thing, *they can do the right*. They cannot guarantee results, but they can do the right. They cannot tell whether they shall fail in business or not, but they can be upright. They cannot tell whether the fall of this house or the crash of that bank may injure them, but they can tell that they will have clean hands, and come out of it all with a spotless character; and when everything is lost there is but little lost if honour still remains, and if integrity is still preserved by divine grace. He that wears the herb hearts-ease in his bosom is richer than he that can wear diamonds upon his fingers, if those fingers be stained with guilt. It is comparatively easy to be correct and upright when these things pay, when we can by them secure the esteem of our fellow men, and that confidence which is as good as money to a man in business, because of the credit it brings with it. But it is quite another thing to do the right when it means to strip oneself of all, and to give up long-loved and cherished possessions, hopes, and prospects, both for ourselves and family. This is the hour of temptation, when Satan comes with his glory and wealth in one hand and a suggestion of evil in the other, and bids us open our lap to receive them, reminding us that to deny him is to close with injury and loss to reputation, to our business, and to our loved families at home. How many have made the dread compact with the Prince of Darkness! They have gained the world but lost their soul. They have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, and bartered heaven for hell; time has been taken and eternity rejected. The honour of men has been esteemed more than the praise of God; they have grasped the gold and it has been a mill-stone round their neck, and into the deepest depths of woe it has dragged them, lost! lost! lost for ever! Oh, that men were wise, that they would remember this, that they would consider their latter end; for what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Come what may, trust in God and do the right.

There is another thing we can do if the foundations be removed, namely, *if we have a hand to spare we will help a comrade up*. If the foundations be removed and there is a common calamity, when others are selfish the Christian man will hear his Saviour's words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "Well," saith he, "it is a time of general suffering, and when a boat is at sea with a few survivors from a wreck, no man hoards his biscuit, no man keeps that little drop of pure fresh water wholly to himself, but like a generous man he divides his biscuit with his fellow sufferers, and drinks his drop with the rest." So will the righteous do. When things are bad they will say, "Now is the time for me to exhibit some degree of generosity." I like the action of a man who was once waited upon for a subscription, and contrary to expectation gave the minister who asked him a very large cheque—I think it was one hundred pounds. The minister was about to retire when the merchant happening to open one of his letters found that he had lost a vessel worth from ten thousand pounds to twenty thousand pounds. He called the minister and said, "You must give me back that cheque, I have just opened a letter and found that I have been a very great loser." The poor country minister, whose chapel was in a very bad plight, looked very blank about the matter; but the merchant said, "I find my money is going fast; I suppose I have not made good use of it, and so the Master has taken it away, but I will save some of it anyhow." And he wrote out another cheque for five hundred pounds. Now, this was a right way of acting—provided of course the money was his own, for no man has a right to give away other people's property; but if it were his own this was the true and wise pathway to choose to make some of it safe, a much better plan than when my lord comes fresh from his bank with his money in his hand, and says, "Go and do likewise, my brave fellows; get your money out like this!" and then finds five minutes afterwards that somebody else has his money without giving him a receipt for the deposit, or anything of the kind, for it has gone into the hand of a pickpocket, who is not so much to be blamed, perhaps, in such cases as he might have been in some others. Now, I can recommend you when things are going to the bad, to make good investments. "Give a portion to seven and also to eight, for thou knowest not what evil may be upon the earth." "Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of righteousness,

that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

Once again. There is something more which the righteous man can do, if the foundations are removed, and that is, *he can trust in God that it will be well in the end.* The worldling says, "It will be all the same a hundred years hence." The Christian says "I do not want to look so far ahead as that; it is all right now." But the wind blows! "It is all right." But the waves dash! "It is all right." But all the sails are reefed! "It is all right!" But the ship flies before the wind! "It is all right." But there are rocks ahead! "It is all right." Why? "Because He who is at the helm knows all about it; He created both wind and wave, and He knows how to cope with the storm. I cannot see that it is right, but I know that it is, and I walk by faith, and not by sight." Oh! Christian, this is what you can do. If the foundations be removed, you can bring faith into heavenly exercise, and you can sail against the wind. The night may be dark and dreary but it will usher in the brighter morn, and merrily will the celestial music and songs greet his ears as the fresh dawning light triumphs over the fleeing darkness, and spreads itself till it bathes with its splendour all things which were even in the darkness working together for the good of God's people. Yes, the rough March winds and the dreary April showers were all fulfilling their task then, and now we can see it and rejoice in it as well as in their result. We will sing in our dungeon with Paul and Silas, for all is well *now* as it will be hereafter in heaven. It is only in degree and realisation that earth's joys differ from heaven's to the true believer in Christ.

Lastly, if the foundations be removed, *the righteous can commune with Christ therein.* We should never have such fellowship with Jesus as we do if we had not such troubles as we have. You cannot see the stars in the daytime, but they tell us that if you go down into a well you can. Sometimes God sinks wells of trouble and puts His servants into them and then they see His starry promises. You might hunt in vain for glowworms by day, but they shall all be seen at night, and so shall the comfortable words and thoughts of Holy Scripture. The fire-flies shall flash best at night when the sunlight is gone, and so oftentimes the light of the promises is best seen in the night of trouble than in the day of outward prosperity. The black foils of trouble shall bring out the brighter jewel of divine grace. You cannot know Christ except by following in His footsteps. Poverty will reveal Him who for our sakes became poor; sickness will show Him whose visage was more marred than any man's; shame will teach you His shame, and suffering will reveal to you His suffering; and even death itself, which shall remove the foundations, shall give you conformity to His death that you may have part in His resurrection. Courage, then, my dear brethren, and to the question, "If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do?" give this answer, "We can do as the righteous ought to do; we can do as God enables us to do." Let us go and show the world what that will be, and let the superiority of our faith and of our religion reveal itself in our times of darkness and in our hours of suffering.

I have been thinking all the while I have been talking that this text has an application to those who are not righteous, because if the righteous cannot do anything if the grace of God fail, then what can the wicked do? They can do nothing, but then herein they can do as much as the righteous, who can do nothing either; and so here is comfort for the very worst, and for those who feel themselves to be farthest from God. So long as the foundation stands there is hope for every soul that believeth, and though you be the worst of the worst, yet if you trust Christ there is hope for you; though there would not be any if the foundations were removed, even if you were the best of the best. Come, then, needy sinner; come, though years of sin have heaped up their iniquities upon you. Come to Jesus; He can cleanse you. Trust Him, trust Him; trust Him now, and you are saved, and shall be His in the day of His appearing. Build on this foundation. Christ Jesus died for the ungodly. Trust Him to save you, and when the floods arise, and the rain descends, and the winds blow, your house shall never fall, because it is built upon a rock, a foundation that can never be removed. I would that some here to-night would learn to leave the treacherous path of sin, and seek an interest in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know that the road you tread is undermined, and that sooner or later you will fall through, and sink on, on, on through the grave into the pit which has no bottom, the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. Turn you, turn you, for why will you die? There is a sure foundation which cannot move, on which you may build and never fear an overthrow. Come, then, with all your load of guilt, and rest at once and for ever on Him who says, Come unto Me, and him that cometh I will in nowise cast out. Heaven and earth may pass, but He will save to the uttermost all who come by faith to Him.

God bless these remarks to you according to His will, for Jesu's sake. Amen.

"Yes! He is mine! and nought of earthly things,
Not all the charms of pleasure, wealth, or power,
The fame of heroes, or the pomp of kings,
Could tempt me to forego His love an hour:
'Go, worthless world,' I cry, 'with all that's thine;
Go, I my Saviour's am, and He is mine.'

"Whate'er may change, in Him no change is seen,
A glorious sun that wanes not, nor declines;
Above the clouds and storms He walks unseen,
And sweetly on His people's darkness shines:
All may depart,—I fret not, nor repine,
While I my Saviour's am, and He is mine."

THE BIBLE TRIED AND PROVED

" The words of the Lord are pure words : as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."—Psalm xii. 6.

IN this psalm our text stands in contrast with the evil of the age. The Psalmist complains that the " godly man ceaseth ; the faithful fail from among the children of men." It was a great grief to him, and he found no consolation except in the words of the Lord. What if men fail : the Word of the Lord abides ! What a comfort it is to quit the arena of controversy for the green pastures of revelation ! One feels like Noah, when, shut within the ark, he saw no longer the death and desolation which reigned outside. Live in communion with the Word of God, and, in the absence of Christian friends, you will not lack for company.

Furthermore, the verse stands in fuller contrast still with the words of the ungodly when they rebel against God and oppress His people. They said, " With our tongue will we prevail ; our lips are our own : who is Lord over us ? " They boasted, they domineered, they threatened. The Psalmist turned away from the voice of the boaster to the words of the Lord. He saw the promise, the precept, and the doctrine of pure truth, and these consoled him while others spake every man vanity with his neighbour. He had not so many of the words of the Lord as we have : but what he had made his own by meditation he prized above the finest gold. In the good company of those who had spoken under divine direction, he was able to bear the threats of those who surrounded him. So, dear friends, if at any time your lot is cast where the truths you love so well are despised, get you back to the prophets and apostles, and hear through them what God the Lord will speak. The voices of earth are full of falsehood, but the word from heaven is very pure. There is a good practical lesson in the position of the text ; learn it well. Make the Word of God your daily companion, and then, whatever may grieve you in the false doctrine of the hour, you will not be too much cast down ; for the words of the Lord will sustain your spirit.

Looking at the text, does it not strike you as a marvel of condescension, that Jehovah, the infinite, should use words ? He has arranged for us, in His wisdom, this way of communicating with one another ; but as for Himself, He is pure Spirit and boundless : shall He contract His glorious thoughts into the narrow channel of sound, and ear, and nerve ? Must the eternal mind use human words ? The glorious Jehovah spake worlds. The heavens and the earth were the utterances of His lips. To Him it seems more in accordance with His nature to speak tempests and thunders, than to stoop to the humble vowels and consonants of a creature of the dust. Will He in very deed communicate with man in man's own way ? Yes, He stoops to speak to us by words. We bless the Lord for verbal inspiration, of which we can say, " I have esteemed the words of Thy mouth more than my necessary food." I do not know of any other inspiration, neither am I able to conceive of any which can be of true service to us. We need a plain revelation upon which we can exercise faith. If the Lord had spoken to us by a method in which His meaning was infallible, but His words were questionable, we should have been rather puzzled than edified ; for it is a task indeed to separate the true sense from the doubtful words. We should always be afraid that the prophet or apostle had not, after all, given us the divine sense : it is easy to hear and to repeat words ; but it is not easy to convey the meaning of another into perfectly independent words of your own : the meaning easily evaporates. But we believe that holy men of old, though using their own language, were led by the Spirit of God to use words which were also the words of God. The divine Spirit so operated upon the spirit of the inspired writer, that he wrote the words of the Lord, and we, therefore, treasure up every one of them. To us " every word of God is pure," and withal full of soul nutriment. " Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." We can heartily declare with the Psalmist, " Thou art my portion, O Lord : I have said I would keep Thy words."

Our condescending God is so well pleased to speak to us by words, that He has even deigned to call His only-begotten Son " The Word." " The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The Lord useth words, not with reluctance, but with pleasure ; and He would have us think highly of them, too, as He said to Israel by Moses, " Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul."

We believe that we have the words of God preserved for us in the Scriptures. We are exceedingly grateful that it is so. If we had not the words of the Lord thus recorded we should have felt that we lived in an evil time, since neither voice nor oracle is heard to-day. I say, we should have fallen upon evil days if the words that God spake of old had not been recorded under His superintendence. With this Book before us, what the Lord spake two thousand years ago He virtually speaks now : for " He will not call back His words " (Isaiah xxxi. 2). His word abideth for ever ; for it was spoken, not for one occasion, but for all ages. The Word of the Lord is so instinct with everlasting life and eternal freshness, that it is as vocal and forceful in the heart of the saint to-day as it was to the ear of Abraham when he heard it in Canaan ; or to the mind of Moses in the desert ; or to David when he sang it to his harp. I thank God that many of us know what it is to hear the divine word respoken in our souls ! By the Holy Ghost the words of Scripture come to us with a present inspiration : not only has the Book been inspired, *it is* inspired. This Book is more than paper and ink, it talks with us. Was not that the promise, " When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee " ? We open the Book with this prayer, " Speak, Lord ; for Thy servant heareth " ; and we often close it with this feeling, " Here am I ; for Thou didst call me." As surely as if the promise had never been uttered before, but had been spoken out of the excellent glory for the first time, the Lord has made Holy Scripture to be His direct word to our heart and conscience. I say not this of you all, but I can say it assuredly of many here present. May the Holy Spirit at this hour speak to you yet again !

In trying to handle my text, there will be three points to dwell upon. First, *the quality of the words of God*—" The words of the Lord are pure words " ;

secondly, *the trials of the words of God*—"As silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times"; and then, thirdly, *the claims of these words* derived from their purity and the trials which they have undergone. Eternal Spirit, help me to speak aright concerning Thine own Word, and help us to feel aright while we hear!

I. First, then, beloved friends, consider THE QUALITY OF THE WORDS OF GOD: "The words of the Lord are pure words."

From this statement I gather, first, *the uniformity of their character.* No exception is made to any of the words of God, but they are all described as "pure words." They are not all of the same character; some are for teaching, others are for comfort, and others for rebuke; but they are so far of a uniform character that they are all "pure words." I conceive it to be an evil habit to make preferences in Holy Scripture. We must preserve this volume as a whole. Those sin against Scripture who delight in doctrinal texts, but omit the consideration of practical passages. If we preach doctrine, they cry, "How sweet!" They will hear of eternal love, free grace, and the divine purpose; and I am glad they will. To such I say—Eat the fat, and drink the sweet; and rejoice that there are fat things full of marrow in this Book. But remember that men of God in old time took great delight in the commands of the Lord. They had respect unto Jehovah's precepts, and they loved His law. If any turn on their heel, and refuse to hear of duties and ordinances, I fear that they do not love God's Word at all. He that does not love it all, loves it not at all. On the other hand, they are equally mistaken who delight in the preaching of duties, but care not for the doctrines of grace. They say, "That sermon was worth hearing, for it has to do with daily life." I am very glad that they are of this mind; but if, at the same time, they refuse other teaching of the Lord, they are greatly faulty. Jesus said, "He that is of God heareth God's words." I fear you are not of God if you account a portion of the Lord's words to be unworthy of your consideration.

Beloved, we prize the whole range of the words of the Lord. We do not set aside the histories any more than the promises.

> "I'll read the histories of Thy love,
> And keep Thy laws in sight,
> While through the promises I rove
> With ever fresh delight."

Above all, do not drop into the semi-blasphemy of some, who think the New Testament vastly superior to the Old. I would not err by saying that in the Old Testament you have more of the bullion of truth than in the New, for therein I should be falling into the evil which I condemn; but this I will say, that they are of equal authority, and that they cast such light upon each other that we could not spare either of them. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." In the whole Book, from Genesis to Revelation, the words of Jehovah are found, and they are always pure words.

Neither is it right for any to say, "Thus spake Christ Himself; but such-and-such a teaching is Pauline." Nay, it is not Pauline; if it be here recorded, it is of the Holy Ghost. Whether the Holy Ghost speaketh by Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or John, or James, or Paul, the authority is still the same. Even concerning Jesus Christ our Lord this is true; for He says of Himself, "The word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me." In this matter He puts Himself upon the level of others who were as the mouth of God. He says again, "For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." We accept the words of the apostles as the words of the Lord, remembering what John said—"We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John iv. 6). A solemn judgment is thus pronounced upon those who would set the Spirit of Jesus against the Spirit which dwelt in the apostles. The words of the Lord are not affected in their value by the medium through which they came. Revealed truth is all of the same quality even when the portions of it are not of the same weight of metal.

Abiding by the text, we observe, next, *the purity of the words of the Lord:* "The words of the Lord are pure words." In commerce there is silver, and silver, as you all know: silver with alloy, and silver free from baser metal. The Word of God is the silver without the dross; it is as silver which has been purified seven times in a crucible of earth in the furnace, till every worthless particle has been removed: it is absolutely pure. David said truly, "Thy word is truth."

It is truth in the form of goodness, *without admixture of evil.* The commandments of the Lord are just and right. We have occasionally heard opponents carp at certain coarse expressions used in our translation of the Old Testament; but the coarseness of translators is not to be set to the account of the Holy Spirit, but to the fact that the force of the English language has changed, and modes of expression which were current at one period become too gross for another Yet, this I will assert, that I have never yet met with a single person to whom the words of God have of themselves suggested any evil thing. I have heard a great many horrible things said, but I have never met with a case in which any man has been led into sin by a passage of Scripture. Perversions are possible and probable; but the Book itself is pre-eminently pure. Details are given of very gross acts of criminality, but they leave no injurious impress upon the mind. The saddest story of Holy Scripture is a beacon, and never a lure. This is the cleanest, clearest, purest Book extant among men; nay, it is not to be mentioned in the same hour with the fabulous records which pass for holy books. It comes from God, and every word is pure.

It is also a book pure in the sense of truth, being *without admixture of error.* I do not hesitate to say that I believe that there is no mistake whatever in the original Holy Scriptures from beginning to end. There may be, and there are, mistakes of translation; for translators are not inspired; but even the historical facts are correct. Doubt has been cast upon them here and there, and at times with great show of reason—doubt which it has been impossible to meet for a season; but only give space enough, and search enough, and the stones buried in the earth cry out to confirm each letter of Scripture. Old manuscripts, coins, and inscriptions are on the side of the Book, and against it there are nothing but theories, and the fact that many an event in history has no other record but that which the Book affords us. The Book has been of late in the furnace of criticism; but much of that furnace has grown cold

from the fact that the criticism is beneath contempt. "The words of the Lord are pure words": there is not an error of any sort in the whole compass of them. These words come from Him who can make no mistake, and who can have no wish to deceive His creatures. If I did not believe in the infallibility of the Book, I would rather be without it. If I am to judge the Book, it is no judge of me. If I am to sift it, like the heap on the threshing-floor, and lay *this* aside and only accept *that*, according to my own judgment, then I have no guidance whatever, unless I have conceit enough to trust to my own heart. The new theory denies infallibility to the words of God, but practically imputes it to the judgments of men; at least, this is all the infallibility which they can get at. I protest that I will rather risk my soul with a guide inspired from heaven, than with the differing leaders who arise from the earth at the call of "modern thought."

Again, this Book is pure in the sense of reliableness: it has in its promises *no admixture of failure*. Mark this. No prediction of Scripture has failed. No promise that God has given will turn out to be mere verbiage. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it?" Take the promise as the Lord gave it, and you will find Him faithful to every jot and tittle of it. Some of us are not yet entitled to be called "old and grey-headed," though the iron-grey is pretty conspicuous upon our heads; but hitherto we have believed the promises of God, and tested and tried them; and what is our verdict? I bear my solemn testimony that I have not found one word of the Lord fall to the ground. The fulfilment of a promise has been delayed sometimes beyond the period which my impatience would have desired; but to the right instant the promise has been kept, not to the ear only, but in deed and in truth. You may lean your whole weight upon any one of the words of God, and they will bear you up. In your darkest hour you may have no candle but a single promise, and yet that lone light shall make high noon of your midnight. Glory be to His name, the words of the Lord are without evil, without error, and without failure.

Furthermore, on this first head, the text not only speaks of the uniform character of God's words, and of their purity, but of *their preciousness*. David compares them to refined silver, and silver is a precious metal: in other places he has likened these words to pure gold. The words of the Lord might have seemed comparable to paper-money, such as our own bank-notes; but no, they are the metal itself. I recollect the time when a friend of ours used to go into the western counties, from one farm to another, buying cheese, and he was in the habit of taking quite a weight of coin with him, for he found that the farmers of that period did not care for bank-notes, and would not look at cheques; but they were more ready to sell when they saw that they would be paid in metal, down on the nail. In the words of God you have the solid money of truth: it is not fiction, but the substance of truth. God's words are as bullion. When you have them in the grip of faith, you have the substance of things hoped for. Faith finds in the promise of God the reality of what she looks for: the promise of God is as good as the performance itself. God's words, whether of doctrine, of practice, of comfort, are of solid metal to the man of God who knows how to put them in the purse of personal faith. As we use silver in many articles within our houses, so do we use God's Word in daily life; it has a thousand uses. As silver is current coin of the merchant, so are the promises of God a currency both for heaven and earth: we deal with God by His promises, and so He deals with us. As men and women deck themselves with silver by way of ornament, so are the words of the Lord our jewels and our glory. The promises are things of beauty which are a joy for ever. When we love the Word of God, and keep it, the beauty of holiness is upon us. This is the true ornament of character and life, and we receive it as a love-gift from the Bridegroom of our souls.

Beloved, I need not enlarge in your presence upon the preciousness of the Word of God. You have, many of you, prized it long, and have proved its value. I have read of a German Christian woman who was accustomed to mark her Bible whenever she met with a passage which was specially precious to her; but towards the end of her life she ceased from the habit, for she said, "I find it unnecessary: for the whole of the Scripture has now become most precious to me." To some of us the priceless volume is marked from beginning to end by our experience. It is all precious, and altogether precious.

> "No treasures so enrich the mind,
> Nor shall Thy word be sold
> For loads of silver well refined,
> Nor heaps of choicest gold."

Furthermore, this text sets before us, not only the purity and preciousness of the Lord's words, but *the permanence* of them. They are as silver which has passed through the hottest fires. Truly, the Word of God has, for ages, stood the fire—and fire applied in its fiercest form: "tried in a furnace of earth"—that is to say, in that furnace which refiners regard as their last resort. If the devil could have destroyed the Bible, he would have brought up the hottest coals from the centre of hell. He has not been able to destroy one single line. Fire, according to the text, was applied in a skilful way: silver is placed in a crucible of earth, that the fire may get at it thoroughly. The refiner is quite sure to employ his heat in the best manner known to him, so as to melt away the dross; so have men with diabolical skill endeavoured, by the most clever criticism, to destroy the words of God. Their object is not purification; it is the purity of Scripture which annoys them, they aim at consuming the divine testimony. Their labour is vain; for the sacred Book remains still what it always was, the pure words of the Lord; but some of our misconceptions of its meaning have happily perished in the fires. The words of the Lord have been tried frequently, aye, they have been tried perfectly—"purified *seven* times." What more remains I cannot guess, but assuredly the processes have already been many and severe. It abides unchanged. The comfort of our fathers is our comfort. The words which cheered our youth are our support in age. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." These words of God are a firm foundation, and our eternal hopes are wisely built thereon. We cannot permit any one to deprive us of this basis of hope. In the olden time men were burned rather than cease to read their Bibles; we endure less brutal oppositions, but they are far more subtle, and difficult to resist. Still let us always abide by the everlasting words, for they will always abide by us.

Unchanged, unchangeable are the words of the

Ever Blessed. They are as silver without dross, which will continue from age to age. This we do believe, and in this we do rejoice. Nor is it a tax upon our faith to believe in the permanence of Holy Scripture, for these words were spoken by Him who is Omniscient, and knows everything; therefore there can be in them no mistake. They were spoken by Him who is Omnipotent, and can do everything; and therefore His words will be carried out. Spoken by Him who is immutable, these words will never alter. The words which God spake thousands of years ago are true at this hour, for they come from Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He that spake these words is infallible, and therefore they are infallible. When did He ever err? Could He err, and yet be God? "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Rest you sure of this—"The words of the Lord are pure words.'

But time hastens me on to the next point.

II. Secondly, and carefully, let us consider THE TRIALS OF THE WORDS OF GOD. They are said to be as silver, which has been tried in a furnace. The words of God have been tested by blasphemy, by ridicule, by persecution, by criticism, and by candid observation. I shall not attempt an oratorical flight while describing the historical tests of the precious metal of divine revelation, but I shall mention trials of a commonplace order which have come under my own notice, and probably under yours also. This may be more homely, but it will be more edifying. The Lord help us!

In dealing with *the sinner's obstinacy*, we have tested the words of the Lord. There are men who cannot be convinced or persuaded; they doubt everything, and with closed teeth they resolve not to believe, though a man declare it unto them. They are encased in the armour of prejudice, and they cannot be wounded with the sharpest arrows of argument, though they profess great openness to conviction. What is to be done with the numerous clan who are related to Mr. Obstinate? You might as well argue with an express-train as with Mr. Obstinate: he runs on, and will not stop, though a thousand should stand in his way. Will the words of God convince him? There are some in this place to-day of whom I should have said, if I had known them before their conversion, that it was a vain task to preach the gospel to them; they so much loved sin, and so utterly despised the things of God. Strangely enough, they were among the first to receive the Word of God when they came under the sound of it. It came to them in its native majesty, in the power of the Holy Ghost; it spoke with a commanding tone to their inmost heart; it threw open the doors that had long been shut up and rusted on their hinges, and Jesus entered to save and reign. These, who had defiantly brandished their weapons, threw them down and surrendered unconditionally to almighty love, willing believers in the Lord Jesus. Brethren, we have only to have faith in God's Word, and speak it out straight, and we shall see proud rebels yielding. No mind is so desperately set on mischief, so resolutely opposed to Christ, that it cannot be made to bow before the power of the words of God. Oh, that we used more the naked sword of the Spirit! I am afraid we keep this two-edged sword in a scabbard, and somewhat pride ourselves that the sheath is so elaborately adorned. What is the use of the sheath? The sword must be made bare, and we must fight with it, without attempting to garnish it. Tell forth the words of God. Omit neither the terrors of Sinai, nor the love-notes of Calvary. Proclaim the word with all fidelity, as you know it, and cry for the power of the Highest, and the most obstinate sinner out of hell can be laid low by its means. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God: this is His one battering-ram with which He casts down the strongholds of sin and self in those human hearts with which He effectually deals. The Word of God will bear the tests furnished by the hardness of the natural heart, and it will by its operations prove its divine origin.

Here begins another trial. When you have a man fairly broken down, he has but come part of the way. A new difficulty arises. Will the words of the Lord overcome *the penitent's despair?* The man is full of terror on account of sin, and hell has begun to burn within his bosom. You may talk to him lovingly, but his soul refuses to be comforted. Until you bring the words of the Lord to bear upon him "his soul abhorreth all manner of meat." Tell him of a dying Saviour; dwell on free grace and full pardon; speak of the reception of the prodigal son, and of the Father's changeless love. Attended by the power of the Spirit, these truths must bring light to those who sit in darkness. The worst forms of depression are cured when Holy Scripture is believed. Often have I been baffled, when labouring with a soul convinced of sin, and unable to see Jesus; but I have never had a doubt that in the end the words of the Lord would become a cup of consolation to the fainting heart. We may be baffled for a season, but with the words of the Lord as our weapons, Giant Despair will not defeat us. O ye that are in bondage under fear of punishment, you shall come forth to liberty yet; your chains shall be broken, if you will accept the words of God. My Master's word is a great opener of prison doors: He has broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron asunder.

That must be a wonderful word, which, like a battle-axe, smashes in the helmet of presumption, and at the same time, like the finger of love, touches the tender wound of the bleeding, and heals it in an instant. The words of the Lord, for breaking down or lifting up, are equally effectual.

In certain instances, the words of God are tried *by the seeker's singularity.* How frequently have persons told us that they were sure there was nobody like themselves in all the world! They were men up in a corner; strange fish, the like of which no sea could yield. Now, if these words be indeed of God, they will be able to touch every case—but not else. The words of God have been put to that test, and we are amazed at their universal adaptation. There is a text to meet every remarkable and out-of-the-way case. In certain instances, we have heard of an odd text, concerning which we could not before see why it was written; yet it has evidently a special fitness for a particular person, to whom it has come with divine authority. The Bible may be compared to the whitesmith's bunch of keys. You handle them one by one, and say of one—"That is a strange key, surely it will fit no lock that ever was made!" But one of these days the smith is sent for to open a very peculiar lock. None of his keys touch it. At last he selects that singular specimen. See! it enters, shoots back the bolt, and gives access to the treasure. The words of this book are proved to be the words of God, because they have an infinite adaptation to the

varied minds which the Lord has made. What a gathering of locks we have here this morning! I could not describe you all: Bramah and Chubb, and all the rest of them, could not have devised such a variety: yet I am sure that in this inspired volume, there is a key in every way suited to each lock. Personally, when I have been in trouble, I have read the Bible until a text has seemed to stand out of the Book, and salute me, saying, "I was written specially for you." It has looked to me as if the story must have been in the mind of the writer when he penned that passage; *and so it was* in the mind of that divine Author who is at the back of all these inspired pages. Thus have the words of the Lord stood the test of adaptation to the singularities of individual men.

We frequently meet with people of God who have tested the words of God *in time of sore trouble.* I make here an appeal to the experience of the people of God. You have lost a dear child. Was there not a word of the Lord to cheer you? You lost your property: was there a passage in the Scriptures to meet the disaster? You have been slandered: was there not a word to console you? You were very sick, and withal depressed; had not the Lord provided a comfort for you in that case? I will not multiply questions: the fact is that you never were high, but the Word of the Lord was up with you; and you never were low, but what the Scripture was down with you. No child of God was ever in any ditch, pit, cave, or abyss, but the words of God found him out. How often do the gracious promises lie in ambush to surprise us with their loving-kindness! I adore the infinity of God's goodness, as I see it mirrored in the glass of Scripture.

Again, the Word of God is tried and proved as *a guide in perplexity.* Have we not been forced, at times, to come to a pause and say, "I do not know what to think about *this.* What is the proper course?" This book is an oracle to the simple-hearted man in mental, moral, and spiritual perplexity. Oh, that we used it more! Rest assured that you never will be in a labyrinth so complicated that this book, blessed of the Spirit, will not help you through. This is the compass for all mariners upon the sea of life: by its use you will know where lies the pole. Abide by the words of the Lord, and your way will be clear.

Beloved, the words of God endure another test; they are *our preservatives in times of temptation.* You can write a book that may help a man when he is tempted in a certain direction; will the same volume strengthen him when he is attracted in the opposite direction? Can you conceive a book which shall be a complete ring-fence, encircling a man in all directions? keeping him from the abyss yonder, and from the gulf on the other side? Yet such is this Book. The devil himself cannot invent a temptation which is not met in these pages; and all the devils in hell together, if they were to hold parliament, and to call in the aid of all bad men, could not invent a device which is not met by this matchless library of truth. It reaches the believer in every condition and position, and preserves him from all evil. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word."

Lastly, on this point, here is a grand test of the Book: *it helps men to die.* Believe me, it is no child's play to die! You and I will find ourselves in that solemn article or ever we are aware, and then we shall need strong consolation. Nothing upon earth ever gives me so much establishment in the faith as to visit members of this church when they are about to die. It is very sad to see them wasting away, or racked with pain; but, nevertheless, the chief effect produced upon the visitor is gladsome rather than gloomy. I have this week seen a sister well known to many of you, who has a cancer in her face, and may, in all probability, soon be with her Lord. It is a dread affliction, and one knows not what it may yet involve; but the gracious patient knows neither murmurs nor fears. No one in this place, though in the flush of health, could be more calm, more restful, than our sister is. She spoke to me with full confidence that living or dying she is the Lord's, and she had bright anticipations of being for ever with the Lord. The little she could say with her voice was supplemented by a great deal which she expressed with her eyes, and with her whole demeanour. Here was no excitement, no fanaticism, no action of drugs upon the brain; but a sweetly reasonable, quiet, and assured hope of eternal joy. Brethren, it is not hard to pass out of this world when we are resting on that old and sure gospel which I have preached to you these many years. Personally, I can both live and die on the eternal truths which I have proclaimed to you; and this assurance makes me bold in preaching. Not long ago I sat by a brother who was near his end. I said to him, "You have no fear of death?" He replied cheerfully, "I should be ashamed of myself if I had, after all that I have learned of the glorious gospel from your lips these many years. It is a joy to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." Now, if this inspired volume, with its wonderful record of the words of God, helps us in the trials of life, directs us in our daily paths, and enables us to weather the last great storm, surely it is precious beyond description, "as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times."

III. Now, thirdly, what are THE CLAIMS OF THESE WORDS OF THE LORD?

The claims of these words are many. First, *they deserve to be studied.* Beloved, may I urge upon you the constant searching of inspired Scripture? Here is the last new novel! What shall I do with it? Cast it on the ground. Here is another piece of fiction which has been greatly popular! What shall I do with it? Throw it on one side, or thrust it between the bars of the grate. This sacred volume is the freshest of novels. It would be, to some of you, an entirely new book. We have a society for providing the Bible for readers, but we greatly need readers for the Bible. I grieve that even to some who bear the Christian name, Holy Scripture is the least read book in their library. One said of a preacher, the other day, "How does he keep up the congregation? Does he always give the people something new?" "Yes," said the other, "he gives them the gospel; and in these days, *that* is the newest thing out." It is truly so; the old, old gospel is always new. The modern doctrine is only new in name; it is, after all, nothing but a hash of stale heresies and mouldy speculations. If God has spoken, listen! If the Lord has recorded His words in a Book, search its pages with a believing heart. If you do not accept it as God's inspired word, I cannot invite you to pay any particular attention to it; but if you regard it as the Book of God, I charge you, as I shall meet you at the judgment-seat of Christ, study the Bible daily.

Treat not the Eternal God with disrespect, but delight in His Word.

Do you read it? Then *believe it.* Oh, for an intense belief of every word that God has spoken! Do not hold it as a dead creed, but let it hold you as with an almighty hand. Have no controversy with any one of the Lord's words. Believe without a doubt. The brother of the famous Unitarian, Dr. Priestly, was permitted to preach for his brother, in his chapel in Birmingham; but he was charged to take no controversial subject. He was obedient to the letter of his instructions, but very rebellious against their spirit, seeing he took for his text, "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." Assuredly there is no controversy among spiritual men upon the glorious truth of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. So, also, all the words of the Lord are out of the region of debate: they are to us absolute certainties. Until a doctrine becomes an absolute certainty to a man, he will never know its sweetness: truth has little influence upon the soul till it is fully believed.

Next, *obey the Book.* Do it freely, do it heartily, do it constantly. Err not from the commandment of God. May the Lord make you perfect in every good work, to do His will! "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." You that are unconverted, may you obey that gospel word: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Repentance and faith are at once the commands and the gifts of God; neglect them not.

Furthermore, these words of God are *to be preserved.* Give up no line of God's revelation. You may not know the particular importance of the text assailed, but it is not for you to assess the proportionate value of God's words: if the Lord has spoken, be prepared to die for what He has said. I have often wondered whether, according to the notions of some people, there is any truth for which it would be worth while for a man to go to the stake. I should say not; for we are not sure of anything, according to the modern notion. Would it be worth while dying for a doctrine which may not be true next week? Fresh discoveries may show that we have been the victims of an antiquated opinion: had we not better wait and see what will turn up? It will be a pity to be burned too soon, or to lie in prison for a dogma which will, in a few years, be superseded. Brethren, we cannot endure this shifty theology. May God send us a race of men who have backbones! Men who believe something, and would die for what they believe. This Book deserves the sacrifice of our all for the maintenance of every line of it.

Believing and defending the Word of God, *let us proclaim it.* Go out this afternoon, on this first Sunday of summer, and speak in the street the words of this life. Go to a cottage-meeting, or to a workhouse, or to a lodging-house, and declare the divine words. "Truth is mighty, and will prevail," they say: it will not prevail if it be not made known. The Bible itself works no wonders until its truths are published abroad. Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigneth from the tree. Tell it out among the multitude that the Son of God has come to save the lost, and that whosoever believeth in Him shall have eternal life. Make all men know that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This thing was not done in a corner: keep it not a secret. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; and may God bless you! Amen.

HOWLING CHANGED TO SINGING

"How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? . . . I will sing unto the Lord, because He hath dealt bountifully with me."—Psalm xiii. 1, 2 and 6.

THIS is a very short Psalm, there are only six verses in it; but what a change there is between the beginning and the end of it! The first two verses are dolorous to the deepest degree; but the last verse is joyful to the highest degree. David begins many of his Psalms sighing, and ends them singing, so that I do not wonder that Peter Moulin says, "One would think that those Psalms had been composed by two men of a contrary humour." If I were asked, "Are there two men here, or is there only one?" my answer would be, that there is only one, but that one is two, for every man is two men, especially every spiritual man. He will find within himself an old man and a new man, an old nature and a new nature; and even the new nature itself is subject to strange changes, so that, like April weather, we have sunshine and showers blended. Sometimes it seems as if all the showers were poured on the top of the sunshine, and the sunshine itself were quenched, and could scarcely gladden us.

David was a wonderful man for changes of experience. God permitted him to go through many experiences, not so much for himself, as for the good of succeeding generations. Whenever you look into David's Psalms, you may somewhere or other see yourselves. You never get into a corner but you find David in that corner. I think that I was never so low that I could not find that David was lower; and I never climbed so high that I could not find that David was up above me, ready to sing his song upon his stringed instrument, even as I could sing mine. These are two instantaneous photographs; the first one gives us the man complaining, the second one gives us the man rejoicing. I wonder whether we shall get two such photographs to-night, some sitting here complaining, who, before the service is over, will go their way rejoicing. God grant that it may be so!

Possibly somebody here says, "I do not understand what you mean by each man being two men." Well, let me say a little more on that point. Every

man is a mystery. He is a mystery to other people; but, if he ever thinks, he is a great mystery to himself; and, if he never does think, why then I think that he is a mystery indeed, that he should have such a wondrous faculty as the power of thought, and yet should let it lie idle! He who does not study himself, may think that he understands himself, but it is the judgment of folly. He who has been accustomed to make a friend of himself, and has had himself for his companion, and talked to himself, and cross-examined himself, is the man who will say, "I am puzzled; I cannot make myself out; I am often at my wits' end. I am such a strange mixture, and so dreadfully changeable."

You must know yourself, dear friend, in some measure, or else I am afraid that you will never know the Lord Jesus Christ; and if you do not know Him, then you do not know what life eternal means, for to know Him is life eternal. But why is it needful for us to know ourselves, that we may know Christ? You must have some knowledge of the disease that you may know what the Physician can do; and there is also this truth to be remembered, the Lord Jesus Christ is the model Man, and only by knowing something about men do we know much about Him. Is it not strange that the Psalms are often so written that you do not know whether David is writing about himself or about the Lord Jesus? One verse can only be applied to Christ, and you are certain that David is writing of the Messiah; but the next verse you can hardly apply to Christ, for there are some terms in it which would be derogatory to the Lord Jesus Christ, so it must refer to David. The fact is, that there is a wonderful union between David and David's Lord, there is a marvellous union between the saint and his Saviour, between the believer and Him in whom he believes; and you cannot tell always where one begins and the other ends. So, if you have no knowledge of man, it is to be feared that you have no knowledge of that Son of man, the Man of men, the Saviour of men, the first-born amongst many brethren, to whose likeness we are yet to be fully conformed. I invite anybody here, who has not yet known the Saviour, to pray to God to make him know himself. It may be that the discovery of what you are will necessitate your discovering what Christ is. A true estimate of your own poverty may compel you to resort to Him for wealth. A true sight of your own disease may force you to apply to Him for His all-healing medicine. Certainly it is to be urged upon you by the highest of motives that you do not, with all your understanding, forget to understand yourself; and that, while you have many books on your shelf, you do not read them so as to forget this book which lies within, this wonderful book which concerns you more than all the writings of men, the book of your own nature, your own wants, your own desires, your own changes. God make you familiar with them, and then make you also familiar with the book of grace which is written in the life of the Son of man!

Now, with that as a preface, I invite you to the study of our text.

First, you will see, in the first two verses, *a man complaining.* Go three verses farther on, and you will get to *a man singing,* about whom we will talk in the second place. And then we shall close our discourse to-night by asking, What are *the connecting links between the man complaining and the man singing?* How did this complaining man get up to concert pitch, and begin to sing before he had gone more than a little way further on the road?

I. First, then, here is A MAN COMPLAINING.

Pardon me if I say that here is a man *howling.* Let me read the first two verses again: "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" Said I not truly, when I called it howling? There is so much of complaining here, so much of questioning—"How long? How long? How long? How long?" four times over, that we may call it, as David did once call his prayer, "the voice of my roaring." It is a kind of howling, roaring, moaning complaint before God, in the bitterness of his soul. Let us take these four "How longs?" and speak of them.

Here is, first, *the poor man's grief, as it seems to him:* "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?" Think for a minute. Can God forget? Can Omnipotence forget? Can unchanging love forget? Can infinite faithfulness forget? Yet so it seems to David. So it has often seemed to men in the deepest of trouble. "How long wilt Thou forget me?" You have been praying for mercy, and you cannot find it, and you think that God forgets. You have been, perhaps, a seeker after peace for years, and yet you have not found it, and you think that God forgets. Or, perhaps, years ago, you were one of the happiest of the happy, and you bathed in the light of God's countenance; and now you are the unhappiest of the unhappy, you are at a distance from your God, you have been trying to get back, and cannot get back, and you think that God forgets you. Or else wave upon wave of trouble has rolled over you; you have hardly had time to breathe between the surges of your grief. You are ready to perish with despondency, and you think that God forgets you. That is how it looks to you; but it is not so, and cannot be so. God cannot forget anything, it is impossible. "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" Mark that expression, the child that still draws its nourishment from her bosom. That is just what you are doing still; for, albeit you think that God forgets you, you are still living on what He daily gives you, and you would die if He did not give you of His grace and strength. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Lay hold of that great truth, and dismiss that which can be only an appearance and an error. God hath not forgotten to be gracious, nor has He even forgotten you.

The next "How long?" the next piece of David's howling, represents *his trouble as it really is.* "How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?" That is as it really is with some of you; God has hidden His face from you; not His heart, nor His mind. He has not forgotten you, but He has taken away from you the comfort of His smile. Are you crying, to-night, "Lord, how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?" I am glad you cry about it; the ungodly do not cry for God's face to be revealed to them, they wish that God would always hide His face from them. They do not want either His face or His favour. But if you are longing to see His face, it is because that face is full of love to you. I do not wonder that you are unhappy, if you have lost the

light of God's countenance, for he who has ever had it cannot lose it, nay, not for a moment, without feeling his heart ready to break. "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." Only give us to know that Thou lovest us, and we will not envy the man who owns the greatest estate, or enjoys the highest degree of human applause. This is enough for us, to have God with us. O, dear child of God, if thou hast lost the light of thy Father's countenance, and thou sighest after it, thou shalt have it again, thou shalt have it very soon! By the degree of thy longing, thou mayest measure the length of His absence. If thou longest but little, He will be absent long; but if thou longest much, He will soon come to thee. Thou wilt soon find that the hidings of His face are over, and the light of His countenance is again thy joy.

This is what the trouble really is; and a great trouble it is while it lasts, though it works for your good. What plants would grow if it were always day? Does not night make them grow as well as day? Brethren, if we always had fine weather, should we ever have a harvest at all? The Arabs have a proverb, "All sun makes the desert." If there is no rain, how can there be verdure? There is a ripeness given to the fruits by the moon as well as by the sun. Grieve when God hides His face from thee, but do not despair as well as grieve; and believe that even in this He loves thee still. It is a face of love that thou dost not see. Thou believest that, thyself, or else thou wouldst not wish to see it. If it were a face of wrath, thou wouldst not be longing to see it again. It is a face of love that is hidden from thee. Wherefore, be of good courage, thou shalt see it by-and-by.

Notice next, that we have *the man's sorrow as it is within himself.* "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" He talks to himself. That is the counsel he takes with himself, and he does not get any very great help out of that. It is a mark of wisdom to talk with yourselves sometimes, but not if you make yourself your own oracle. A man may talk to himself until he talks himself into despair; though there is a way of talking with yourself that will talk you up into the light, such as David used when he said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God." That is the way to talk to yourself. But yet, as a rule, there is not much good comes of talking to yourself unless there is a third One present, that blessed One, who can construe what self may say in mystery, and set right what self might twist into error. Oh, yes, I know some who pour out their hearts within them! Do you remember what David says in the forty-second Psalm? "I pour out my soul in me." Now, if it were possible to pour the contents of a jug of water out into itself, the water would be there all the same, would it not? That is a grand passage where David says, "Ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us." Take your pitcher, and turn it bottom upwards, and let the contents all run out. That is a true easement. To pour out from itself into itself is a poor change. To pour it out before God is to find instant relief. Beloved, it may be that you cannot get any relief, and that daily, from morning until evening, you are still in a fret and a trouble. Well, that is the case with David here; and my text is a photograph of you.

And, once more, the fourth "How long?" shows *the man's sorrow as it is without him.* "How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" It adds very much to a man's grief when somebody from the outside says, "Oh, you are always miserable! It makes anybody wretched to be near you." It was thus when Peninnah exulted over Hannah's barrenness, and "provoked her sore, to make her fret." It does happen to many Christians to have this sort of thing done by somebody, especially a very "candid friend." A candid friend is only an enemy candied over with a little sugar, as a general rule, and one who takes the opportunity to say nastier things than a downright enemy would say. You may have some such person in your family. Above all, there is our great adversary, from whom may God deliver us, who also delights to triumph and exult over us whenever he can! And so our trouble outside is, that Satan and his allies exult over us, and we have not yet learned to say, as we ought to say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall, I shall arise." That last touch may, perhaps, make the photograph depict somebody here who said, "I do not think that I shall see my portrait to-night. I have been roaming about, and got into great trouble, and I am one by myself." Well, but here is David, who is with you, and David's Lord is with you, too.

That is the first photograph, a man complaining.

II. I am glad to pass from the first view, and bring on the second one. The second picture of the same person is found in the sixth verse, where we see A MAN SINGING: "I will sing unto the Lord, because He hath dealt bountifully with me."

It is the same man that we saw before, but he has done with his howling, and has taken to singing, for, first, *his heart is rejoicing.* Read the fifth verse. He says, "My heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation." It is not merely the appearance of joy: it is real joy; his heart is rejoicing. Have you never seen a friend, who has been suddenly lifted up by the Spirit of God out of great mourning, and of whom you have said, "Well, I should not have known that it was the same person"? Grief throws a peculiar cast over the human countenance. Well do I remember, as a child, a lady who used to come to my grandfather's house, whose face was terrible to look upon, and when I asked who that sad lady was, they said, "Hush, child," and they made me hold my tongue until she was gone, and then they told me that she was one who thought she had committed the unpardonable sin. I do not know what it was that struck me; but there was something about her face which has never gone from my memory, though it must be pretty well fifty years ago that I saw her. But when a person is full of joy, especially spiritual joy, have you ever noticed what a kind of transfiguration the face undergoes? You have been yourself to have your photograph taken, and the man places an iron clamp at the back of your neck, and you go away directly, I mean that *you* do. Your body stands there, but yourself goes travelling down the rod of iron, and you are not there at all, and the likeness is not yourself; it is your chrysalis, the case in which you used to be, but *you* are gone. Well, now, when you have joy in your heart, really in your heart so that everybody can see it on your countenance, your eyes begin to sparkle, and your whole face is lit up, so that people say, "Well, really, he is only an ordinary-looking person as a general rule, but when he is in that state of mind, there is a wonderful kind of beauty about

him." Now, the Lord can work that change for some of you, so that when you go home, mother will say, "Why, Maria, you are quite different from what you were when you went to the Tabernacle! John, how changed you are! You went so dull and heavy, and now you seem to be quite another person." Yes, the secret is, that it is with him as it was with David, his heart is rejoicing.

The next thing is that *his tongue is praising:* "I will sing unto the Lord." That which is down in the well will come up in the bucket. That which is in the heart is sure to come up to the mouth before long; so the happy believer begins to sing, and very likely he breaks out with the children's hymn,—

"I feel like singing all the time,
My tears are wiped away;
For Jesus is a Friend of mine,
I'll serve Him every day."

You may try, perhaps, to repress your emotion; but if the Lord has really brought you up out of the horrible pit, such as I have been describing, your emotion will not be altogether repressed. You will feel as if, should you hold your peace, the very stones would begin to cry out. A rejoicing heart soon makes a praising tongue.

Notice, next, that *the man's judgment is content.* That cool, calculating faculty now begins to read God's dealings, and it comes to a very different conclusion from that which it arrived at before. Some of you used to learn, as children, a book called "Why, and Because"; and it is a good thing to have a "why and because" for your own feelings. Now, says David, "I will sing unto the Lord, because, after weighing and judging the matter thoroughly, I can testify that He hath dealt bountifully with me. I thought that He had forgotten me, but He hath dealt bountifully with me. I thought that He had hidden His face from me, but He hath dealt bountifully with me. I said in my heart that He treats me very harshly, but I call all such language back. Lord, I eat my own words with bitter herbs, and I regret that I should ever have used them! Thou hast dealt bountifully with me." "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." This poor man, who thought that he was forgotten, now looks at the food which God has put upon his table, and he finds that he has Benjamin's portion, much more than was given to the rest of his brethren; and his verdict is totally changed now, as to the dealings of the Lord with him. He says, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

And now that his judgment has been set right, now that heart, tongue, judgment, all are right, *his resolve is right,* for he says, "I will sing unto the Lord." "Not only am I singing now, but I will make up my mind to this, I have been sighing long enough, I will sing now. I have been groaning and complaining, now I will sing. I will sing unto the Lord." I like this resolve, for it relates not only to present joy, but it is a resolution to project that joy throughout the whole of his life. "I will sing unto the Lord." I do trust that some of you will go out of the Tabernacle to-night, saying, "Well, I will sing; yes, I will. God helping me, I will. I will sing unto the Lord. I will sing at my work. I will sing on my bed. I will sing when I wake in the morning. I will sing when I go to bed at night. The Lord hath put a new song into my mouth, and I cannot keep it there; I must sing it out. I must sing His praises." I am sure we will not try to stop you. We will encourage you to sing unto the Lord as much as possible.

There is not half enough singing in the world. The music of the early mornings in the country, at this time of the year, always seems to chide me. The birds are up, and they wake us up; and when they are up, the first thing they do is to sing; and there is a kind of contention among them: each one tries to sing the most sweetly, and the most loudly, and one calls to another, and the other answers to him. They sing as they fly, and they sing as they build their nests; and they make such a wonderful chorus of song, that it often astonishes us that such little creatures can make such cataracts, such Niagaras of music as they pour forth from their tiny throats. Oh, that God's people would sing more! I remember a servant who used to sing while she was at the wash-tub. Her mistress said to her, "Why, Jane, how is it that you are always singing?" She said, "It keeps bad thoughts away." I remember an old Methodist brother, who was pretty nearly eighty, and I never came across him, as he went along the street at a rather slow pace, without hearing him toot-tootling little bits of tunes as he walked. If you went by his door, and heard a noise in his house, it was the old man singing. He never seemed to make any other noise but that of praising and blessing God. Oh, that we might do so continually!

"Sing a hymn to Jesus,
When the heart is faint;
Tell it all to Jesus,
Comfort or complaint";

and, when you have done that, sing another; and when you have finished that, sing another. Whether it be a hymn of comfort or complaint, still sing to the praise of His name, and make this your resolution as you go out to-night, "I will sing unto the Lord, my God, as long as I live."

There are the two photographs. Put them into your album, and take care of them.

III. But how came this change to take place? What are THE CONNECTING LINKS BETWEEN THE MAN COMPLAINING AND THE MAN SINGING? How did No. 1 get to be No. 2? How did this howler become a singer? What process did he pass through?

If you read this thirteenth Psalm over again when you get home, you will notice that the first thing he did was, *he pleaded with God.* He stated his case to the Lord, he mentioned the separate particulars of it, and then he pleaded, "Consider and hear me, O Jehovah, my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." For you, mourners, the first step towards comfort is to go and take the matter to your God. You have Rab-shakeh's letter in your pocket now; it is a dreadful letter, enough to make you sad. While I have been preaching, you have been sighing to yourself, "Ah, me! When I get home, I shall be thinking about that letter; I shall lie awake thinking of it." Some of you, who are rather of a nervous temperament, will let some little thing keep boring into you like a gimlet. You cannot get away from it. Now, I invite you to take that letter out of your pocket when you get home, and spread it before the Lord. Many and many a time

I have had great troubles: who can be the pastor of such a church without them? I have done my very best with the matter that has perplexed me, and I have only made it worse; and at last I have laid it before the Lord, and prayed over it; and in such cases I have always said to myself, "I will never have anything to do with that matter again; I have done with it." I advise you to do the same. Cast thy burden upon the Lord. Put it upon that shelf. But then if you take it down again, what good have you done? No, leave it there; leave it there; and have done with it. The Lord will bring you out of the difficulty when you clear yourself of it. But do not go on hugging your trouble; take it to the Lord in prayer. If you have a solicitor, and there is a suit at law, and the person against whom the suit is laid comes to you, and says, "I want to hear what you are going to do," do not say anything to him, except, "I have left that with my solicitor. You must be so good as to see him; I refer you to him." If there are two of you to manage the business, one will be a fool; and I think I know which that one will be. Either do not have a solicitor, and be your own lawyer; or else, if you have somebody to attend to the suit for you, let him do it. Why keep dogs and bark yourself? So let it be in all things. If you lay the matter before God, then do not begin to take it on your own back as well. That will be an absurdity. Although I made you smile just now, by quoting an old proverb, I do seriously urge upon you, my friends, the impropriety of attempting to undertake a case which you have laid before God in prayer. Leave it there. If you have done so, let your Advocate see you through with the business. Come, beloved, you shall soon begin to change your mode of talking, if you will go and tell your trouble to God straight away. "Well, I shall see my brother to-morrow." Do not see your brother; go and see your Father. "Oh, but I want to call in a friend!" That is what I want you to do, but not the friend you are thinking of; call in the Friend of friends. Tell Him everything about your trouble and your difficulty; and when you have done that, have done with it, and leave it with Him. You will then soon begin to sing.

The next thing is that David, having prayed, and brought his cause before God, *trusted in the Lord.* This is the chief point. Read the fifth verse, and you will see that the whole story is made plain: "I have trusted in Thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation." I seem as if I could leave all you troubled saints now, just to say to any sinner here, who is in deep soul-trouble, what you have said to yourself, "That first photograph was very like me. I cannot say that I am at all like the second one." No, but you will be like that second one if you will from your heart say this, "I have trusted in Thy mercy." This is the remedy for the disease of sin, and for the disease of the heart—trust Jesus. There He hangs on yonder cross. Trust Him. "I cannot realize that He is mine," you say. Did I tell you to realize that? Trust Him. "Oh, but I do not feel as if I had a good heart to bring to Him." Did I tell you to bring Him anything? Trust Him. Trust Him. Trust Him. O, child of God, this is the lesson you want to learn—*trust!* O, old sinner, this is the essential lesson for you if you would enter into light and peace—*trust!* "I have so many sins." Trust! "But I have such tendencies to sin." Trust Him to overcome those tendencies. "But I have tried." No, I did not say try; but trust. "But I—I—I will try." No, do not try; I did not say try. "Sir, I was going to say I will try to trust." I did not say try to trust. Trying to trust is the very reverse of trusting. If Christ be a liar, do not trust Him. If He be true, trust Him. If He cannot save you, do not trust Him; but as He is the Almighty Saviour, trust Him. Oh, that I could shout that word loud as a thousand thunders speaking at once, TRUST! O soul, the way of the law is obey; a hard word, with which you cannot comply, for you are too weak; but the gospel way is trust, *trust*, TRUST. When thou hast learned that way, thou shalt afterwards learn how to obey, and thou shalt obey through trusting: but the first thing is, trust. Is thy leg broken, so that thou canst not walk? Lean on Him who can carry thee. Hast thou a great weight? Lean hard, then. Is it greater than ever it was? Lean harder, then. Trust, implicitly trust. As the blind man puts his hand into the hand of him who can see, that he may lead him, so trust thou in Jesus. Put thy hand into the hand of Him who was crucified, and trust Him to-night.

There, you may put away that first photograph. You may sit down now, if you have trusted, and we will take your likeness again; and I am sure your likeness will agree with the sixth verse, and you will say, "I will sing unto the Lord; I will go home singing. I have trusted. I have found salvation."

Lord, lead these people to trust Thee! Why can they not trust Thee? What hast Thou ever done that they should doubt Thee? Lord Jesus, if I had a million souls, I would trust them all with Thee, fully persuaded that Thou couldst wash them all whiter than snow. Trust, then, beloved friends; trust Jesus. God help you to trust, for Christ's sake! Amen.

THE SECRET OF A HAPPY LIFE

"I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."—Psalm xvi. 8.

IN the preceding verses we read, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." The speaker therefore is a very contented and happy man. It is not the most usual thing in the world to find persons extolling their lot, and manifesting a conspicuous emphasis of satisfaction; far more common is it to hear men surrounded with favours lamenting the hardness of their case. Contented minds are almost as scarce as snow-flakes in harvest. The man who rejoices in his goodly heritage deserves attention, and we shall do well to learn his secret. How is it that he is able to feel so happy? Let us seek out the way by which he arrived at this peace, and discover the silken clue which led him into such a bower of delight. Perhaps his road may fit our feet, and by following it we may

become as perfectly content as he was. O Lord and giver of peace, help us in the search!

But, first, who is this person who is thus singularly content? To our astonishment we find that the Spirit speaketh here by prophecy in the name and person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is He who by the Spirit here saith, "The lines have fallen unto Me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage"! He was the "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," He was "despised and rejected of men," He had not where to lay His head, He was often subject to hunger and thirst; He had few friends, and those proved faithless in the time of His extremity: how could He speak thus? All this is so much the more encouraging for us, because if this most sorrowful of men was nevertheless able to feel an inward calm, a sweet content, then it must be possible for us to do so whose lot is not so bitter. *We* are not sent to make atonement for sin, and hence our sorrows are few compared with our Lord's. There was a special reason for His being distressed, for He took our griefs and carried our sorrows; but no atoning griefs are demanded of us, nor have we afflictions to bear from the hand of God as punishments for sin, for the Lord has laid all these upon Him, and we are clear. If the Lord Jesus, the Man of grief, a mourner all His days' yet said the lines had fallen unto Him in pleasant places, and He had a goodly heritage, it must be the more possible for us to rise to the like content, if we follow His rule and live according to His example. What, then, is the secret of perfect peace and happiness here below? The price thereof is above rubies: where shall this art be learned? The magic lamps and wonderful rings of which children read in fairy stories are as nothing in value compared with this true philosopher's stone, this mystic secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear Him, by which His saints are enabled to enjoy the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, which keeps their hearts and minds by Jesus Christ. O Prince of Peace, grant us this rest!

Our text clearly imparts to us the secret of the greatest happiness to be found below the skies, and, indeed, it reveals the hidden source of those pleasures above, which are at God's right hand for evermore. The first part of the excellent method lies in *living in the Lord's presence always,*—"I have set the Lord always before me"; the second is found in *trusting in the Lord's presence always*—"Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

I. The secret, then, of peace, is first LIVING IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE ALWAYS:—"*I have set the Lord always before me.*" We shall try, in order to understand what this means, to keep our eyes upon the life of Jesus, and at the same time apply the text to the saints; because though this passage is pre-eminently fulfilled in Him, yet since the members partake of the nature of the head, each one in his degree, that which Jesus did and thereby obtained a holy joy and rest, is to be fulfilled in us that we may enter into the joy of our Lord. Does not our Lord Jesus bid us take His yoke upon us and learn of Him, that so we may find rest unto our souls?

I take it that our text means first, that *we should make the Lord's presence the greatest of all facts to us.* Of all things that are, God chiefly *is*, and we should regard Him in that light. It was so with our Lord Jesus Christ. He, as a man, was cognisant of the existence of all the things that are seen, but even more did He recognise the existence of God, who cannot be seen—that great Spirit who is alike invisible and incomprehensible. How vividly the presence of God must have been realised by Christ at all times, for He was in the Father and the Father in Him. You and I have never seen and understood the Father in the same degree as He did, though the Son has revealed Him to us. He entered into a fuller and more constant recognition of God's presence in all places and things, than we as yet have done. Yet truly we have seen the Father, for we have seen Jesus by faith. We have mounted up on wings as eagles, and with the eagle eye have looked the sun in the face, and have not been blinded. Is it not written, "The pure in heart shall see God"? We have been taught to see God around us in all things that exist, and in all events that happen; and we bless the Lord that we live not as those who are "without God in the world," but we are taught by the Spirit to recognise our Father's loving, all-pervading presence; yet I trow we do not discern it so constantly, clearly, and impressively as our Lord Jesus did. He looked upon the mountains, and the sunlight on their brows was the smile of His Father. He saw the plains, and their harvests were His Father's bounty. To Him the waves of the sea were tossed in tempest by His Father's breath, or calmed by His Father's whisper. He fed the multitude, but it was with His Father's bread; and He healed the sick, but the Father did the works. In all things about Him He continually and distinctly recognised the active presence of the Most High. Other men remarked that the ravens were fed, but He said, "Your heavenly Father feedeth them." Other men noticed that the lilies were fair to look upon, but He discerned that "God so clothes the grass of the field." The heavenly Father was in every place, and in every thing to Jesus. Now, I pray our Lord to grant that by the blessed Spirit we may always be sensitive of the presence of God wherever we are. Is it not a sad proof of the alienation of our nature that though God is everywhere we have to school ourselves to perceive Him anywhere? His are the beauties of nature, His the sunshine which is bringing on the harvest, His the waving grain which cheers the husbandman, His the perfume which loads the air from multitudes of flowers, His the insects which glitter around us like living gems; and yet the Creator and Sustainer of all these is far too little perceived. Everything in the temple of nature speaks of His glory, but our ears are dull of hearing. Everything, from the dewdrop to the ocean, reflects the Deity, and yet we largely fail to see the eternal brightness. I beseech you, my brethren, to pray that you may have this text wrought into your very souls: "I have set the Lord always before me." Refuse to see anything without seeing God in it. Regard the creatures as the mirror of the great Creator. Do not imagine that you have understood His works till you have felt the presence of the great Worker Himself. Do not reckon that you know anything till you know that of God which lies within it, for that is the kernel which it contains. Wake in the morning and recognise God in your chamber, for His goodness has drawn back the curtain of the night and taken from your eyelids the seal of sleep: put on your garments and perceive the divine care which provides you with raiment from the herb of the field and the sheep of the fold. Go to the breakfast room and bless the God whose

bounty has again provided for you a table in the wilderness: go out to business and feel God with you in all the engagements of the day: perpetually remember that you are dwelling in His house when you are toiling for your bread or engaged in merchandise. At length, after a well-spent day, go back to your family and see the Lord in each one of the members of it; own His goodness in preserving life and health; look for His presence at the family altar, making the house to be a very palace wherein king's children dwell. At last, fall asleep at night as in the embraces of your God or on your Saviour's breast. This is happy living. The worldling forgets God, the sinner dishonours Him, the atheist denies Him, but the Christian lives in Him. "In Him we live and move and have our being; we are also His offspring." Visible things we look upon as shadows; the things which we touch and taste and handle perish in the using; the elements of this solid earth shall dissolve with fervent heat, but the ever-present God whom we cannot see is the same, and of His years there is no end, and His existence is the only real and true and eternal one to us. He has been our dwelling-place in all generations, and it were evil indeed not to know our own eternal home. This is a main ingredient in the oil of joy,—to realise always that the Lord is round about us "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, from henceforth even for evermore."

Secondly, the words of the text signify *the making of God's glory the one object of our lives.* As a prize is set before the runners in a race, so the believer's heart sets God's glory before it as the prize for which the race of life is run. It was even so with our dear Redeemer; from the first to the last He set the Lord always before Him as the object of His life on earth. Do you ever find in Him a selfish motive? Is He ever moved by any grovelling ambition? Is He not always seeking the good of men and by that means the glory of God. While yet a youth He goes up to the temple, not to display His precocity, nor like other children to gratify Himself with the admiration heaped upon Him for His early wisdom, but He says, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" In after days, when He has been anointed to His work, He sits by a well and takes His rest; a woman comes and converses with Him, but He speaks upon no idle theme; He talks to her of the living water, seeks her soul to save it, and then tells His disciples that He has meat to eat that they know not of; for it was His meat and His drink to do the will of Him that sent Him.

He presses forward with changeless intensity of purpose towards the completion of the work which the Father had committed to Him. You see Him present at a wedding, or meeting a funeral procession, but He is found in both cases alike aiming at God's glory. If you find Him battling with the crowd, or in the chamber shut in with two or three raising the dead, if you read of His prayers upon the lone mountain-side, or listen to His groans in the garden of Gethsemane, still, evermore—this one thing He does: He glorifies His Father on the earth. Despising shame and trampling under foot the world's honour, He lives to God and to God alone. Not sometimes and now and then, or as the general aggregate of His life, is He found setting God before Him, but *always* and without exception. In every thought, in every word, in every deed, God was before Him, and for God He lived. Oh, that we could reach to this,—whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we would do all to the glory of God. Oh, that we never dared to do what would dishonour the name of God! Oh, that we walked in all things so as to please Him who loved us and gave Himself for us! I am sure, dear brothers and sisters, if you have aimed at this, though you may have fallen far short of your desire, yet in such a path you have found peace unto your souls. This is the king's highway, the way of holiness wherein no lion shall be found. To know that God is present, and to live wholly to please Him, this is the way of pleasantness; take care that ye keep therein. Never do anything which would dishonour the holy name wherewith you are called, and leave nothing undone, however hard to the flesh, which would serve the cause of God, so shall you be like our Lord, and become partakers of His peace. This is the mode of life by which a man shall have foretastes of the feasts of heaven while yet in this wilderness world: may the Holy Ghost lead us into it.

A further meaning of setting the Lord always before us is *so to live that the presence of God shall be the rule and support of our obedience.* So Jesus did. You know right well that to many servants the master's eye is most important in order to make them careful and industrious. How many are eye-servers, and men pleasers. Take away the master's eye, and how slowly the labour drags along; how often it is slurred over in a slovenly manner, or left undone altogether. The old proverb declares that the master's eye does more than both his hands, and it is too sadly true; yet it is not wrong to say that their Master's eye ought to have a great influence over the servants of God. "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God." Beloved, how would you live if God were seen, looking on? He is looking on! So live. Suppose that in some action of to-morrow you were specially warned,—"The Lord will carefully observe you, the Omniscient will fix all His thoughts upon you, and detect your motives and scan your spirit, as well as weigh the deed itself." If you had such a revelation, how would you act? So should you act at all times, for it is always true. "Thou God seest me" is an exclamation for every moment of day and night. Can you put your finger upon any part of Christ's life and say "He forgot that the Father beheld Him in this act"? Is not the whole of Christ's life such a picture that God Himself looked at every line and tint of it with infinite admiration? Have you not yourself traversed the gallery of the Saviour's life, and pausing at each picture and scene, been filled with amazement and led to exclaim, "He hath done all things well." When your mind has been most devout and holy, have you not more than ever admired every little trait in your Saviour's character, every separate feature of every action of His life, whether public or private. The Father was always with Him, and He did always those things which pleased Him. O, beloved, would to God that your obedience were in like manner measured out under the profound consciousness that the great God is watching you in all that you do! He has beset you behind and before, and laid His hand upon you. If you take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, He is there; even darkness hideth not

from Him. Everything that you have done has been enacted in the presence of your heavenly Father; have you felt this? Ah, when you dishonoured the Lord Jesus He was Himself looking on: He to whom belong those pierced hands heard your coward words and saw your traitorous acts, and gazed in wondering sorrow at you, His friend, thus betraying Him. When you mingled with the ungodly world and was as one of them, He too was there, and now He shows you His wounds, and sorrowfully exclaims, "These are the wounds which I received in your house, the house of My friend." The blows of friends smite in a tender place, their woundings are the cruellest that can be received, for enemies pierce sharply, but friends stab with poisoned daggers. When *we* bring dishonour upon Him whom we profess to love, it is dishonour indeed. Oh, how much would be left undone, and on the other hand how much more of another kind would be diligently executed, if in very deed we set the Lord always before us.

Not yet, however, have we completely expounded our text. The words must mean also that we are to set the Lord before us *as the source from which we are to derive solace and comfort under every trial.* Jesus could say, "I have set the Lord always before Me"; for this it was that made Him suffer poverty and never complain; this it was that made Him encounter shame and spitting and yet remain dumb with wondrous patience, like a sheep before her shearers. You never hear our Lord cry out until His Father's face is hidden from Him; then indeed He cries, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" When, because of His standing as our surety, God Himself withdrew the manifestation of His favour, then His pangs were bitter and His grief was overflowing, but you and I will never have to bear the like. God forsook Him that He might never forsake us. You shall always find the Lord near in the day of trouble, and therefore if ever you have a Gethsemane, and the bitter cup cannot be passed from you except you drink it, you shall set the Lord before you, and in that cheering presence you shall be able to say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," and patiently drink your appointed cup even to the dregs. Are you saying to-day, "How much I wish that I had more of the comforts of life, but my means are sadly scant, and I am very sick and very heavy in spirit"? Your Saviour was tempted in all points like as you are, but He set the Lord always before Him, and therefore He was content and said, "The Lord is My portion, saith My soul, therefore will I hope in Him. The lines are fallen unto Me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." Let all else go, my brother, for if God be with you, you will still be upheld. Let friends die one after another, and let earthly comforts fade like autumn leaves, but if you set the Lord always before you there is such a fulness of joy in every attribute of God, there is such a heaven in every glimpse of Jesus' face, there is such overwhelming bliss in every drop of Jehovah's everlasting love, that you shall not fail nor be discouraged, but you shall sing His praises even in the fiercest fires. To you He will say, "Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God. When thou passest through the rivers I will be with thee, the floods shall not overflow thee. When thou goest through the fires thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The presence of God makes even death delightful, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." Thus you see that setting the Lord always before us ensures us never ceasing consolation.

Yet, further, these words mean that *we are to hold perpetual communion with God.* When Jesus said, "I have set the Lord always before Me," He meant that He was always in fellowship with the Father. Very frequently the fellowship was exercised in prayer, for our Lord, though He is described as praying very much, no doubt prayed infinitely more than any evangelist has recorded, for He was praying when no one knew it but Himself and His God, when even His lips did not move. His public prayer, or the prayer which could be observed by others, was made manifest for our sakes and their sakes who stood with Him, but it was only a cropping up upon the surface of the great rock of prayer which laid the foundation of His holy living. Right well did He say, when at the grave of Lazarus, "And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it." He was always in converse with the Father, who was indeed the only One upon whom He could cast Himself. What consolation could He gather from Peter and James and John? He was like a father with a number of little children around Him, who could not so much as understand their Father's troubles, much less support Him under them. As our Lord was always in sacred fellowship with God, He had great sorrow from beholding the sin of mankind, knowing as He did how grievous it was to God. He would mourn before His Father the people's sin, and continue still to intercede, praying all His life as He prayed at last, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Thus was He at all times in deepest sympathy with the God of love.

I doubt not that our Lord often spoke with the Father in the form of praise, for while on one occasion only it is recorded that He rejoiced, yet doubtless He rejoiced evermore in God. How could His pure nature do otherwise than joy in the Lord? His whole heart and soul and mind ran in one line with the mind of God. I am of course now speaking of Him as a man, and as man His heart was in perfect harmony with the heart of God—there was nothing in Him contrary to the will and design of the Father, but His whole human nature was carried along in a parallel course with the mind of the Most High, and hence it was that He was always at peace.

O, brothers and sisters, may God grant us grace to commune constantly with Himself. Prayer should not be a matter of mornings and evenings alone, but all the day our spirit should commune with God. Father, Thou art so near us, and yet how slow we are to speak to Thee. Teach us, Thy children, to be always talking with Thee, so that while we walk on earth our conversation may be in heaven. The Lord give us to hold holy commerce with heaven, hearing what God the Lord will speak, and speaking to Him in return. Be it ours to hear the words of the inspired Book, and to regard the monitions of the gracious Spirit, and then may our spirit in its turn speak with God, and make known its requests unto Him. I hope you will be reaching out towards this by the divine anointing of the Holy Spirit. For this is the grand secret, the sure foundation of a happy life. Perpetual communion with God is the highest state of joy which can be known on earth. Learn to say truthfully, "I have set the Lord always before me," and you have the Lord's secret.

Once again upon this point, dear friends. If we are to be happy, *we must follow this life of nearness to God because of our delight in it, and from the joy which we feel in it.* Indeed, such a life cannot be lived in any other manner. Mere duty and law cannot operate here. If any man shall say, "What a dreary affair this communion with God must be! How dull must be this walking continually with God!' then I reply, your speech bewrayeth you, you have not the first essentials of such a life, neither can you so much as guess what it means. Indeed, I am not talking to you at all, it would be useless to press such a theme upon you. Excuse me, you know nothing of the spiritual life, nothing of what it is to be a child of God, or else communion would not be despised by you. You must be born again, and till you are born again such exhortations as those which I am now giving will not apply to you at all. Does some mere professor sneeringly enquire, "What, are we always to live to God's glory, and are we to do nothing but what would glorify Him? This is laying down very straight rules, and making the road to heaven very narrow indeed." Do you think so, friend? Then I will tell you plainly my solemn suspicion about you,—I am persuaded that you do not know the Lord, for if you did the way of holiness would be your delight, and you would not ask for licence to sin. I can understand your sinning, but I cannot understand your finding pleasure in it if you are a real Christian. The pleasures of the world are to a true believer as the husks which the swine do eat; and if you find them to be good bread for your soul then assuredly you are none of His: the hogs may be satisfied with hogs' meat, for providence meant it for them, but the child of God, even when he is a prodigal, cannot be satisfied so; he would fain fill his belly with the husks, but it is impossible that he should thus be satisfied. I am sure if you are the Lord's you will look upon living near to God, and delighting in Him, not as being a severe task, or a weariness, but as a luxury, and a delightful privilege, after which your soul hungers and thirsts. You will say with David, "My soul panteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" To you the choicest place is that which is nearest to your Lord, though it may be in the dust of contempt, or in the furnace of affliction. It is your ambition to be subdued by the Lord Jesus unto Himself most completely, and then to be henceforth the place of His abode, the instrument for His use, and, best of all, the object of His love. I would dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, as a child at home, considering the present world to be a lower room of that house, and heaven above as the upper story of the selfsame abode. The presence of God is our bliss.

Now, is there anything about our Lord's life which looks like being under restraint, or being compelled to act otherwise than He would have wished? Can you suspect in His whole career that He was at any time acting against His inclination? Was His life constrained and unnatural? Did He walk like a man in irons? Did He live as one pressed into the army of the righteous, denied pleasures which would have been His choice, and forced to forms of piety which were distasteful to Him? Not at all. Christ is a free man, living out His inmost self, following His heart's best desires. You can see that wherever He is He acts according to His nature, and is as free in what He does as the fish are free in the sea, or the birds in the air. Now, such is the Christian in this matter of setting the Lord always before him. He acts not of constraint but willingly, for the Lord has given him a nature which delights in that which God delights in. He does not say, "Woe is me, I am caged like a bird; my life is so precise and Puritanic that I am weary of it." "Nay," says he, "if I had these worldly joys and might indulge in them, there is nothing in them to please me. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Others are saying, 'Who will show us any good?' but my one petition is 'Lord, lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me.'" He says, "Let others do as they will, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The Christian is never so free as when he is most under law to Christ, he is never so much himself as when he denies himself, and never so delighted as when he delights himself in the Lord, and lives only for the glory of God. Now, if such be the case with you, dear brethren, you have learned the secret of joy.

The text may be read in the Hebrew, "I have set the Lord *equally* before me," that is equally at all times. He speaks of the solitary night watches, and then his reins instructed him, for he was with God. In the morning he exclaims, "When I awake I am still with Thee." We are to have the Lord equally before us under all circumstances: in our business pursuits as well as in prayer-meetings and hearings of sermons; in seasons of recreation as well as in hours of devotion, in the day of health as well as in the hour of death. If you break the chain of communion by going where you cannot expect to have the Lord's presence, or doing what the Lord cannot sanction, the broken link can be restored, but it will always show the rivets. You may lose your roll like Christian in the arbour, and you may go back again and find it, but it is very hard going back over the same ground, and after going back it is difficult to take to the onward path again. The hardest part of the road to heaven is that which has to be traversed three times: once when you go over it at first, a second time when you have to return with weeping to find your lost evidences, and then again when you have to make up for lost time. Backsliding causes unhappiness, but abiding with God creates peace like a river, flowing on in one long-continued stream. Dear friends, here is the method of a blissful life: try it, and the result is certain.

II. I will speak very briefly upon the second head. The second part of the secret follows upon the first,—that is TRUSTING ALWAYS IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE. Here is confidence in God: "because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Here is confidence that God is near us; confidence that God loves us, for He is not only near us, but in the place of friendly fellowship; and confidence that God will practically help us, for the right hand is the dextrous hand, the hand which does the work, and thus God is nigh unto His people with practical assistance, to sustain and to deliver them. How blessed it must be to feel that we have nothing to be afraid of in all the world, for God stands at our right hand to take care of us whatever may happen.

David says, and Christ says through David, "I shall not be moved," that is, first, I shall *not be moved with any regret or remorse as to the past.* Ah, brethren, if we have set the Lord always before us, we can sit down and meditate upon our course of action, and it will bear reflection. The man who knows that he had lived as in the sight of God will not have to wish that he had never been born: on

the contrary, he will bless the Lord at all times for all that happens to him. Christ had many sorrows, but no regrets. What a life was His! He never had to look back upon a single act and repent of it. All was done with the Lord before Him, and He was not moved. A lady once said to a minister that she was attending the theatre, and she remarked, "There are so many pleasures connected with seeing a play; there is the pleasure of anticipation before you go, there is the pleasure of enjoying it when you are there, and there is the third pleasure of reflecting upon it afterwards." The good man replied, "Ah, madam, there is another pleasure which you have not mentioned, and that is the comfort it will afford you upon a dying bed." The irony was well deserved. I may mention this as being the greatest recommendation of setting the Lord always before you, that it will bear reflection and yield comfort amid sickness and death. If by divine grace you are able to live a life of unbroken communion with God, constantly having an eye to His presence, you will not have to mourn over a misspent life. Your retrospect will be full of pleasure: as for sin, that is already covered by the blood of Christ, and beside that you will have been kept from a thousand snares by having the fear of God always before your eyes; and so in reviewing the past you shall not be moved with bitter remorse. Many things which we now do we may have to lament in the future though now we think we are acting very wisely and well, but if the Lord is always before us, our steps will be established, because they are ordered by the Lord. Even if you make a mistake as to policy, you will be comforted by the knowledge that it was a fault of your judgment, and not of your heart, if indeed you desired alone to serve the Lord.

Beloved, it is well for us to live near to God, that we may not *be moved from our consistency in the way of true religion.* There are many professors whose lives are jerky; they are walking with God after a fashion to-day, but anon they wander into crooked paths; then they begin again, but ere long they start aside as a deceitful bow; like Reuben, they are unstable as water and do not excel. In our Lord's life there is no break, it is one continuous harmony. The unities are observed in His grand career, it is like His garment—without seam and woven from the top throughout. Now, brother, if you set the Lord always before you, you will not be moved, but your path will be like that of the sun in the heavens, rising from dawn till noon.

Setting the Lord before us prevents our being *moved with terror.* It is said of the believer, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." The believer is not moved with staggering fear. A great trouble is coming upon him, but he has set the Lord before him, and he is not cast down. If like Jesus Himself he is for the moment swayed with exceeding great sorrow, yet doth he say, "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee," and when he prays he is heard in that he feared.

Such a man is not *moved by temptation so as to be swept into surprising sin.* If I set the Lord always before me I shall not be carried away by a sudden temptation. It is when you are off your guard that sin comes, and you fall. You speak unadvisedly, you get into a hot temper, you make sad havoc of your Christian life, and all because your eye was off your Lord. If you could have but known that the trial was coming, you would have been protected against it; and if you had set the Lord always before you, you would have been prepared for the world, the flesh, and the devil, and shielded from every fiery dart of the wicked one. Let us dwell in God, and He will be a wall of fire round about us. He will keep us every moment, lest any hurt us: He will keep us night and day.

Thus you will not be *moved so as to fall into failure at last.* You must all have felt the dread lest after all at the end of life it should turn out that you are not saved. Have you not feared that you have deceived yourselves, and were not converted when you thought you were? What if it should turn out to be so? What will you do when the bubble of false hope shall burst? Ah, but if you set the Lord always before you, you shall not be moved with that fear, for you will know that your Redeemer liveth; you will have such a consciousness of the divine presence that you will commit your departing spirit unto God as to a faithful Creator. You will not be afraid to die, for as Jesus said, "My flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption," so will you say, "My flesh also shall rest in hope, for Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, and though I see corruption as to my body, yet shall I be raised in incorruption in the likeness of my Lord, for I know that my next-of-kin liveth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall behold for myself, and not another." Oh, the joy of thus abiding in God and trusting in His present power,—having the Lord at your right hand, and then abiding in calm assurance that you cannot be moved.

Just four things, and I have done. First, to any of you who are unhappy. Some of you are not Christian people, but altogether of the world. You are not happy, and yet I dare say you have a great many things to make you so. You are placed in easy circumstances, where you can enjoy *yourselves* as much as you like. The sorriest thing in the world to enjoy is yourself. I can enjoy other people better than I can myself: to enjoy yourself needs a very depraved appetite, for selfishness is sordid, and, like the serpent, has dust appointed to be its meat. If you think that you will find pleasure in worldliness, I should like you to recollect one who tried that method very thoroughly: I mean Solomon of old, who had all the wealth a heart could wish, and all the wisdom a brain could hold, and yet was both poor and foolish. He ransacked the world for joy, but found it not. At one time he gave all his thoughts to architecture, and built splendid palaces, and after he had built them all he said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He took to his books and studied very hard, but after he had pored over them long he said, "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." He tried singing men and singing women, and the peculiar delights of kings, but when he had enjoyed himself in this manner to the utmost possibilities of human nature, he said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He planted gardens, and laid out watercourses, and practised engineering; he inclined at one time to the pleasures of a fool, and once he was eager in the nobler pursuits of a wise man; sometimes he was sober with science, and at other seasons he was excited with laughter,—he tried everything, and found all earthly joy to be as deceitful as the apples

of Sodom which are fair to look upon but turn to ashes in the hand. Nothing beneath the skies, and nothing above the skies, can make any man happy apart from God, search as you will. Apart from God you may make a hell, but you cannot make a heaven, do what you please. Oh, I beseech you, unhappy man, if you have grown weary of the world and are sick of everything, if you are in the sere and yellow leaf though not forty years of age, remember that there is a place where your leaf can be made green. If thou wilt set the Lord always before thee, thou shalt find peace in Him.

And, next, I may be addressing some who think themselves perfectly happy in the world. I confess I do not envy you, but still I like to hear you sing your song, and tell the tale of what bliss the world affords. Yet note on what frail pillars this fairy palace of yours is erected! You are healthy, that is at the bottom of it—your bodily frame is in good order, and you are merry. But suppose you should fall sick? Or suppose those few grey hairs should, ere long, be multiplied, where would be your mirth? Or if your wealth should take to itself wings and fly away, what then? Or if you come before the Lord in judgment, what then? O, sir, let this frail foundation go; it is not meet to rest your eternal hopes upon. You are like a little child building his little sand house by the seaside: the tide is coming up; O child, leave your sand and flee from the waves! There is a rock on which you may build with massive stones a house eternal, a palace of happiness that never shall be dissolved. Go get you there!

Now, you Christian people, if any of you are unhappy, I wish I could preach you out of it by reminding you of this text, but, as I cannot, I leave you in the hands of the Holy Spirit. If you draw near to God you will be as happy as the days are long in midsummer, your doubts and fears will flee, and you will be as merry as birds of the air.

And you happy Christians, you of the bright eye and the elastic footstep, you can be happier still by coming yet nearer to God, and abiding in fuller communion with Him; and though already you are singing,

"How happy is the pilgrim's lot,"

you shall be yet more blessed if you become more obedient, more submissive to the divine will, more in sympathy with Jesus, and more abidingly in communion with the Father. This is heaven below: God grant it you for Christ's sake. Amen.

"MARVELLOUS LOVINGKINDNESS"

"Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness."—Psalm xvii. 7.

THE Lord's people, in the time of their trouble, know where to go for comfort and relief. Being taught of God, they do not hew out to themselves broken cisterns, which can hold no water; but they turn to the ever-flowing fountain, they go to the well-head,—even to God Himself; and there they cast themselves down, and drink to the full. David, when he wrote this Psalm, was evidently in very great distress; and, therefore, he says, "I have called upon Thee, for Thou wilt hear me, O God: incline Thine ear unto me, and hear my speech." What he wanted was his God; as Dr. Watts expresses it,—

"In darkest shades if He appear,
My dawning is begun;
He is my soul's sweet morning star,
And He my rising sun."

Believers draw comfort both from God's ordinary and extraordinary dealings with them, for they regard God's lovingkindness as being both an ordinary and an extraordinary thing. I have heard of a good sister who, when a friend narrated to her some very gracious dealing of God, was asked the question, "Is it not very wonderful?" and she replied, "No; it is not wonderful, for it is just like Him." Begging her pardon, and admitting the great truth that she meant to convey, I think it is still more wonderful that it should be "just like Him." The wonder of extraordinary love is that God should make it such an ordinary thing, that He should give to us "marvellous lovingkindness," and yet should give it so often that it becomes a daily blessing, and yet remains marvellous still. The marvels of men, after you have seen them a few times, cease to excite any wonder. I suppose there is scarcely a building, however costly its materials, and however rare its architecture, as to which, sooner or later, you will not feel that you have seen enough of it. But God's wonderful works never pall upon you. You could gaze upon Mont Blanc, or you could stand and watch Niagara, yet never feel that you had exhausted all its marvels. And everyone knows how the ocean is never twice alike. They who live close to it, and look upon it every hour of the day, still see God's wonders in the deep.

That God should bless us every day, is a theme for our comfort. God's ordinary ways charm us. The verse before our text says, "'I have called upon Thee, for Thou wilt hear me, O God.' I know Thou wilt, for the blessing that I am about to ask from Thee is a thing that I have been accustomed to receive from Thee. I know Thou wilt hear me, for Thou hast heard me in the past; it is a habit of Thine to listen to my supplications, and to grant my requests." I hope we can argue in a similar fashion; yet, at the same time, God's people draw equal comfort from the extraordinary character of the mercies He bestows upon them. They appeal to Him to show them His "marvellous lovingkindness," to let them see the wonderful side of it as well as the common side of it, to let them behold His miracles of mercy, His extravagances of love, His superfluities of kindness; —I scarcely know what words to use when talking of what the apostle Paul calls "the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence," "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

I want, on this occasion, to dwell upon the extraordinary side of God's lovingkindness; and,

using our text as a prayer, to say to the Lord in the language of David, "Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness." Sometimes, a man is brought into such a condition that he feels that, if God does not do something quite out of the common order of things, he will assuredly perish. He has now come to such a pass that, if some extraordinary grace is not displayed towards him, all is over with him. Well, now, such a brother may think that God will not give this extraordinary grace to him; he may be troubled at the idea that some marvellous thing is needed. It is to meet that suggestion of unbelief that I am going to address you now.

I. And my first remark is, that ALL THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF GOD IS MARVELLOUS.

The least mercy from God is a miracle. That God does not crush our sinful race, is a surprising mercy. That you and I should have been spared to live,—even though it were only to exist in direst poverty, or in sorest sickness,—that we should have been spared at all, after what we have been, and after what we have done, is a very marvellous thing. The explanation of the marvel is given in the Book of Malachi: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." If God had possessed such a short temper as men often have, He would have made short work with us all; but He is gracious and longsuffering, and therefore He is very patient with us. The very least mercy that we ever receive from God is a very wonderful thing; but when we think of all that is meant by this blessed word "lovingkindness"—,which is a compound of all sorts of sweetnesses, a mixture of fragrances to make up one absolutely perfect perfume,—when we take that word "lovingkindness," and think over its meaning, we shall see that it is a marvellous thing indeed that it describes.

For, first, it is *marvellous for its antiquity*. To think that God should have had lovingkindness towards men or ever the earth was, that there should have been a covenant of election,—a plan of redemption,—a scheme of atonement,—that there should have been eternal thoughts of love in the mind of God towards such a strange being as man, is indeed marvellous. "What is man, that Thou are mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" Read these words now with the tears in your eyes: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee"; and when you know that this passage refers to you, tell me if it is not "marvellous lovingkindness." God's mind is occupied with thoughts concerning things that are infinitely greater than the destiny of any one of us, or of all of us put together; yet He was pleased to think of us in love from all eternity, and to write our names upon His hands and upon His heart, and to keep the remembrance of us perpetually before Him, for His "delights were with the sons of men." This antiquity makes it to be indeed "marvellous lovingkindness."

Next, think of *its discriminating character*, that God's lovingkindness should have come to the poorest, to the most illiterate, the most obscure, and often to the most guilty of our race. Remember what Paul wrote about this matter: "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." Dr. Watts expresses the same thought in his verses,—

"When the Eternal bows the skies
To visit earthly things,
With scorn divine He turns His eyes
From towers of haughty kings.

"He bids His awful chariot roll
Far downward from the skies,
To visit every humble soul,
With pleasure in His eyes."

God's choice is marvellous. I know of no better word to apply to His lovingkindness to His chosen than that which is applied in the text: "Thy marvellous lovingkindness."

"What was there in you that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so, Father,' you ever must sing,
'Because it seem'd good in Thy sight.'"

There is no other explanation of this wondrous mercy, this "marvellous lovingkindness," than the poet gives,—

"His love, from eternity fix'd upon you,
Broke forth, and discover'd its flame,
When each with the cords of His kindness He drew,
And brought you to love His great name."

So, beloved, think over the antiquity of God's lovingkindness, and then of the discriminating character of it, and surely you will be full of adoring wonder.

After that, think also of *the self-sacrificing nature of His lovingkindness*,—that, when God had set His heart on man, and had chosen His people before the foundation of the world, then He should give—what? Himself. Aye, nothing short of that;—that He should not only give us this world, and His providence, and all its blessings, and the world to come, and all its glories; but that, in order to our possession of these things, He should give His own Son to die for us. Well might the apostle John write, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." It was not that Christ died for us when we were righteous, "for scarcely for a righteous man will one die": "but God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Isaiah had long before explained the mystery: "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him: He hath put Him to grief." You who love your children, to lose one of whom would be worse than to die, can realise a little of what must have been the Father's love to you in giving up His only-begotten Son that you might live through Him. Dwell on this great truth, dear friends, meditate on it, and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into its heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, for these lips cannot fully speak of its wonders. As you think over the Lord's ancient lovingkindnesses which were ever of old, His distinguishing love towards His redeemed, and His self-sacrificing love in giving up His Only-begotten, you will be obliged to say, "It is marvellous lovingkindness; it is marvellous lovingkindness indeed."

Then go on to think of *the marvellous constancy of it.* That one should begin to love another, is not so very wonderful; but that love, after it has been despised and ill-requited, should still continue,—that the sweet love of Christ should not long ago have curdled into jealousy, and from jealousy have soured into indignation, is an extraordinary thing. He loved us, brothers and sisters, when we did not even know Him, and yet hated the Unknown; when we did not even dimly understand His love to us, and peradventure even ridiculed it, or at least neglected it. Yet He kept on loving us until He loved us into loving Him. But even since then, what has been our character? Are you satisfied with what you have been towards the Well-beloved? Are you content with your conduct towards the Bridegroom of your souls? I trow that you are not; and yet, notwithstanding your lukewarmness, your backsliding, your dishonouring of His name, your unbelief, your pride, your love of others, He still loves you; and even now, if you are not enjoying fellowship with Him, He has not gone away from you, for His word still is, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." He loves, He loves on, and He loves still. Many waters cannot quench His love, neither can the floods drown it. It is indeed "marvellous lovingkindness." Can you think of a better adjective than that? I cannot, yet I am conscious that even it does not fully express the miraculous character of this all-enduring love which will not take our "No" for an answer, but still says, "Yes,—'yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." Oh, this wonderful, this matchless, this unparalleled, this inconceivable, this infinite love! No human language can adequately describe it, so let us sit still, and marvel at that which we cannot even understand.

There is much in God's lovingkindness to be marvelled at *in its strange ingenuity.* I might keep on with this topic for ever, applying one word and another to it; yet I should never have shown you even the tithe of its wonders, for it is an altogether inexhaustible theme. But it is wonderful how God deals with us with such a sacred ingenuity of tenderness. He seems to be always thinking of something, for our good; while we, on our part, appear to be always testing His love in one way or another. Some fresh want is discovered only to receive a new supply of grace. Some fresh sin breaks out only to be blotted out with the ever-pardoning blood of Jesus. We get into fresh difficulties only to receive fresh aid. The further I go on my way to heaven, the more I do admire the road as well as wonder at the goal to which that road shall bring me. "O world of wonders!" said John Bunyan; "I can say no less." They tell us, nowadays, that the world is worn-out, and that there is no joy in life, and nothing fresh to afford delight. Ah, me! they talk of the attractions of fiction and of the playwright's art, and I know not what besides. They must needs travel all round the world to get a new sensation; and many a man, to-day, is like the Emperor Tiberus, who offered large sums of money to anyone who could invent a new pleasure, meaning, alas! too often, a new vice, or a new way of practising it. But staying at home with Christ has more wonders in it than gadding abroad with all the wisest of the world. There is more to marvel at in half an inch of the way to heaven than there is in a thousand leagues of the ordinary pathway of unbelieving men. They call their joys by the name of "life," and say that they must "see life"; but the apostle John tells us that "he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"; that is to say, he is dead. Death has its varieties of worms and rottenness; there are charnel-houses *and* charnel-houses, various processes and methods of corruption, and no doubt there is a science that men may learn in the cemetery, and call it life, if they like; but, oh! if they did but once see Christ upon the cross, they would learn that they had been blind till then. If they did but know His lovingkindness, they would rejoice in it in the sick-chamber, in the long weary night watches, when every bone prevented sleep; they would even recognize it in the arrows of death that smote wife, and child, and brother. They would see it, not only in the table loaded for the supply of hunger, and in the garments furnished against the cold and in every common blessing of providence; but they would also see it in every despondency, in every deficiency, in every cross, and every loss; and, seeing it, they would keep on saying, "It is all for the best; it is all better than the best could have been if it had been left to me. It is marvellous; it is marvellous lovingkindness." I do believe that, when we get to heaven, one of the wonders of the glory-land will be to look back upon the road over which we have travelled. It will be marvellous to note the way in which God has led us; and we shall, as our hymn puts it,—

> "Sing with rapture and surprise,
> His lovingkindness in the skies."

I must now leave this part of my subject with you, only again urging you to think over the truth of which I have been speaking, that all God's lovingkindness to His people is marvellous.

II. Now, secondly, THIS LOVINGKINDNESS WE SHOULD DESIRE TO SEE. The Psalmist says, "Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness"; and we ought to ask God to let us see it; and that, I think, in four ways.

First, *let me see it with my intellect, that I may adore.* Help me, O blessed Spirit, to see and understand what is the lovingkindness of God to my soul! I know that it is written of some that "they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Let me be among the number of those truly wise ones. O Lord, make me wise to see the end and design of Thy providence as well as the providence itself! Make me wise to perceive how Thou hast prepared Thy grace to meet my depravity, how Thou dost adapt Thine upholdings to the slipperiness of the way, and to the feebleness of my feet. Often shed a ray of light upon some passage in my life which, otherwise, I could not comprehend; and let the light stay there till I begin to see and to know why Thou didst this and why Thou didst that. "Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness." I am sure, dear friends, that the lessons of a man's own life are too often neglected; but there is, in the life of any ordinary child of God,—let me pick you out wherever you may be, John, Mary, Thomas,—enough to fill you with wonder and admiration of the lovingkindness of the Lord if your mind be but sufficiently illuminated to perceive the hand of God in it, and to see what God purposed by it. He sometimes uses strange means for producing blessed results. With His sharp axe, He will cut down all our choice trees; as by a whirlwind or a tornado,

He will devastate our gardens, and make our fields a desolation; and He will do it all in order that He may drive us away from the City of Destruction, and make us go on pilgrimage to the Celestial City, where the axe can never come, and the leaves will never fade. In His mysterious dealings with us, the Lord often seems to push us backward that we may go forward, and to deluge us with sorrow that He may immerse us into blessing. That is His way of working wondrously; and if we did but understand it, according to the prayer of the text, "Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness," we should be full of adoring wonder.

The next meaning I would give to this prayer would be, *Lord, show Thy lovingkindness to my heart, that I may give Thee thanks.* Lord, I know that Thou hast been very good to me; but I pray Thee to show my heart how good Thou hast been, by letting me see how unworthy I have been of this Thy kindness. It is very profitable, sometimes, to sit down, and rehearse the lovingkindness of God, mingling with it penitential reflections upon your own shortcoming. If you do this, you will at last break out with some such cry as this, "Why is all this mercy shown to me?" I know a dear brother in Christ, a clergyman, whose name is Curme; he divides it into two syllables, "*Cur me*," so as to make it mean, "Why me? Why is all this goodness given to me, Lord?" And that is a question which I, too, would fain ask, "Why me, Lord?"

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room;
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

Is this kindness, and this, and this, all meant for me? Can it really be intended for me? Such reflections as these will make me realise more than ever how "marvellous" is God's "lovingkindness" to me, and will fill my soul with adoring gratitude and thanksgiving.

Then, next, we ought to pray the Lord to *show His "marvellous lovingkindness" to our faith, that we may again confide in Him.* If he will cause the eye of our faith to see that He has this "marvellous lovingkindness" toward us, we shall be the more ready to rely upon Him in all the straits into which we may yet be brought. Dost thou believe it, my dear friend? Brother in Christ, dost thou believe that God loves thee? Thou knowest how sweet it is to be sure that thy child loves thee. Though it may well do so, because of its many obligations to thee, yet is it sweet for its warm cheek to touch thine, and to hear it say, "Father, I love you." But, oh! it is sweeter far for God to say, "I love you." Read the Song of Solomon through, and be not afraid to appropriate the message of that sweet and matchless Canticle. Hear in it the voice of Jesus saying to thee, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." Such words as those may be sensuous to those who are sensuous, but they are deeply spiritual to those who are spiritual; and, oh, the bliss of having such words as those to come from the Christ of God to us! Why, sometimes, when our Lord thus speaks to us, we hardly know how to bear our excess of joy. I would not ask for a better holiday than to have one hour alone with Jesus; to be undisturbed by any earthly care, and just to think of nothing else but the love of God,—the love of God to me. Oh, that it now were shed abroad, in all its fulness, in this poor heart of mine! O love divine, what is there that can ever match Thine inexpressible sweetness? Truly it is "marvellous lovingkindness." Again I ask you,—Do you believe this? Are you sure you do? Pray God to show it to your faith distinctly and clearly, so that you shall be absolutely sure of it, and practically depend upon it whenever you need it.

One other meaning of the text may be, *show Thy "marvellous lovingkindness" to me now in my experience, that I may rest in Thee.* Let me now, at this present moment, O my God, experience something of that lovingkindness in my soul, in whatever condition I may happen to be, that I may be so flooded with the consciousness of it that I may do nothing else but sit in solemn silence before Thee, and adore Thee, while beholding the blazing splendour of Thy love! I cannot say any more about this part of my theme, but must leave you to fill up the gaps in the sermon. This is not a topic upon which one should venture to speak if he wants to say all that should or could be said upon it.

III. So, thirdly, dear friends, I remark that IT SHOULD BE OUR DESIRE—and there are times when it should especially be our desire—TO SEE THIS "MARVELLOUS LOVINGKINDNESS" OF GOD DISPLAYED TO US IN ITS MARVELLOUSNESS.

I will make plain to you what I mean directly; and, first, we would see it *as pardoning great sin.* I expect we have here, in this assembly, at least one whose sin lies very heavy on his conscience. We do not find many such people come out to week-evening services, but yet I thank God that they do come here. Your sin is very great, dear friend. I cannot exaggerate it, because your own sense of its greatness far surpasses any descriptions I could give. You feel that, if God were to pardon you, it would be a marvellous thing. If He were, in one moment, to take all your guilt away, and to send you home completely forgiven, it would be a marvellous thing. Yes, it would, it would; but I beg you to pray this prayer, "Lord, show forth Thy marvellous lovingkindness in me." God is constantly doing wonders; then, glorify His name by believing that he can work this miracle of mercy for you. Do not be afraid even to sing,—

"Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Are matchless, God-like, and divine:
But the fair glories of Thy grace
More God-like and unrivall'd shine:
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?"

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and saved immediately. Trust Him now; and marvellous though it will be to you, I have shown you that God's lovingkindness is all marvellous, and that the extraordinary is ordinary with God, and that the marvellous is but an every-day thing with Him. Pray for this "marvellous lovingkindness" to be manifested to you, and you shall have it. One said, "If God ever saves me, He shall never hear the last of it." You may say the same, and resolve that, henceforth, having had much forgiven, you will love much; having been saved from great sin, you will tell it on earth, and tell it in heaven; and, if you could, you would even wish to make hell itself resound with the wondrous story,—

"'Tell it unto sinners tell,
I am, I am out of hell';—

" and what is more, I am on the road to heaven, for God's 'marvellous lovingkindness' has been shown to me."

So God's lovingkindness may be seen as pardoning great sin; and, next, it may be seen *as delivering from deep trouble.* I may be addressing some poor child of God who is sorely perplexed. These are very trying times, and we constantly meet with godly people, who have a sincere desire to provide things honest in the sight of all men, but who do not find it easy to do so. Some very gracious people have got into a cleft stick; and however they will get out, they cannot imagine. If this is your case, dear friend, I expect you feel very much as John Fawcett's hymn puts it,—

> " My soul, with various tempests toss'd,
> Her hopes o'erturn'd, her projects cross'd,
> Sees every day new straits attend,
> And wonders where the scene will end."

Well, now, if you are ever brought through all your troubles, it will be " marvellous lovingkindness " to you, will it not? Then, go to God with the prayer, " Show me Thy marvellous lovingkindness," and He will do it. He will bring you up, and out, and through; —not, perhaps, in the way you would like to come, but He will bring you out in the best way. " Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." Always expect the unexpected when you are dealing with God. Look to see in God, and from God, what you never saw before; for the very things, which will seem to unbelief to be utterly impossible, will be those which are most likely to happen when you are dealing with Him whose arm is omnipotent, and whose heart is faithful and true. God grant you grace, dear friend, thus to use the prayer of our text as the means of delivering you from deep trouble!

Here is another way to use it. I think you may pray it thus,—at all events, I mean to do so, whether you will or not,—" Lord, reveal Thy marvellous lovingkindness to me, *so as to give me high joys and ecstasies of delight.*" I sometimes envy those good people who never go up and never go down, always keeping at one level; theirs must be a very pleasant experience indeed. Still, if ever I do get on the high horse, then I go up far beyond anything I can describe. If ever I do ride upon the clouds, then I do not envy the people who keep along the smooth road. Oh, what deep depressions some of us have had! We have gone down to the very bottoms of the mountains, and the earth with her bars has seemed to be about us for ever; but, after just one glimpse of God's everlasting love, we have been up there where the callow lightnings flash, resting and trusting among the tempests, near to God's right hand. I think, nay, I am sure we may pray for this experience. Should not the preacher of the Word wish to know the fulness of love divine? Should not the teacher of the young long to learn all that he can concerning God's infinite love? Though this is the love that passeth knowledge, should not every Christian wish to know all that is knowable of this great love of God? Then let us pray, " Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness." It was truly said, " Thou canst not see God's face, and live "; but I have been inclined to say, " Then, let me see God's face, and die." John Welsh said, when God was flooding his soul with a sense of His wondrous love, " Hold, Lord, hold! I am but an earthen vessel, and Thou wilt break me." If I had been there, and I could have borne no more, I would have said, " Do not hold, Lord; break the poor earthen vessel, let it go all to pieces; but anyhow, let Thy love be revealed in me!" Oh, that I might even die of this pleasurable pain of knowing too much of God, too much of the ineffable delight of fellowship with Him! Let us be very venturesome, beloved, and pray, " Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness."

And, when we have done that, I think we may put up this prayer for ourselves, *as to our own usefulness.* You want to do good, dear brother,—dear sister. Well, then, pray to God, " Show me Thy marvellous lovingkindness, O Lord! Use even such a feeble creature as I am. Let heaven, and earth, and hell itself, see that Thou canst save souls by poor ignorant men as well as by inspired apostles and learned doctors. Lord, in my chapel, show Thy marvellous lovingkindness. Crowd it with people, and bring many of them to Christ. In my class, Lord, show Thy marvellous lovingkindness. If there never was a Sunday-school class in which all were saved, Lord, let it be done in mine. Make it a marvellous thing." A dear brother, who prayed at the prayer-meeting before this service, kept on pleading that God would bless me again as He had done before. I liked that prayer; it was as if the friend meant to say to the Lord, " Whatever Thou didst in years gone by, do the like over again. If ever it was a marvellous thing to see how the people thronged to hear the Word, Lord, make it more marvellous still." I recollect when some people called our early success " a nine days' wonder." Well, well, well, it has been a good long nine days, anyhow. But, oh, that we might have another nine days like it,— just such another nine days! May God be pleased to send us as many conversions as we had at the first,—aye, and I shall add, and ten times as many! And if ever there have been revivals in the Church of God that have been really marvellous, brothers and sisters, let us take up the cry, " Lord, show Thy marvellous lovingkindness again. Send us another Whitefield, and another Wesley, if such will be the kind of men that will bless the world. Send us another Luther, another Calvin, another Zwingle, if such be the men that will bless the world. Lord, send us another Augustine, or another Jerome, if such be the men by whom Thou wilt bless the world. But, in some way or other, Lord, show us Thy marvellous lovingkindness." " Oh, but!" some would say, " we do not want any excitement. That is an awful thing, you know,—anything like excitement." And, then, perhaps they add, " We have heard so much of what has been done in previous revivals. It has all ended in smoke, and therefore we really dread the repetition of such an experience." Well, then, brother, you go home, and pray, " Lord, show me Thy moderate lovingkindness." When you are on your knees, to-night, pray, " Lord, save half-a-dozen souls here and there.

> " 'We are a garden wall'd around,
> Chosen and made peculiar ground;
> A little spot inclosed by grace
> Out of the world's wide wilderness';—

" Lord, make it yet smaller screw us up tighter still, to the glory of Thy blessed name!" I don't think any of you can pray that prayer; you shall if you

like ; but, for my part, I mean to pray, and I hope many of you will join me in it, and may God hear us ! "Show us Thy marvellous lovingkindness." Oh, for some new miracle of mercy to be wrought in the earth ! Oh, for some great thing to be done, such as was done of old ! Shall it be so, or not ? On this promise it shall depend : "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." But if our mouths be not open, we cannot expect to get the blessing : "According to your faith be it unto you." The Lord grant that our faith may expect to see His "marvellous lovingkindness" displayed yet more and more ! Amen and Amen.

THE HOPE OF FUTURE BLISS

"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."—Psalm xvii. 15.

IT would be difficult to say to which the gospel owes most, to its friends or to its enemies. It is true, that by the help of God, its friends have done much for it ; they have preached it in foreign lands, they have dared death, they have laughed to scorn the terrors of the grave, they have ventured all things for Christ, and so have glorified the doctrine they believed ; but the enemies of Christ, unwittingly, have done no little, for when they have persecuted Christ's servants, they have scattered them abroad, so that they have gone everywhere preaching the Word ; yea, when they have trampled upon the gospel, like a certain herb we read of in medicine, it hath grown all the faster : and if we refer to the pages of sacred writ how very many precious portions of it do we owe, under God, to the enemies of the cross of Christ ! Jesus Christ would never have preached many of His discourses had not His foes compelled Him to answer them ; had they not brought objections, we should not have heard the sweet sentences in which He replied. So with the book of Psalms : had not David been sorely tried by enemies, had not the foemen shot their arrows at him, had they not attempted to malign and blast his character, had they not deeply distressed him, and made him cry out in misery, we should have missed many of those precious experimental utterances we here find, much of that holy song which he penned after his deliverance, and very much of that glorious statement of his trust in the infallible God. We should have lost all this, had it not been wrung from him by the iron hand of anguish. Had it not been for David's enemies, he would not have penned his Psalms ; but when hunted like a partridge on the mountains, when driven like the timid roe before the hunter's dogs, he waited for awhile, bathed his sides in the brooks of Siloa, and panting on the hill-top a little, he breathed the air of heaven and stood and rested his weary limbs. Then was it that he gave honour to God ; then he shouted aloud to that mighty Jehovah, who for him had gotten the victory. This sentence follows a description of the great troubles which the wicked bring upon the righteous, wherein he consoles himself with the hope of future bliss. "As for me," says the patriarch, casting his eyes aloft ; "As for me," said the hunted chieftain of the caves of Engedi—"As for me," says the once shepherd boy, who was soon to wear a royal diadem—"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Thy likeness."

In looking at this passage to-night, we shall notice first of all, the *spirit of it*, secondly, the *matter of it ;* and then, thirdly, we shall close by speaking of *the contrast which is implied in it.*

I. First, then, the SPIRIT OF THIS UTTERANCE, for I always love to look at the spirit in which a man writes, or the spirit in which he preaches ; in fact, there is vastly more in that than in the words he uses.

Now, what should you think is the spirit of these words ? "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."

First, they breathe the spirit of a man *entirely free from envy.* Notice, that the Psalmist has been speaking of the wicked. "They are inclosed in their own fat : with their mouth they speak proudly." "They are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes." But David envies them not. "Go," says he, "rich man, in all thy riches—go, proud man, in all thy pride—go, thou happy man, with thine abundance of children ; I envy thee not ; as for me, my lot is different : I can look on you without desiring to have your possessions ; I can well keep that commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet,' for in your possessions there is nothing worth my love ; I set no value upon your earthly treasures ; I envy you not your heaps of glittering dust ; for my Redeemer is mine." The man is above envy, because he thinks that the joy would be no joy to him—that the portion would not suit his disposition. Therefore, he turns his eye heavenward, and says, "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness." O ! beloved, it is a happy thing to be free from envy. Envy is a curse which blighteth creation ; and even Eden's garden itself would have become defaced, and no longer fair, if the wind of envy could have blown on it ; envy tarnisheth the gold ; envy dimneth the silver ; should envy breathe on the hot sun, it would quench it ; should she cast her evil eye on the moon, it would be turned into blood, and the stars would fly astonished at her. Envy is accursed of heaven ; yea, it is Satan's first-born—the vilest of vices. Give a man riches, but let him have envy, and there is the worm at the root of the fair tree ; give him happiness, and if he envies another's lot, what would have been happiness becomes his misery, because it is not so great as that of some one else. But give me freedom from envy ; let me be content with what God has given me, let me say, "Ye may have yours, I will not envy you—I am satisfied with mine ;" yea, give me such a love to my fellow creatures that I can rejoice in their joy, and the more they have the more glad I am of it. My candle will burn no less brightly because theirs outshines it. I can rejoice in their prosperity. Then am I happy, for all around tends to make me blissful, when I can rejoice in the joys

of others, and make their gladness my own. Envy! oh! may God deliver us from it! But how, in truth, can we get rid of it so well as by believing that we have something that is not on earth, but in heaven? If we can look upon all the things in the world and say, "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied by-and-by!" then we cannot envy other men, because their lot would not be adapted to our peculiar taste. Doth the ox envy the lion! Nay, for it cannot feed upon the carcase. Doth the dove grieve because the raven can gloat itself on carrion? Nay, for it lives on other food. Will the eagle envy the wren his tiny nest? Oh, no! So the Christian will mount aloft as the eagle, spreading his broad wings, he will fly up to his eyrie amongst the stars, where God hath made him his nest, saying, "As for me, I will dwell here; I look upon the low places of this earth with contempt; I envy not your greatness, ye mighty emperors; I desire not your fame, ye mighty warriors; I ask not for wealth, O Crœsus; I beg not for thy power, O Cæsar; as for me, I have something else; my portion is the Lord." The text breathes the spirit of a man free from envy. May God give that to us!

Then, secondly, you can see that there is about it the air of a man who is *looking into the future.* Read the passage thoroughly, and you will see that it all has relation to the future; because it says, "As for me, I *shall.*" It has nothing to do with the present: it does not say, "As for me I do, or I am, so-and-so," but "As for me, I *will* behold Thy face in righteousness; I *shall* be satisfied, when I awake." The Psalmist looks beyond the grave into another world; he overlooks the narrow death-bed where he has to sleep, and he says, "When I awake." How happy is that man who has an eye to the future; even in worldly things we esteem that man who looks beyond the present day; he who spends all his money as it comes in will soon bring himself to rags. He who lives on the present is a fool; but wise men are content to look after future things. When Milton penned his book he might know, perhaps, that he should have little fame in his lifetime; but he said, "I shall be honoured when my head shall sleep in the grave." Thus have other worthies been content to tarry until time has broken the earthen pitcher, and suffered the lamp to blaze; as for honour, they said, "We will leave that to the future, for that fame which comes late is often most enduring," and they lived upon the "shall" and fed upon the future. "I shall be satisfied" by-and-by. So says the Christian. I ask no royal pomp or fame now; I am prepared to wait, I have an interest in reversion; I want not a pitiful estate here—I will tarry till I get my domains in heaven, those broad and beautiful domains that God has provided for them that love Him. Well content will I be to fold my arms and sit me down in the cottage, for I shall have a mansion of God, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Do any of you know what it is to live on the future—to live on expectation—to live on what you are to have in the next world—to feast yourselves with some of the droppings of the tree of life that fall from heaven—to live upon the manna of expectation which falls in the wilderness, and to drink that stream of nectar which gushes from the throne of God? Have you ever gone to the great Niagara of hope, and drank the spray with ravishing delight; for the very spray of heaven is glory to one's soul! Have you ever lived on the future, and said, "As for me, I *shall* have somewhat, by-and-by?" Why, this is the highest motive that can actuate a man. I suppose this was what made Luther so bold, when he stood before his great audience of kings and lords, and said, "I stand by the truth that I have written, and will so stand by it till I die; so help me God!" Methinks he must have said, "I *shall* be satisfied by-and-by; I am not satisfied now, but I *shall* be soon." For this the missionary ventures the stormy sea; for this he treads the barbarous shore; for this he goes into inhospitable climes, and risks his life, because he knows there is a payment to come by-and-by. I sometimes laughingly tell my friends when I receive a favour from them, that I cannot return it, but set it up to my Master in heaven, for they shall be satisfied when they awake in His likeness. There are many things that we may never hope to be rewarded for here, but that shall be remembered before the throne hereafter, not of debt, but of grace. Like a poor minister I heard of, who, walking to a rustic chapel to preach, was met by a clergyman who had a far richer berth. He asked the poor man what he expected to have for his preaching. "Well," he said, "I expect to have a crown." "Ah!" said the clergyman, "I have not been in the habit of preaching for less than a guinea, anyhow." "Oh!" said the other, "I am obliged to be content with a crown, and what is more, I do not have my crown now, but I have to wait for that in the future." The clergyman little thought that he meant the "crown of life that fadeth not away!" Christian! live on the future; seek nothing here, but expect that thou shalt shine when thou shalt come in the likeness of Jesus, with Him to be admired, and to kneel before His face adoringly. The Psalmist had an eye to the future.

And again, upon this point, you can see that David, at the time he wrote this, was *full of faith.* The text is fragrant with confidence. "As for me," says David, no *perhaps* about it; "I *will* behold Thy face in righteousness; I *shall* be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." If some men should say so now, they would be called fanatics, and it would be considered presumption for any man to say, "I *will* behold thy face, I *shall* be satisfied"; and I think there are many now in this world who think it is quite impossible for a man to say to a certainty, "I know, I am sure, I am certain." But, beloved, there are not one or two, but there are thousands and thousands of God's people alive in this world who can say with an assured confidence, no more doubting of it than of their very existence, "I *will* behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake in Thy likeness." It is possible, though perhaps not very easy, to attain to that high and eminent position wherein we can say no longer do I *hope*, but I *know*; no longer do I trust, but I am persuaded; I have a happy confidence; I am sure of it; I am certain; for God has so manifested Himself to me that now it is no longer "if" and "perhaps," but it is positive, eternal, "shall." "I *shall* be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness." How many are there here of that sort? Oh! if ye are talking like that, ye must expect to have trouble, for God never gives strong faith without fiery trial; He will never give a man the power to say that "shall" without trying him; He will not build a strong ship without subjecting it to very mighty storms; He will not make you a mighty warrior, if He does not intend to try your skill in battle. God's swords must be used; the old Toledo blades of heaven must be smitten

against the armour of the evil one, and yet they shall not break, for they are of true Jerusalem metal, which shall never snap. Oh! what a happy thing to have that faith to say, "I shall." Some of you think it quite impossible, I know; but it "is the gift of God," and whosoever asks it shall obtain it; and the very chief of sinners now present in this place may yet be able to say long before He comes to die, "I shall behold Thy face in righteousness." Methinks I see the aged Christian. He has been very poor. He is in a garret where the stars look between the tiles. There is his bed. His clothes ragged and torn. There are a few sticks on the hearth: they are the last he has. He is sitting up in his chair; his paralytic hand quivers and shakes, and he is evidently near his end. His last meal was eaten yester morn; and as you stand and look at him, poor, weak, and feeble, who would desire his lot? But ask him, "Old man, wouldst thou change thy garret for Cæsar's palace? Aged Christian, wouldst thou give up these rags for wealth, and cease to love thy God?" See how indignation burns in his eyes at once! He replies, "'As for me, I *shall*,' within a few more days, 'behold His face in righteousness; I *shall* be satisfied' soon; here I never shall be. Trouble has been my lot, and trial has been my portion; but I have 'a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'" Bid high; bid him fair; offer him your hands full of gold; lay all down for him to give up his Christ. "Give up Christ?" he will say, "no, never!"

"While my faith can keep her hold,
I envy not the miser's gold."

Oh! what a glorious thing to be full of faith, and to have the confidence of assurance, so as to say, "I *will* behold Thy face; I *shall* be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness."

Thus much concerning the spirit of David. It is one very much to be copied and eminently to be desired.

II. But now, secondly, THE MATTER OF THIS PASSAGE. And here we will dive into the very depths of it, God helping us; for without the Spirit of God I feel I am utterly unable to speak to you. I have not those gifts and talents which qualify men to speak; I need an afflatus from on high, otherwise I stand like other men and have nought to say. May that be given me; for without it I am dumb. As for the matter of this verse, methinks it contains a double blessing. The first is a beholding—"I will behold Thy face in righteousness"; and the next is a satisfaction—"I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness."

Let us begin with the first, then. David expected that he should *behold God's face*. What a vision will that be, my brethren! Have you ever seen God's hand? I have seen it, when sometimes He places it across the sky, and darkens it with clouds. I have seen God's hand sometimes, when the cars of night drag along the shades of darkness. I have seen His hand when, launching the thunder-bolt, His lightning splits the clouds and rends the heavens. Perhaps ye have seen it in a gentler fashion, when it pours out the water and sends it rippling along in rills, and then rolls into rivers. Ye have seen it in the stormy ocean —in the sky decked with stars, in the earth gemmed with flowers; and there is not a man living who can know all the wonders of God's hand. His creation is so wondrous that it would take more than a life-time to understand it. Go into the depths of it; let its minute parts engage your attention; next take the telescope, and try to see remote worlds, and can I see all God's handiwork—behold all His hand? No, not so much as one millionth part of the fabric. That mighty hand wherein the callow comets are brooded by the sun, in which the planets roll in majestic orbits; that mighty hand which holds all space, and grasps all beings—that mighty hand, who can behold it? but if such be His hand, what must His face be? Ye have heard God's voice sometimes, and ye have trembled; I myself, have listened awe-struck, and yet with a marvellous joy, when I have heard God's voice, like the noise of many waters, in the great thunderings. Have you never stood and listened, while the earth shook and trembled, and the very spheres stopped their music, while God spoke with His wondrous deep bass voice? Yes, ye have heard that voice; and there is a joy marvellously instinct with love which enters into my soul, whenever I hear the thunder. It is my Father speaking, and my heart leaps to hear Him. But you never heard God's loudest voice. It was but the whisper when the thunder rolled. But if such be the voice, what must it be to behold His face? David said, "I will behold Thy face." It is said of the temple of Diana, that it was so splendidly decorated with gold, and so bright and shining, that a porter at the door always said to every one that entered, "Take heed to your eyes, take heed to your eyes; you will be struck with blindness unless you take heed to your eyes." But oh! that view of glory! That great appearance. The vision of God! to see Him face to face, to enter into heaven, and to see the righteous shining bright as stars in the firmament; but best of all, to catch a glimpse of the eternal throne! Ah! there He sits! 'Twere almost blasphemy for me to attempt to describe Him. How infinitely far my poor words fall below the mighty subject! But to behold God's face. I will not speak of the lustre of those eyes, or the majesty of those lips, that shall speak words of love and affection; but to behold His face! Ye who have dived into the Godhead's deepest sea and have been lost in its immensity, ye can tell a little of it! Ye mighty ones, who have lived in heaven these thousand years, perhaps ye know, but ye cannot tell what it is to see His face. We must each of us go there, we must be clad with immortality. We must go above the blue sky, and bathe in the river of life: we must outsoar the lightning, and rise above the stars, to know what it is to see God's face. Words cannot set it forth. So there I leave it. The hope the Psalmist had was, that he might see God's face.

But there was a *peculiar sweetness mixed with this joy*, because he knew that he should behold God's face *in righteousness*. "I shall behold Thy face in righteousness." Have I not seen my Father's face here below? Yes, I have, "through a glass darkly," But has not the Christian sometimes beheld Him, when in his heavenly moments earth is gone, and the mind is stripped of matter? There are some seasons when the gross materialism dies away, and when the ethereal fire within blazes up so high that it almost touches the fire of heaven. There are seasons, when in some retired spot, calm and free from all earthly thought, we have put our shoes from off our feet, because the place whereon we stood was holy ground; and we have talked with God! even as Enoch talked with Him, so has the Christian held intimate communion with his Father. He has heard His love-whispers; he has told out his heart, poured out his

sorrows and his groans before Him. But after all he has felt that he has not beheld His face in righteousness. There was so much sin to darken the eyes, so much folly, so much frailty, that we could not get a clear prospect of our Jesus. But here the Psalmist says, "I will behold Thy face in righteousness." When that illustrious day shall arise, and I shall see my Saviour face to face, I shall see Him "in righteousness." The Christian in heaven will not have so much as a speck upon his garment; he will be pure and white; yea, on the earth he is

"Pure through Jesus' blood, and white as angels are."

But in heaven that whiteenss shall be more apparent. Now, it is sometimes smoked by earth, and covered with the dust of this poor carnal world; but in heaven he will have brushed himself, and washed his wings, and made them clean; and then will he see God's face in righteousness. My God! I believe I shall stand before Thy face as pure as Thou art Thyself; for I shall have the righteousness of Jesus Christ; there shall be upon me the righteousness of a God. "I shall behold Thy face in righteousness." O Christian, canst thou enjoy this? Though I cannot speak about it, dost thy heart meditate upon it? To behold His face for ever; to bask in that vision! True, thou canst not understand it; but thou mayest guess the meaning. To behold His face in righteousness!

The second blessing, upon which I will be brief, is *satisfaction*. He will be satisfied, the Psalmist says, when he wakes up in God's likeness. Satisfaction! this is another joy for the Christian when he shall enter heaven. Here we are never thoroughly satisfied. True the Christian is satisfied from himself; he has that within which is a well-spring of comfort, and he can enjoy solid satisfaction. But heaven is the home of true and real satisfaction. When the believer enters heaven I believe his *imagination* will be thoroughly satisfied. All he has ever thought of he will there see; every holy idea will be solidified; every mighty conception will become a reality; every glorious imagination will become a tangible thing that he can see. His imagination will not be able to think of anything better than heaven; and should he sit down through eternity, he would not be able to conceive of anything that should outshine the lustre of that glorious city. His imagination will be satisfied. Then his *intellect* will be satisfied.

"Then shall I see, and hear, and know,
All I desired, or wished, below."

Who is satisfied with his knowledge here? Are there not secrets we want to know—depths in the arcana of nature that we have not entered? But in that glorious state we shall know as much as we want to know. The *memory* will be satisfied. We shall look back upon the vista of past years, and we shall be content with whatever we endured, or did, or suffered on earth.

"There, on a green and flowery mount,
My wearied soul shall sit,
And with transporting joys recount
The labours of my feet."

Hope will be satisfied, if there be such a thing in heaven. We shall hope for a future eternity, and believe in it. But we shall be satisfied as to our hopes continually: and the whole man will be so content that there will not remain a single thing in all God's dealings, that he would wish to have altered; yea, perhaps I say a thing at which some of you will demur—but the righteous in heaven will be quite satisfied with the damnation of the lost. I used to think that if I could see the lost in hell, surely I must weep for them. Could I hear their horrid wailings and see the dreadful contortions of their anguish surely I must pity them. But there is no such sentiment as that known in heaven. The believer shall be there so satisfied with all God's will, that he will quite forget the lost in the idea that God has done it for the best, that even their loss has been their own fault, and that He is infinitely just in it. If my parents could see me in hell they would not have a tear to shed for me, though they were in heaven, for they would say, "It is justice, Thou great God, and Thy justice must be magnified, as well as Thy mercy;" and moreover, they would feel that God was so much above His creatures that they would be satisfied to see those creatures crushed if it might increase God's glory. Oh! in heaven I believe we shall think rightly of men. Here men seem great things to us; but in heaven they will seem no more than a few creeping insects that are swept away in ploughing a field for harvest; they will appear no more than a tiny handful of dust, or like some nest of wasps that ought to be exterminated for the injury they have done. They will appear such little things when we sit on high with God, and look down on the nations of the earth as grasshoppers, and "count the isles as very little things." We shall be satisfied with everything; there will not be a single thing to complain of. "I *shall* be satisfied."

But when? "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." But not till then. No, not till then. Now here a difficulty occurs. You know there are some in heaven who have not yet waked up in God's likeness. In fact, none of those in heaven have done so. They never did sleep as respects their souls; the waking refers to their bodies, and they are not awake yet—but are still slumbering. O earth! thou art the bedchamber of the mighty dead! What a vast sleeping-house this world is! It is one vast cemetery. The righteous still sleep; and they are to be satisfied on the resurrection morn, when they awake. "But," say you, "are they not satisfied now? They are in heaven: is it possible that they can be distressed?" No, they are not; there is only one dissatisfaction that can enter heaven—the dissatisfaction of the blest that their bodies are not there. Allow me to use a simile which will somewhat explain what I mean. When a Roman conqueror had been at war, and won great victories, he would very likely come back with his soldiers, enter into his house, and enjoy himself till the next day, when he would go out of the city and then come in again in triumph. Now, the saints, as it were, if I might use such a phrase, steal into heaven without their bodies; but on the last day, when their bodies wake up, they will enter in their triumphal chariots. And, methinks, I see that grand procession, when Jesus Christ, first of all, with many crowns on His head, with His bright, glorious body, shall lead the way. I see my Saviour entering first. Behind Him come the saints, all of them clapping their hands, all of them touching their golden harps, and entering in triumph. And when they come to heaven's gates, and the doors are opened wide to let the King of Glory in, now will the angels crowd at the windows, and on the house-tops, like the inhabitants in the Roman triumphs,

to watch them as they pass through the streets, and scatter heaven's roses and lilies upon them, crying, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!" "I shall be satisfied" in that glorious day, when all His angels shall come to see the triumph, and when His people shall be victorious with Him.

One thought here ought not to be forgotten, and that is, the Psalmist says we are to wake up *in the likeness of God.* This may refer to the soul; for the spirit of the righteous will be in the likeness of God as to its happiness, holiness, purity, infallibility, eternity, and freedom from pain; but specially, I think, it relates to the body, because it speaks of the waking. The body is to be in the likeness of Christ. What a thought! It is—and alas! I have had too many such to-night—a thought too heavy for words. I am to awake up in Christ's likeness. I do not know what Christ is like, and can scarcely imagine. I love sometimes to sit and look at Him in His crucifixion. I care not what men say—I know that sometimes I have derived benefit from a picture of my dying crucified Saviour; and I look at Him with His crowns of thorn, His pierced side, His bleeding hands and feet, and all those drops of gore hanging from Him; but I cannot picture Him in heaven, He is so bright, so glorious; the God so shines through the man; His eyes are like lamps of fire; His tongue like a two-edged sword; His head covered with hair as white as snow, for He is the Ancient of Days; He binds the clouds round about Him for a girdle; and when He speaks, it is like the sound of many waters! I read the accounts given in the book of Revelation, but I cannot tell what He is; they are Scripture phrases, and I cannot understand their meaning; but whatever they mean, I know that I shall wake up in Christ's likeness. Oh! what a change it will be, when some of us get to heaven! There is a man who fell in battle with the word of salvation on his lips; his legs had been shot away, and his body had been scarred by sabre thrusts; he wakes in heaven, and finds that he has not a broken body, maimed and cut about, and hacked and injured, but that he is in Christ's likeness. There is an old matron, who has tottered on her staff for years along her weary way; time has ploughed furrows on her brow; haggard and lame, her body is laid in the grave. But oh! aged woman, thou shalt arise in youth and beauty. Another has been deformed in his life-time, but when he wakes, he wakes in the likeness of Christ. Whatever may have been the form of our countenance, whatever the contour, the beautiful shall be no more beautiful in heaven than those who were deformed. Those who shone on earth, peerless, among the fairest, who ravished men with looks from their eyes, they shall be no brighter in heaven than those who are now passed by and neglected: for they shall all be like Christ.

III. But now to close up, HERE IS A VERY SAD CONTRAST IMPLIED. We shall all slumber. A few more years and where will this company be? Xerxes wept, because in a little while his whole army would be gone; how might I stand here and weep, because within a few more years others shall stand in this place, and shall say, "The fathers, where are they?" Good God! and is it true? Is it not a reality? Is it all to be swept away? Is it one great dissolving view? Ah! it is. This sight shall vanish soon; and you and I shall vanish with it. We are but a show. This life is but "a stage whereon men act"; and then we pass behind the curtain, and we there unmask ourselves, and talk with God. The moment we begin to live we begin to die. The tree has long been growing that shall be sawn to make you a coffin. The sod is ready for you all. But this scene is to appear again soon. One short dream, one hurried nap, and all this sight shall come o'er again. We shall all awake, and as we stand here now, we shall stand together, perhaps, even more thickly pressed. But we shall stand on the level then—the rich and poor, the preacher and hearer. There will be but one distinction—righteous and wicked. At first we shall stand together. Methinks I see the scene. The sea is boiling; the heavens are rent in twain; the clouds are fashioned into a chariot, and Jesus riding on it, with wings of fire, comes riding through the sky. His throne is set. He seats Himself upon it. With a nod He hushes all the world. He lifts His fingers, opens the great books of destiny, and the book of our probation, wherein are written the acts of time. With His fingers He beckons to the hosts above. "Divide," says He, "divide the universe." Swifter than thought all the earth shall part in sunder. Where shall I be found when the dividing comes? Methinks I see them all divided; and the righteous are on the right. Turning to them, with a voice sweeter than music, He says, "Come! Ye have been coming—keep on your progress! Come! it has been the work of your life to come; so continue. Come and take the last step. 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.'" And now the wicked are left alone; and turning to them, He says, "Depart! Ye have been departing all your life long; it was your business to depart from Me; ye said, 'Depart from me, I love not Thy ways.' You have been departing, keep on, take the last step!'" They dare not move. They stand still. The Saviour becomes the Avenger. The hands that once held out mercy, now grasp the sword of justice; the lips that spoke loving-kindness, now utter thunder; and with a deadly aim, He lifts up the sword, and sweeps amongst them. They fly like deer before the lion; and enter the jaws of the bottomless pit.

But never, I hope, shall I cease preaching, without telling you what to do to be saved. This morning I preached to the ungodly, to the worst of sinners, and many wept—I hope many hearts melted—while I spoke of the great mercy of God. I have not spoken of that to-night. We must take a different line sometimes; led, I trust, by God's Spirit. But O! ye that are thirsty, and heavy laden, and lost and ruined, mercy speaks yet once again to you! Here is the way of salvation. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." "And what is it to believe?" says one; "is it to say I know Christ died for me?" No, that is not to believe; it is part of it, but it is not all. Every Arminian believes that; and every man in the world believes it who holds that doctrine, since he conceives that Christ died for every man. Consequently that is not faith. But faith is this: to cast yourself on Christ. As the negro said, most curiously, when asked what he did to be saved; "Massa," said he, "I fling myself down on Jesus, and dere I lay; I fling myself flat on de promise, and dere I lay." And to every penitent *sinner* Jesus says, "I am able to save to the uttermost;" throw thyself flat on the promise,

and say, "Then, Lord, Thou art able to save *me*." God says, "Come now, let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, and though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." Cast thyself on Him, and thou shalt be saved. "Ah!" says one, "I am afraid I am not one of God's people; I cannot read my name in the book of life." A very good thing you can't; for if the Bible had everybody's name in it, it would be a pretty large book; and if your name is John Smith, and you saw that name in the Bible, if you do not believe God's promise now, you would be sure to believe that it was some other John Smith. Suppose the Emperor of Russia should issue a decree to all the Polish refugees to return to their own country; you see a Polish refugee looking at the great placards hanging on the wall, he looks with pleasure, and says, "Well, I shall go back to my country." But some one says to him, "It does not say Walewski." "Yes," he would reply, "but it says Polish refugees: Polish is my Christian name, and refugee my surname, and that is me." And so, though it does not say your name in the Scriptures, it says lost sinner. Sinner is your Christian name, and lost is your surname; therefore, why not come? It says, "lost sinner;"—is not that enough? "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." "Yes, but," another one says, "I am afraid I am not elect." O! dear souls, do not trouble yourselves about that. If you believe in Christ, you *are* elect. Whoever puts himself on the mercy of Jesus is elect; for he would never do it if he had not been elect. Whoever comes to Christ, and looks for mercy through His blood, is elect, and he shall see that he is elect afterwards; but do not expect to read election till you have read repentance. Election is a college to which you little ones will not go till you have been to the school of repentance. Do not begin to read your book backwards, and say Amen before you have said your paternoster. Begin with "Our Father," and then you will go on to "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory;" but begin with "the kingdom," and you will have hard work to go back to "Our Father." We must begin with faith. We must begin with—

"Nothing in my hands I bring."

As God made the world out of nothing, He always makes His Christians out of nothing; and he who has nothing at all to-night, shall find grace and mercy, if he will come for it.

Let me close up by telling you what I have heard of some poor woman, who was converted and brought to life, just by passing down a street, and hearing a child, sitting at a door, singing—

"I am nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is all in all."

That is a blessed song; go home and sing it; and he who can rightly apprehend those little words, who can feel himself vanity without Jesus, but that he has all things in Christ, is not only not far from the kingdom of heaven, but he is there in faith, and shall be there in fruition, when he shall wake up in God's likeness.

DIVINE INTERPOSITIONS

"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters."—Psalm xviii. 16.

I DO not know how you feel, my brethren, at this time, but as for myself, a heavy cloud seems to hang over me all the day. The overwhelming calamity of last Tuesday, so crushing and so far reaching, of which we must have spoken to each other, I suppose, every hour during the past week, cannot be removed from the thoughts of our minds or from the affections of our hearts. The whole of London may well be likened to that ancient city of which we read—"The city Shushan was perplexed." Every man has been asking his fellow, "Have you lost a friend?" and no man wonders when the answer is, "Alas, I have been sorely bereaved." In our own immediate circle we have borne a special share of the grief, for five, at least, of those who are in church membership with us have been removed from our midst, and we can scarcely speak with any of our brethren without discovering that they have lost some connection or friend. Alas, that unhappy vessel has sunk with a more precious freight than ever loaded Spanish galleon, and her wreck has brought a greater loss to our city than if she had carried untold gold. We cannot help thinking of this dire affliction, and, therefore, we had better think of it with some practical purpose.

I believe that this sudden grief comes, like every other event, from God, and comes as a voice from God to this our city—a voice which, we trust, will be heard and regarded. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name; hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." We are of the mind of that old prophet who said, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6). Cometh there anything in the form of calamity upon the sons of men without the permission, control, and overruling of the Lord? Assuredly not. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." I know that many minds are so stunned by this tremendous blow, that they can hardly think of God in connection with it, and half wish to believe that the Omnipresent was not there. The problem staggers their reason, and they are unable to leave it among the mysteries of faith. As yet they have not gained the confidence of Job, who denied that affliction cometh out of the dust, but attributed it to the Lord, saying, "He taketh away: who can hinder Him?" Even some who love the Lord, and trust Him, are somewhat of the mind of Mary and Martha when they said, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died"; while others who should know better would timidly conceal their belief in an overruling providence, lest the ribald world should scoff at them. Let them scoff, I say;

for our God is none the less glorious because His ways are far above and out of our sight. It is an atheistical thought which would put God out of any place; if He be not everywhere, He is nowhere; omnipresence is an essential of Godhead. If His hand ruleth not over evil it is not omnipotent, and thus again it lacks another essential attribute of deity. It would be dreadful to suppose Him to have a limited dominion: "His kingdom ruleth over all."

We are not as those who believe in two co-existent forces, each supreme, one of whom shall create disasters, and the other shall distribute blessings, The prince of evil is, according to our faith, subordinate to the great Lord of all. Thus saith Jehovah, by the mouth of His servant Isaiah, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and I create evil: I the Lord do all these things." He reigneth in the calm summer's day, and gives us the precious fruits of harvest, but He is equally present and regnant in the hurricane which destroys, or the blight which desolates. His providence speeds the ship to its desired haven, but it is equally His providence which sinks the barque and its mariners to the bottom of the sea. It is His power which looses the bands of Orion and binds the sweet influence of the Pleiades; His are the lightnings as well as the sunbeams, the thunderbolts as well as the raindrops. He is able to make the heaven as iron and the earth as brass, so that our land shall not yield her increase; He can call for a famine and break the whole staff of bread; for famine, pestilence, and war are as rods in His hand. Everywhere is God, and in all things His hand is present: in the things which seem to us to be evil as well as in the events which appear to us to be good, God is at work. He doeth no wrong, for God is not tempted of evil, neither tempteth He any man, but we speak of physical evil, which causeth sorrow, pain, and death among men, and we say that certainly God is there. If not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father, we are sure that no great calamity can befall us apart from Him. He is not far from us in our deepest sorrow, and however we may trace a calamity to the carelessness or the mistake of men, these are but the second causes, and we see behind all mere detail the permit of the Lord. If it were not so, mourners would be deprived of the greatest reason for submission, and the surest source of consolation.

Even where a terrible event is the result of crime, God is not excluded. He shares not the guilt, but He overrules the act. Think of the crucifixion of our Lord, and remember that though the sin of it lay heavy upon those who perpetrated it, yet the grand design of it was God's. Read Peter's words in the Acts: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Who shall deny that God was at Calvary, though sin there reached its culminating point?

We freely admit that we do not understand this, and therefore we do not attempt to explain it; but we believe and adore. Happily, we need not attempt to justify the ways of God to man, for He asks no defence at our hands, and deigns not to give any account of His matters: this only is our resolve, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him."

Now, the question which has very naturally suggested itself to many is this,—If there be a providence, why does it permit these terrible evils? It is dreadful that human life should be lost on such a scale: God is omnipotent, nobody doubts that; why, then, does He not interfere to save? That shall suggest to us the first point of our discourse this morning, that *miraculous interpositions in the affairs of this life are not to be expected*, and we may not hope literally to use the words of our text and say, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." Still, secondly, we shall note that, according to our text, *providential interpositions of another kind are vouchsafed*; and thirdly, and best of all, *gracious interpositions are given for the salvation of men*. What though the Lord doth not nowadays send from above, and take His servants, and draw them by miracle out of the waters of the river, yet doth He uplift us from the depths of trouble, and especially doth He upbear us from the deeps of sin to our eternal salvation, for thus saith the Lord, "I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring My people from the depths of the sea."

I. First, then, MIRACULOUS INTERPOSITIONS IN THE CALAMITIES OF THIS LIFE ARE NOT TO BE EXPECTED. I am not standing here as an advocate for God to defend His character because He does not thus interpose, for to objectors His sole answer is, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" If you will accuse your Maker He will not care to answer you. You who have forged the accusation may fashion an answer, if it seem good unto you. Yet there is a difficulty which none can deny, and that difficulty lies in a fact. Why is there any evil at all, seeing that the good God is almighty, and sits upon the throne? This is the old puzzle which none can answer. The negro put it in a very natural form when he asked the missionary, if God be so much stronger than the devil, why does He not kill the devil and make an end of his mischief? Just so; that is the top and bottom of the matter. There is the question, but who can answer it? A fool may raise in an hour more objections than the wisest man could remove in a century. Now, the cleverest theory will not alter facts. What you and I may think is a very small matter compared with what really is, and it is quite certain that there is moral evil in the world, and that there is also a God; that there is physical evil in the world, and yet love is supreme; and that the Almighty permits fire and water to destroy His creatures, and does not interpose to rescue them, and yet He is full of tenderness and pity. There be some of course who will dare to condemn their Maker, and call Him by I know not what horrible names. I have even heard such a word as "monster" hissed from between proud lips. Again I say it is not worth our while to answer such objectors, because such persons are not pervious to explanation, nor willing to receive it; and then again, it is a small matter to the Most High what such persons may think of Him. He doeth as He pleases and asks no leave from His creatures.

But now just for a minute let us consider the question which we trust is modestly proposed. Suppose that every time a great danger threatened we might expect a miraculous interposition from heaven, what then? The supposition is not absurd, for there might be such an interposition; we must admit the possibility since God is almighty. The train is thundering along the iron way, it will dash into another, and many lives will be destroyed, but if the Lord willed it He could put His hand upon the engine and stay it in its full career. The vessel freighted with eight hundred lives is about to sink;

but if the Lord willed it He could buoy it up in the hollow of His hand. Yet He does not move; the iron road is strewn with the dead, the river is gorged with corpses. We do not know all the reasons for this non-interference, but yet we think we can see a little, which little we will think upon. For, first, *such interpositions would change the whole arrangement of the world:* it would not be the same place at all. The Lord has made this world, and He governs it by certain fixed laws. If those laws were variable, and were continuously being altered, it would be another form of creation altogether, and man had need to be another creature. His physical, moral, and even spiritual condition would be changed from top to bottom. It was the Lord's arrangement that He should put forth His power in certain ways which we call the laws of nature, and by that arrangement He abides. There is no such independent force as "nature," as some are always dreaming; nor is there any energy in mere laws of nature apart from God's own power. You may write all the laws you like, but there is no power in laws, there must be a power in the king to carry out the laws. All power emanates from God, be it what it may; He is the source and fountain of all the forces which operate throughout creation; but He has been pleased from the beginning to determine that His power shall usually go forth in certain ways, and under fixed laws and regulations. He can suspend those laws when He pleases; He can quench the violence of fire, stop the mouths of lions, and make water to stand upright as a heap; but He has not often done so, and in these days He never does so. I think we can in a measure see why; for if such were the case continually, the whole plan and purpose with which He made the present world would have been abandoned, and another mode of power would have taken its place.

Recollect, too, *that whatever the plan of God is, it is now being carried out under the shadow of the Fall.* There had been, I suppose, neither pain, nor sickness, nor death, had there been no sin. If it had been possible for a race to have multiplied from the glades of Eden, and to have gone forth into a wider Paradise as pure and holy as Adam first came from his Maker's hands, I can believe that there would have been no famine, no war, no catastrophe of shipwreck by sea, nor of accident by land; but however multitudinous the human race might have become its records would have been all unstained with agonizing details such as those which blacken the broadsheets of to-day. But, alas, man has fallen, and to a race in such a condition it would not be consistent that everything should be of sunlight and summer; there must now be heard the roar of the storm and the cry of death, as the fruit of sin. Render calamity impossible and what mark would there be of the divine displeasure for man's revolt? Wherein indeed would sin differ as to its consequences from obedience and holiness? Think for a little, and you will see reason for God's staying His hand from rescue.

Furthermore, *if interpositions were given to save the lives of godly men alone, as some would have it, then this world would become the place of judgment,* which it is not intended to be. It still remains among many persons as a superstition that if there is an accident, and people suffer, there must have been some special sin in the victims of the disaster; and yet our Lord has told us that the men upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were not sinners above others, and the Galileans who were slain by Pilate were not sinners above other Galileans. I pray you dismiss from your minds the idea that a sudden death is necessarily a judgment. Never draw any inference from the destruction of a building, or the wreck of a ship, or an explosion, or aught of that nature, as to the character of the persons who perish, for if you do you will be guilty of cruel injustice. What if some gracious man be spared, ascribe the deliverance to providence, but do not suppose that those who perished were less gracious than he. You shall find that men of bad character sometimes escape where saints are left to die. Because I said the other day that providence had saved a certain godly woman, foolish persons drew the inference that I condemned those who perished. No sentiment would have been further from my mind. I ascribe to providence death as well as life, and draw no inference as to the character of the person. What if a man has found a watery grave in the *Princess Alice*, do not therefore imagine that God was angry with him, for he may now be in Paradise, and at any rate the same wreck carried down with it many of the Lord's beloved. Now, if God were to interpose and save His own people whenever they were in danger, this world would become the place of judicial separation, which it is not and is not meant to be: judgment is reserved for the world to come. When Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and sit upon His great white throne—then will He separate the tares from the wheat, but now they are to grow together. Then will He put the goats on the left and the sheep on the right, but for the time present they feed in the same pastures. One event happeneth to them all; as it happeneth to the fool so happeneth it to the wise. This is not the land of judgment, but of longsuffering; not the place wherein God giveth sentence, but waiteth patiently awhile. There is a judgment of nations in this world, but that of individuals, with rare exceptions, is reserved for the final account.

Beloved, note once again that *if God were to interpose in the case of all calamities it would involve many evils.* For, observe, if next year the mass of farmers should refuse to sow the fields, if over whole nations the land should be left to produce only weeds, there would be great scarcity of corn. Suppose that in such cases God should interpose and cause harvests suddenly to grow by miracle, that our teeming millions might escape starvation, what would be the consequence? Why, it would encourage idleness everywhere; men would say, "The Lord is too good to let us starve, and therefore we may allow the plough to rust, and dance away the hours." Would that be well? Suppose again that when a contagious disease comes into a district the Lord miraculously prevented it from being fatal although the carelessness of men may have left fever-lairs in rotting, overcrowded houses enough to pollute the very air. Suppose, I say, that we all neglected sanitary laws, and then knew that a merciful God would not let the poor people die of fever, or of cholera, then the filthiness of our cities would increase till they became huge dung-hills, and man who is great enough now at polluting rivers and defiling God's earth in every imaginable way, would go on to turn the whole earth into one monstrous globe of rottenness. But now even pests and plagues and fevers have their good side, they are watchmen to sound an alarm, prophets to give us warning. They arouse man to discover the laws of his being, and thus they benefit the race. Suppose again that whenever there is a

likelihood of there being an accident God were to send an angel at once to interpose, and avert the collision or the wreck, what would happen? Why then, of course, every railway and steamboat company might go in for accidents in any quantity, seeing they would be harmless, and might even become attractive. There would be no reason for keeping a watch at the ship's bow, and no necessity for brakes or signals. There would be no longer any need to be careful about human life, but we might each one be as reckless as he pleased, and gratify himself with experiments which could not end fatally. Such a state of things would destroy many of the virtues, and render many vices harmless. I cannot suppose a world regulated upon such a system; I can imagine God divinely interposing and suspending His own laws now and then, as pleaseth Him, for some great purpose of instruction; but it appears wise and good for all concerned that, having made man what he is, the Creator should rather leave him to take the consequence of violating the fixed laws of matter than make those laws variable and uncertain.

Again, dear friends, *divine interpositions of a miraculous sort would not be attended with the advantage to the ungodly which we might suppose*, because if there were miracles of mercy on the behalf of God's people to snatch them from a watery grave, or from the devouring element of fire, or from the deadly consequences of a collision, then we might expect to have, and naturally should have, miracles of judgment, too. If you get into the wilderness, and manna falls from heaven, and water leaps from the rock, remember you have also entered a land where the earth opens to swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and where the very sand breeds fiery serpents to sting to death the rebels against God. You cannot have the mercy-wonder interposing without having the judgment-wonder side by side with it; and on the whole it is a more lenient mode of dealing on God's part to let sinners alone, and to let one event happen to all men for a while, because the longsuffering of God leadeth the sinner to repentance, and the sorrow that falleth upon the child of God is blessed to him. If all accidental deaths were punishments it would be a far more terrible state of things than that which is now before us; and therefore the matter is best as it is.

If we had wonders of miraculous deliverance often before us they would not impress mankind as we imagine. If God were always suffering the wicked to drown or burn, and always snatching the righteous from the midst of every danger, men would not think much of it after all; they might be slightly impressed at first, but by-and-by they would harden their hearts. In Egypt there was light in the houses of the Israelites when all was dark with the Egyptians, and God smote Egypt heavily while He was blessing Israel; but this fact did not affect Pharaoh, for he only hardened his heart the more. When in the wilderness the Israelites, murmuring against God, saw some of their companions swallowed up and destroyed, it very little affected them; for soon after they began murmuring against Moses, and charged him with destroying the people of God. All things considered, the arrangement is best as it is, and the Lord knows it is so, and, therefore, continues the method of letting physical law take its course, although occasionally it may destroy hundreds of lives.

Neither would it be so great a gain to the godly, as some imagine, always to have their lives spared in times of danger. We have to die some day, brothers and sisters, and we have nothing here below which might make us anxious to postpone the hour of our departure. It is as well to die one way as another; at least, there is small choice in the modes of death. If one were asked by what death he should glorify God, he might be long in the choosing, and probably would then choose that which would be most painful. Some are afraid to go to sea lest they should be drowned, and yet there is little reason for the fear. When a captain was asked whether he was not afraid to go to sea he said, "Not at all." "But your father was drowned, captain?" "Yes." "Your grandfather was drowned?" "Yes." "Your brothers have been drowned?" "Yes." "Are you not afraid to go to sea?" "No," said he, "not at all; for I may ask you the same question. Your father is dead?" "Yes." "Where did he die?" "In his bed." "And his father, where did he die?" "In his bed." "And his father?" "In his bed." "And your brothers, where have they died?" "In their beds." "Are you not, then, afraid to go to bed?" Certainly we must die somewhere or other, and we shall not die one single minute before the ordained period. I am a sufficient believer in predestination to feel sure that every bullet has its billet, and that no death can befall the man whom God ordains to live. God hath appointed all things, and His people are safe everywhere, whether they live or die. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel"; the powers of darkness cannot harm us though they put forth all their craft and power. The Lord has declared that he who hath made God his refuge shall abide beneath His shadow, and therefore we may go where duty calls us without trembling, and we may die when God bids our spirit return without the slightest fear. We ask no immunity from death. Why should we be absolved from it? It is better to die than to live full often, inasmuch as it is better to be in heaven than to remain in banishment below. So there I leave that matter of the non-interposition of God to think very briefly of interpositions which do occur.

II. PROVIDENTIAL INTERPOSITIONS ARE FREQUENT AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE: they can often say, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." Divine interpositions come in the way of deliverance from floods of trouble. Have you not experienced them? How strikingly has God delivered some of us! What remarkable preservations of life have we enjoyed; not miraculous, certainly, but full of wonder for all that. We have as much reason to praise God for our deliverances as if the laws of nature had been suspended, for we have been quite as completely preserved. What helps we have had in the hour of sorrow, when one after another our beloved have been taken from us, or when they have gone to the very edge of the grave, and yet have been spared to us. How often have we been helped in business troubles and saved from impending failure or serious loss! In times of slander, when our character has been belied, how graciously has God brought to light our innocence! I say again, not by miracle, but yet very marvellously has our God delivered us. In answer to prayer God worketh in His own way for the good of His people without stopping one single wheel of providence; without violating one single law of nature, God is able to work the same end as we sometimes wish He would work

by a miracle. He will not quench the violence of the flame, but yet a precious life shall be snatched from a burning house. He will not prevent the water from drowning, and yet in how many cases in answer to prayer have vessels been saved and the lives of men preserved by unexpected incidents! He will not stop the ordinary run of business, nor alter the way in which the world goes on, and yet He knows how to help the poor, and to bless the struggling tradesman, and to bring up the righteous from deep distress. A miracle is a rough procedure after all, if I may dare say so, compared with the Lord's present methods. The grandest achievement of all is for the Lord God to work miraculous results without miracles, to produce by common means, in answer to the cry of His servants, that which appears to be impossible without a suspension of natural laws. See how the Lord allows all the forces of nature to drive on in their ordinary course, and yet the outcome of it all is that His servant is delivered and his prayers answered.

God doth this by very varied ways. We have known some who have been brought out of deep waters by having health suddenly restored to them, or by having the health of those upon whom their maintenance depended renewed. This is God's mercy, but let Him be praised for it. Sometimes circumstances have greatly changed; a man has been going down hill for years as to his business, but something quite unexpected has happened, and he has just as gradually risen to a position of comfort. My friends, believe in the unexpected. I was about to utter a paradox, and say expect the unexpectable. Believe that God will do for you something which you know nothing about. The Lord always has a plan in reserve. You think He has reached His last, and you will be left to perish; but it is not so. At the right moment He will bring forth some new and surprising stroke of wisdom, which He did but postpone to the particular moment, so that when He performs it, and draws His servant out of deep waters, the praise and the glory will the more fully redound to His name. We have known the Lord save His servants in the hour of trouble by touching the hearts of their enemies; those that were most unkind and cruel have suddenly become the most generous and thoughtful. At other times enemies have died or have been put to confusion, like the wicked Haman when he plotted the destruction of the Jews. The Lord has hanged up Haman that His chosen might be delivered. Mordecai has gone from the king's gate to the king's house, and Haman has ascended from the king's table to the king's gallows. I cannot instance all the ways in which the Lord makes clear the pathway of His people, but this I know that often in our lives some of us have had to pause and sing, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters."

Some will not see the hand of God, but I warrant you, brethren, those who have been delivered out of the deep waters will see it. Their experience teaches them that God is yet among us. Others may talk about "laws of nature," as if God were gone to sleep and had left the world wound up like a watch to go without Him; but those who have been in sore affliction and tribulation, and have been brought out therefrom, will for ever bless and extol Him who is a very present help in trouble. Yes, my brethren, the way by which we have come hitherto is as full of God as this city is full of men. There are deserts which the foot of man hath never trodden, but there is no wilderness where the foot of God hath not been. What say you, my beloved friends, you are not fanatics, neither has the enthusiasm of devotion carried you out of your minds; but are you not conscious of distinct providential deliverances? "Conscious of them," say you, "indeed, if we did not speak of them with joy and thankfulness, the very stones of the street would cry out against us for our wicked silence. Many and many a time hath He sent, from above, and rescued us. We are, like Moses drawn out of the waters, and like him we would be servants of the Lord."

III. Now, thirdly, INTERPOSITIONS IN MATTERS OF GRACE ARE THE CHIEF OF ALL. As best I can I should like to conclude with a few words upon this subject. God does not, even to save the souls of His chosen, violate any of His laws. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Every transgression shall have its just punishment and reward." Yet the Lord would save His people. How should He make these two things agree,—how should He be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly? It is in the person of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ that we see how one law has been made to counteract and yet to honour another, to remove its direful consequence and yet to make it honourable. You recollect that the law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered; and there was a law made by Ahasuerus that on a certain day the people of all countries might gather themselves together and kill the Jews. Haman had promulgated this royal edict far and wide, and the king could not alter it. Mark the wise method by which the cruel law was met; they made another law, which was—that the Jews might defend themselves, might slay those who tried to kill them, and take all their property for a spoil. This met the case, though no edict was revoked. Now, God does not and never will alter His law that sin must be punished; but forth comes another law that, inasmuch as the first sin was committed by a representative man, a representative man should be permitted to come in and bear the penalty which was consequent thereon. This has been done; no law has been broken, and yet God's mercy has had free course.

Now let us think a minute or two upon this great salvation and how it is described in the text. "He sent from above." Oh, blessed Lord, the whole race of man was sinking in the old vessel of the covenant of works which had been cut in pieces by the first sin: they were all going down *en masse* to destruction. Then Thou didst send from above. But who was He that was sent? Not the brightest of the cherubim nor the chief of the angelic band, but HE came, the messenger of the covenant, whom we delight in, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Most High, the brightness of His Father's glory. He was the Messiah, the sent One, and He descended from above that He might work out our redemption. Brethren, let your hearts leap for joy as you behold the messenger of the covenant of grace, even Jesus Christ, the adorable and ever blessed Son of the Highest.

Now, note the next word, "He took me." When we had lost all hold on God then did this blessed messenger take hold on us. He accepted us as the Father's gift to Him, and accepted a charge as the great Shepherd of the sheep, that He would keep and preserve those whom His Father gave Him, though they were ready to perish. Then what a hold He took on us. He took not up angels, but He took up

the seed of Abraham, by becoming a man. Babe in Bethlehem, labourer at Nazareth, suffering man at Gethsemane, Thou hast taken indeed a hold on us, such as Thou wouldst not relax in life or death! "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," and so being sent from above He took hold upon us.

Then what a wondrous *drawing* took place after that grip had once been given. He drew us out of many waters, entering into them Himself, plunging into the rivers of grief and infirmity, and then into the waters of the curse, being "made a curse for us": descending deep, as it were, into the very depths of hell to bring up the Lord's jewels, that they might be delivered from the pit. Oh, the matchless uplifting which He gave to us when He drew us out of many waters by His own suffering life and agonizing death. Fix your eyes, brethren, upon the work of Jesus. See the human race all sinking. Behold how hopeless and helpless it is; and see Him descending, walking the waters, snatching with His own right hand sinking men and women from the billows of destruction, and landing them on the Rock of Ages, putting a new song into their mouths. As you feel that you are partakers of this deliverance, let each one of you say, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters."

This was the great deed itself, but, just a minute, I ask you to remember the application of it to your own experience. Do you recollect when you felt everything sinking from beneath you? My own self-wreck will help me to describe your experience. I had sailed on gallantly in the good vessel of my own works, hearing music, and full of delight, never dreaming of danger; but suddenly the law of God came along, moving unswervingly in its terrible course, and it cut into the vessel of my works, as though it had been vanity itself. Down it began to sink, and I with it. I looked around for something I could lay hold upon, but nothing availed. The priest was there and offered me his inventions, but I knew him of old, and knew that he would sink as well as I. What, then, could he do for me? Ceremonials were there, but I knew that they prove bubbles to a man who trusts in them. Hopes of salvation by self-mortification were there, and the like, but they clearly could not bear the weight of such a sinner as I was. I sank, I sank, nor had I will or wish to be saved, nor did I struggle for life; yet Jesus came, whose will of grace precedes our will, whose purpose of love outruns our desire for salvation. "He took me"; well do I recollect His grasp. He took me and made me more conscious of my danger than I had been before. He took me, by His Holy Spirit, and I knew that He had taken me, for I began to feel His grip tightening upon me. He drew me gradually to look at Him, to trust Him, and to leave myself and all my hopes entirely in His hand, then He drew me right out of the many waters and made my heart to sing for joy. Do you not recollect the time with yourself? As you look with wonder upon some friend who has been rescued from the great calamity of this week, I want you to feel that you may look with equal wonder upon yourself, for you have experienced a greater rescue. You have been delivered from sinking into the pit that hath no bottom, a sinking down in sin and into the lower depths of corruption. He came from heaven, He took you, He drew you out of many waters, therefore praise and bless His name! You were too anxious to hope, and yet He taught you to hope in His mercy. You were too despairing to struggle, but He made you exercise holy violence to enter the kingdom. You were too weary and despondent to trust, but He led you to faith. His divine Spirit wrought all your works in you, and here you are sitting in this house of prayer this morning to say, "He hath delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

Now, I should not wonder if since then you have been pretty nearly shipwrecked as to your spiritual hopes, and have a second and a third time been rescued. You have begun to grow somewhat cold, and you have wandered from the Lord, and you have therefore, dreaded the total destruction of all true religion within your heart. Then you have cried out in fear "I have been a hypocrite, or a mere formalist, and shall perish after all." But when you were ready to give all up under the temptation of the powers of darkness the Lord has again restored you. Has He not sent from above and taken you out of the deep yet again? Yes, blessed be His name, He has sought you and led you back to His ways. If I address a backslider who feels as if he were sinking deeper and deeper, I would pray for him that he may yet know how Christ can save a sinking Peter and bring a runaway Jonah to the shore again.

Last of all, we shall soon come into the many waters of death: sooner, perhaps, than we think. To some the stream of death is very shallow. We have known certain of the saints go over dry-shod, singing all the way. They can hardly have been conscious of death, nor have known when they were last on earth and when they were first in heaven. But there are others who have to cross Jordan at a time when it overfloweth its banks, and, like Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, they are up to their necks in the stream, and need words of comfort. You remember how one said, "Fear not, brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good." There is a rocky bottom all the way across. No slippery sand nor sucking mud, but sound rock from shore to shore, and however deep it is, it is never so deep as to drown a believer's hope, nor destroy his soul. Yet I can imagine the best of saints to be flooded with many troubles in their last hours—physical weakness, depression of spirit, temptations of Satan, family difficulties, all increase the swellings of Jordan. Do you know what will happen? He will send from above, He will take you, and He will draw you out of many waters, and you shall rise to glory. What a heaven of heavens above others will you feel when you go right up from the depths to the heights! To leap right away from *de profundis* to *in excelsis*, from the death-sweat and the expiring faintness to the ecstasy and the ineffable glory, how transcendent the bliss! What an exchange it will be, brethren, for those who have grown old and decrepit, or for those who could scarcely say even a word to testify their dying faith, to find themselves on a sudden rid of every ache and pain, and all their withering flesh, and to be disembodied in perfect liberty, charmed with the beatific vision of their Lord, from whom they are never to part again. Why, methinks, we might almost choose the death-road of the two. Some are very fond of expecting that their Lord will surely come in time to prevent their dying. Ah, well, you may be very thankful if it happens, but I do not think it is the way I shall go, nor can I say that I envy you the prospect in which you delight. In heaven you will come to us who die, and ask us—What was it to

fall asleep in Jesus? What was the feeling of putting off the body? What was the joy of being made like our Covenant Head in death? I do not say that you will regret that you did not descend into the tomb, but of this I am sure, none of us who shall sleep will think that you had any preference over us.

> "Where should the dying members rest,
> But with their dying Head?"

If the Master went that way, descending into the sepulchre, and so up by the hill of resurrection to the golden gate, we will not even envy Enoch and Elias, though they were permitted to take the reserved route, and enter the city by the postern gate. It shall be all well with us if we are resting in Jesus, for at the last He will send from above and take us and draw us out of many waters. To His name be praises. Amen.

"THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"

"In them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."—Psalm xix. 4, 5, 6.
"The Sun of righteousness."—Malachi iv. 2.

WE should feel quite justified in applying the language of the 19th Psalm to our Lord Jesus Christ from the simple fact that He is so frequently compared to the sun; and especially in the passage which we have given you as our second text, wherein He is called "the Sun of Righteousness." But we have a higher justification for such a reading of the passage, for it will be in your memories that, in the 10th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul, slightly altering the words of this psalm, applies them to the gospel and the preachers thereof. "Have they not heard?" said he, "Yea, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." So that what was here spoken of the sun by David, is referred by Paul to the gospel, which is the light streaming from Jesus Christ, "the Sun of Righteousness." We can never err if we allow the New Testament to interpret the Old: comparing spiritual things with spiritual is a good mental and spiritual exercise for us; and I feel therefore, that we shall not be guilty of straining the text at all when we take the language of David in relation to the sun, and use it in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not your hearts often say, "What shall we do, or what shall we say to render honour unto our Redeemer?" Have you not often felt confounded as to what offering you shall bring to Him? If you had been possessor of all the worlds, you would have laid them at His feet: if the universe had been your heritage, you would cheerfully have resigned it to him, and felt happy in stripping yourself of everything, that He might be rendered the more glorious by your sacrifice. Since you have not all this wealth, have you not again and again asked of your soul,

> "Oh, what shall I do,
> My Saviour to praise?"

I would write the best of poems if so I could extol Him, but the faculty is not in me; I would sing the sweetest of songs, and compose the most melting music, if I could, and count art, and wit, and music exalted by being handmaidens to Him; but, wherewithal shall I adore Him, before whom the best music on earth must be but discord; and how shall I set Him forth, the very skirts of whose garments are bright with insufferable light? At such times you have looked the whole world through to find metaphors to heap upon Him; you have culled all the fair flowers of nature, and made them into garlands to cast at His feet, and you have gathered all earth's gems and precious things wherewith to crown His head, but you have been disappointed with the result, and have cried out with our poet:—

> "The whole creation can afford
> But some faint shadows of my Lord;
> Nature, to make His beauties known,
> Must mingle colours not her own."

At such times, while ransacking land, and sea, and sky for metaphors, you have probably looked upon the sun, and have said: "This great orb, the lord of light and lamp of day, is like my Saviour; it is the faint image of His excellent glory whose countenance shineth as the sun in its strength." You have done well to seize on such a figure. What Milton calls the golden-tressèd sun is the most glorious object in creation, and in Jesus the fulness of glory dwells; the sun is at the same time the most influential of existences, acting upon the whole world, and truly our Lord is, in the deepest sense, "of this great world both eye and soul; He "with benignant ray sheds beauty, life, and joyance from above." The sun is, moreover, the most abiding of creatures; and therein it is also a type of Him who remaineth from generation to generation, and is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The king of day is so vast and so bright that the human eye cannot bear to gaze upon him; we delight in his beams, but we should be blinded should we continue to peer into his face; even yet more brilliant is our Lord by nature, for as God He is a consuming fire, but He deigns to smile upon us with milder beams as our Brother and Redeemer. Jesus, like the sun, is the centre and soul of all things, the fulness of all good, the lamp that lights us, the fire that warms us, the magnet that guides and controls us; He is the source and fountain of all life, beauty, fruitfulness, and strength; He is the fosterer of tender herbs of penitence, the quickener of the vital sap of grace, the ripener of fruits of holiness, and the life of everything that grows within the garden of the Lord. Whereas to adore the sun would be idolatry; it were treason not to worship ardently the divine Sun of Righteousness.

Jesus Christ is the great, the glorious, the infinitely blessed; even the sun fails to set Him forth;

but, as it is one of the best figures we can find, be it ours to use it this day. We will think of Jesus as the Sun this morning; first, *as in the text;* secondly, *as He is to us ;* and then, thirdly, for a few minutes, *we will bask in His beams.*

I. First, then, we will contemplate JESUS AS THE SUN IN THE TEXT.

Note how the passage begins: "In them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun." Kings were accustomed in their pompous progresses through their dominions to have canopies of splendour borne aloft over them, so that marching in the midst of their glittering soldiery they were themselves the main attraction of the gorgeous pageant. Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Church is, as it were, traversing the heavens in a majestic tabernacle, and, like the sun, scattering His beams among men. The Redeemer is canopied by the adoration of His saints, for He "inhabiteth the praises of Israel." He is from day to day advancing in His glorious marchings through the universe, conquering and to conquer, and He will journey onward till the dispensation shall termiate, and the gospel age shall be closed by His second advent. When the text saith that there is a tabernacle set for the sun in the firmament, we are reminded of Christ as dwelling in the highest heavens. He is not alone the Christ of ancient history, but He is the Christ of to-day. Think not always of Him as the lowly man despised and rejected, as nailed to the cross, or buried in the tomb ; He is not here, for He is risen, but He still exists, not as a dream or phantom, but as the real Christ. Doubt it not, for up yonder, in the seventh heaven, the Lord has set a tabernacle for the Sun of Righteousness. There Jesus abides in splendour inconceivable, the joy and glory of all those blessed spirits who, having believed in Him on the earth, have come to behold Him in the heavens.

> "Bright, like a sun, the Saviour sits,
> And spreads eternal noon ;
> Nor evenings there, nor gloomy nights,
> To want the feeble moon."

That Jesus lives is a deep well of consolation to the saints, and did we always remember it our hearts would not be troubled. If we always remembered that Jesus both lives and reigns, our joys would never wither. We worship Him, it is true, as one who was slain and hath redeemed us unto God by His blood ; but we also extol Him as one who is "alive for evermore, and hath the keys of death and of hell."

Let your faith to-day behold Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, even the Father. He sits there because His atoning work is done, and He is receiving the infinite reward which His Father promised Him. He is exalted as a king upon His throne, expecting until His enemies are made His footstool. He dwells within His tabernacle of praise, adored and admired by angels and glorified spirits. He sits there, not as a weary one, feeble and exhausted, but with the keys of universal monarchy at His girdle, for "the government is upon His shoulder, and His name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God." I want you fully to grasp the thought of the living Saviour,—of the sun in His tabernacle in the highest heavens, for this must be the fulcrum upon which we shall work this morning. We shall get our leverage here : the living Saviour, the mighty Saviour, the reigning Saviour ; He is the Church's joy and hope in the present and for all years to come.

The text proceeds to speak of Jesus as the sun, and describes Him first as *a bridegroom coming out of His chamber.* A beautiful description indeed of the sun when he rises in the early morning. He comes forth from the vast obscure, as from within a secret chamber. He withdraws the veil of night, and floods the earth with fluid gold. From curtains of purple and vermillion, he looks forth, and scatters orient pearl around him. Clad with a blaze of glory, he begins the race of day. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ when He rose from the dead, was as the sun unveiling itself. He came forth from the sepulchre as a bridegroom from His chamber. Observe that dear name of bridegroom. The Lord of heaven and earth, between whom and us there was an infinite distance, has deigned to take our humanity into union with Himself of the most intimate kind. Among men, there is no surer mode of making peace between two contending parties, than for a marriage to be established between them. It has often so been done, and thus wars have been ended, and alliances have been established. The Prince of Peace on heaven's side condescends to be married to our nature, that henceforth heaven and earth may be as one. Our Lord came as the Bridegroom of His Church out of His chamber, when He was born of the virgin and was revealed to the shepherds and the wise men of the east ; yet, in a certain sense, He still continued in His chamber as a bridegroom all His life, for He was hidden and veiled, the Jewish world knew not their King ; though He spake openly in their streets and sought not mystery, yet He was unknown, they did not discern Him ; and in some respects He did not then desire to be discerned, for He often bade His disciples to tell no man what was done. That was the time when the Bridegroom was in His chamber, being made perfect through suffering and perfectly conformed unto His Church, bearing her sicknesses and her sorrows, suffering her wants, enduring her shame, and thus completing the marriage union between the two. To this end, He actually descended by dark steps of anguish into the silent inner room of the grave, and there He slept in His chamber, perfectly wedded to His Church. Come and look at Him, you who admire the Lover of your souls ; He stooped to death and the sepulchre, because manhood had fallen under their yoke ; His Church was subject to death, and He must die. She deserved to suffer the penalty due to God's insulted law, and, therefore, Jesus bowed His head to the stroke.

> "Yea," said the Son, "with her I'll go
> Through all the depths of sin and woe ;
> And on the cross will even dare
> The bitter pains of death to bear."

And He did bear them, and in the darksome chamber of the tomb, He proved how truea Bridegroom He was to His Church. Before His great race began, of which we are soon to speak, it behoved our mighty Champion to descend into the lowest parts of the earth, and sleep among the dead. Before every day there is a night wherein darkness seems to triumph. It behoved Christ to suffer, and then to rise again. His descent was necessary to His ascent ; His sojourn in the chamber to His race and victory.

Thus I have introduced to you the prelude of the race, the Bridegroom in His chamber. Now observe *the coming out of it.* The sun comes forth, at the appointed hour, from the gates of day, and begins to gladden the earth ; even so on the third day, early

in the morning. Jesus, our Lord, arose from His sleep, and there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre. Then did the Sun of Righteousness arise. Then did the great Bridegroom come forth from His chamber, and begin His joyful race. It must have been a ravishing sight to have beheld the risen Saviour; well might the disciples hold Him by the feet and worship Him. Methinks, if ever angels sung more sweetly at one time than another, it must have been on that first Easter morning, when they saw the Divine Champion break His bonds of death asunder, and rise into the glorious resurrection life. Then was He revealed to the sons of men; and, no longer hidden: He began to tell His disciples the meaning of those enigmas which had been dark to them; things which they had not understood, which seemed inexplicable, were all opened up by Him, for now was His time to come out of His chamber. His words, though plain enough, had aforetime hidden Him even from those who loved Him; but now He speaketh no more in proverbs, but showeth them openly concerning Himself and the Father. He hath laid aside the incognito in which He traversed the earth as a stranger, and He is now divinely familiar with His friends, bidding them even touch His hands and His side. In His death the veil was rent, and in His resurrection the High Priest came forth in His robes of glory and beauty. A little while He was gone away, but He returned from the secret chambers of the ivory palaces, and showed Himself unto His disciples. Blessed were the eyes that saw Him in that day.

Though during the forty days in which our Lord lingered among His followers upon earth we may truly say that He had come out of His chamber, we perceive that He more fully did so when, after the forty days had been accomplished, He took His disciples to the top of Olivet, and there ascended into heaven, out of their sight. Then had the sun indeed ascended above the horizon to make his glories stream along the heavens. See ye not the angelic bands poising themselves upon the wing in mid-air, waiting until He shall return all glowing with the victory won in long and deadly fight. Mark ye well that matchless spectacle as He is "seen of angels."

> "The helmed cherubim
> And sworded seraphim,
> Are seen in glittering ranks, with wings displayed."

They have hastened to meet the Prince of Glory, and attend Him to His ancient patrimony. Right glad are all the heavenly band to welcome back the Captain of the Lord's host, and, therefore, they harp in loud and solemn quire to Heaven's triumphant Heir. As for the glorified of mortal race, redeemed of old by His blood which in the fulness of time was shed, they hail Him with gladdest hymn, and lift up their sweetest symphonies to extol Him who finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. Then the Bridegroom came out of His chamber with fit marriage music: His beauties hidden awhile in the chamber, where He was regarded as without form or comeliness, blazed forth with renewed splendour, such as confounded both sun and moon.

In another respect, Christ came out of His chamber at His ascension, because, when He ascended on high, leading captivity captive, He received and gave gifts for men. The gifts were intended for the manifestation of Himself. His Church, which is His body, was by His own command sitting still in the chamber, tarrying till power was given. But, on a sudden, the Bridegroom's power was felt, for there was heard the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, which filled all the place, and then descending upon each favoured head came the cloven tongue, and, straightway, you could see that the Bridegroom had come out of His chamber, for the multitude in the street began to hear His voice. It was Peter that spake, we say, but far rather was it Christ, the Bridegroom, who spake by Peter. It was the sun, from the chambers of the east, bursting through the clouds, and beginning to shine on Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and Rome, and Egypt, and making the multitudes in far off lands to see the day which prophets and kings had waited for, but which had never visited their eyes. Do you hear the joyful motion among the people, the joy mingled with the sorrows of repentance? This is the singing of birds, and these the dewdrops which hail the rising sun. The people cry, "What must we do to be saved?" —the shadows are fleeing. They believe in Jesus, and are baptized into His name,—the true light is shining. Three thousand souls are added in one day to the Church, for truly the Bridegroom is awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine (Psalm lxxviii, 65.) Then was the gospel race commenced with a glorious burst of strength, such as only our Champion could have displayed. Meditate at your leisure upon this first general manifestation of our Lord to the general multitude. He had not gone out of Israel before. "I am not sent," said He, "save to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." Palestine was His chamber: He went to the windows of it, and looked forth on Tyre and Sidon wistfully; but He had not come forth of His chamber till that day, when the gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles also, and in fulfilment of the gift of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out upon all flesh, the apostles went everywhere preaching the word. When even we, the dwellers in the far off northern isles, received the gospel, then, indeed, had the Bridegroom come forth out of His chamber.

But enough of this, or time will fail me. After the coming forth, we have to consider in the text *His course.* The course of Jesus has been as that of the sun, or like that of a mighty champion girded for running.

Notice, under this head, *His continuance.* Our Lord's gospel has been no meteor that flashed for a while and then passed away, but it has remained as the sun in the heavens. What systems of philosophy have come and gone since on Calvary the Christ of God was lifted up! What speculations, what lo-heres and lo-theres have shone forth, have dazzled fools, and have been quenched in night, since He left the chamber of His marriage! Yet He continues still the same; nor, brethren, are there any marks of decrepitude either in Him or in His gospel. They tell us that the idolatry of Hindustan is evidently crumbling: it falls not yet, but it is worm-eaten through and through. Equally sure is it that the false prophet holds but a feeble sway among his followers, and we can all see that though popery makes desperate efforts, and its extremities are vigorous, yet it is paralysed at its heart, and the Vatican is made to feel that its time of power is short.

As for the gospel, it wears the dew of its youth after eighteen centuries of struggles; and it predominates most in those young nations which have evidently a history before them. The old systems are now most favoured by those nations which are left behind in the race of civilization, but the peoples whom God has made quick by nature are those to whom He has given to be receptive of His grace. There are grand days coming for the Church of God. Voltaire said that he lived in the twilight of Christianity; and so he did, but it was the twilight of the morning, not the twilight of the evening. Glory be unto God, the little cloud the size of a man's hand is spreading; it begins to cover the heavens, and the day is not far distant when the sound of abundance of rain shall be heard. Christ was not a strong man, who bounded forth at a leap, and then put forth no more strength, but He rejoiced to continue His work, and to run His race. He was not a shooting star that sparkles for a moment, but a sun that shall shine throughout the livelong day.

Note next in this metaphor *the unity of our Lord's course*, for it is clear in the text: "Rejoicing as a strong man to run the race." A race is one thing; there is the one goal, and the man gathers up his strength to reach it. He has nothing else to think of. They may throw the golden apples in his road, but he does not observe them; they may sound harp and sackbut to the right, and breathe the lute or sweeter instruments of music to the left, but he is deaf to all; he has a race to run, and he throws his whole strength into it. This is a fit image of our Lord; He has never turned aside, He has never been compelled to retrace His steps, to revise His doctrine, to amend His system, or change His tactics. On, on, has the course of Jesus been, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

A certain people now-a-days who yet dare to call themselves Christians, are always hankering after something new, pining for novelties, and boasting of their fresh discoveries, though, forsooth, their fresh things are only fragments of broken images of heresies, which our fathers dashed to shivers centuries ago. The great thinkers of the present day are nothing more than mere translators—you know the London meaning of that word—buyers of old shoes who patch them up, and send them forth again as if they were something new. Old shoes and clouted are common enough among those Gibeonites who would deceive Israel, and whose boast is that they have come from far, and bring us treasures of wisdom from remote regions. Sirs, we want not your new things, for our Lord's race is the same as of old, and as He continues in one course so also will we. To spread righteousness and, in so doing, to save sinners and to glorify God, this is the one purpose of Christ; from it He will never cease, and nothing shall ever tempt Him from the pursuit of it. Look, I pray you, with pleasure and see how our Lord, from His first coming out of His chamber until now, has continued still in the gospel to shine forth with rays of glory, without variableness or shadow of a turning. Though we believe not, He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself; He changes not in work or way. For Zion's sake He worketh hitherto, and the pleasure of the Lord prospers in His hand.

But now, observe next, the notable idea of *strength* which the text conveys to us. "Rejoicing as a strong man to run his race." It is no drudgery to the ascended Lord to carry on His cause:

> "The baffled prince of hell
> In vain new efforts tries,
> Truth's empire to repel
> By cruelty and lies;
> Th' infernal gates shall rage in vain,
> Conquest awaits the Lamb once slain."

There is a race to be run but Jesus is strong enough for it; He does not come panting up to the starting place, and thence go creeping on, but like a strong man He surveys the course. He knows that He is equal to it, and, therefore, He delights in it. When He began His race He was opposed, but the opposition only made Him triumph the more readily, for "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." When our Lord arose like the sun, the clouds were thick and heavy, but He painted their fleecy skirts with gold; persecution hung over the eastern horizon, but He turned it into the imperial purple of His sovereignty. As He pursued His course the ice of centuries melted, the dense gloom of ages disappeared. No chains could bind Him, and no bonds could hold Him. He dashed on with undiminished energy, and the gates of hell could not prevail.

As no cloud has ever stayed the sun as he has "whirled his car along the ethereal plain," so no difficulties impeded the onward course of the gospel in the days of its dawning. To the first days of the Church Thomson's lines to the sun are fully applicable—

> "Now, flaming up the heavens, the potent sun
> Melts into limpid air the high-raised clouds,
> And morning fogs, that hover'd round the hills,
> In party-coloured bands; till wide, unveil'd,
> The face of nature shines, from where earth seems
> Far stretch'd around, to meet the bending sphere."

The gospel soon shed its light in every land, and all nations felt its benign power. Men ceased to persecute, and bowed before the cross.

Anon fresh clouds arose, and the Church passed through them. Errors and heresies multiplied, filthy dreamers led away a huge apostasy, Rome became the mother of harlots and abominations, but the true Church, and the true Christ within her, went right on. The Church was not less triumphant in her second trial than in her first. Rome Papal was overcome as surely as Rome Pagan. Popes were no more her conquerors than bloody emperors had been of yore. To the thoughtful eye the sun of Christ is not less bright over the valleys of Piedmont than over the waves of the sea which bore Paul and his fellow apostles. The Champion's race was as eager and as triumphant as before.

Since then, dense banks of spiritual deadness and false teaching have barred the visible heavens, and have appeared to mortal sight an ebon wall impenetrable as steel, but the Lord reigneth. He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh, the Lord doth have them in derision. Strong is His right hand, and His enemies shall be broken. On goes the Sun of Righteousness, nothing impedes Him, His tabernacle is above them all, He rideth on the heavens, yea, He rideth on the wings of the wind. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength. Christ has failed in nothing, the decrees have been executed, the eternal purposes have been fulfilled, the elect have been saved, His kingdom is established, and shall continue as long as the sun. Who shall stay His hand? Who shall resist His will?

Observe, therefore, how the force is coupled with *joy*. Weakness brings sorrow, but strength begets joy. Christ is always glad, and He would have His people rejoice, for His cause goeth right on and He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He rejoices as He divides the spoil with the strong. When a man has a task to do which is easy to him, and which he can readily perform, he sings at his work; and so this day doth Christ rejoice over His Church with joy, and triumph over her with singing. His cause goes on in spite of foes, and His strength is so great, that even the battle fills Him with delight. I remember to have heard a Welsh preacher make use of the following simile. He was speaking of the joy of Christ in heaven, and he said, "You tell me that the Church is sorrowful on earth and I tell you that Christ is joyous in heaven; and then you ask me how this can be? You see yonder mother with her babe, and she is washing the child; its face is foul and she desires to see it shine with brightness, she would see it white as the marble mingled with the redness of the rose. Therefore she washes it; but the child cries, it is fretful and knows not what is good for it, so it whines and struggles; the mother does not cry, or share its sorrow, she keeps on singing because she knows that all is right, and that her darling will smile like a cherub when all is over; she sees the good results coming, while the babe only feels the present discomfort, so she sings her song and never stops, let the child cry as it may." And so the Lord Jesus has pleasure in His work; He is purifying His Church, and making her fit to be presented to Himself, and though she winces and laments, it is the flesh that makes her so to do. The Lord sings still joyously, because He sees the end from the beginning! Earth may be swathed in mist, but the sun is never so, He shines gloriously evermore.

The text mentions one other fact connected with Jesus as the sun,—"*There is nothing hid from the heat thereof*"; by which is meant, nothing is able to escape the powerful influence of Christ Jesus. His own chosen people must, in due season, feel His power to save. They may wander as they do, and sin as they may, but when the time appointed comes, they shall be redeemed out of the land of the enemy. The sun's power is felt in the darkest and deepest mines; that there is a sun still shining might be discoverable even in the bowels of the earth! and so, in the darkest haunts of sin, God's elect shall be made to feel the sovereign power and omnipotent grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When you and I shall die, and when we shall be buried in the grave, we shall not there be hid from the heat of this Sun of Righteousness for by-and-by He shall kindle life within our bones again; He shall create a soul within the ribs of death, and we shall spring upward as the grass, and as the willows by the watercourses, when the sun renews the year. Our dry bones shall live, and in our flesh shall we see God. Meanwhile, while the gracious operations of Christ thus fall on all His elect, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof, other operations are at work on all the sons of men. He rules in providence over all people, whether they believe in Him or not, and if men do not accept the gospel, yet they are affected by it, in some way or other. Even the darkest parts of the world feel something of the presence of the Christ of God. Responsibility is heaped on those that hear of Him and reject Him; He becomes a savour of death unto death where He is not a savour of life unto life. There is nothing hid from the heat thereof. Oh, how this ought to encourage you Christian people to work! The Lord has gone before you; there is nothing hid from the heat of His presence. Jesus is King of the darkest settlements of the heathen, and He reigns in the lowest haunts of London's vice. Go there, for you are not intruders; you have a right to go anywhere in your Master's dominions; and the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. Be not afraid to face the vilest blasphemer, or the most foul-mouthed infidel, for Christ is Master, and if you bring the gospel before His enemy, He will be made to feel its power, either so as to yield to it a willing submission, or else to be condemned by it. In either case, you shall have done your part, and uttered your testimony, and freed your head of His blood.

In these thoughts combined, we see Christ Jesus, the risen Saviour, pursuing His ever glorious course till He shall descend again the second time to take His people to Himself to reign with Him.

II. Very briefly indeed in the second place. Let us think for a moment of JESUS AS A SUN TO US. Worship and bless our Saviour, it is ever meet and right to do so. Let Him be extolled and be very high. Some would give Him a secondary place, let it never be so with us. As the sun is the centre, so is Christ; as the sun is the great motor, the first source of motive power, so is Christ to His people; as the sun is the fountain from which light, life, and heat perpetually flow, so is the Saviour; as the sun is the fructifier by which fruits multiply and ripen, so is Christ: and as the sun is the regulator and rules the day, and marks the seasons, even so is Jesus owned as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Think these thoughts over in the following respects. When you take the *Bible* remember that Christ is the centre of the Scriptures. Do not put election in the centre; some do, and they make a one-sided system. Do not put man in the centre,—some do, and they fall into grievous errors. Christ is the centre of the entire system of the gospel, and all will be seen to move with regularity when you perceive that He is the chief fixed point; you cannot be right in the rest unless you think rightly of Him. He is the centre and King of all truth.

He is the centre of the *Church* too. Not the pastor, not the church itself, not any rule or government, no bishop, no priest, and no Pope can be our centre, Christ alone is our central sun. We follow as planets where He leads the way: around Him we revolve, but we own no other Lord.

Let it be so in *the world*. Believe that even there Christ governs and is the centre of all history. You will understand history better when you know this, for this is the key of the world's story, the reason for the rise and fall of empires. You shall understand all things when you know Immanuel, God with us.

And let Him have this place in *your hearts*. There enthrone Him! Establish Him as the central sun, and let Him rule your entire being, enlightening your understanding, warming your hearts, filling all your powers, passions, and faculties with the fulness of His presence. To have Christ in us, the hope of glory—oh, what blessedness! But let us take care that it is so, for we know not Christ aright unless we give Him such a place in our hearts as the sun occupies in God's world.

III. But time fails me, and we must now pass on to the last point, and let us for a minute or two BASK IN HIS BEAMS. How shall we do it?

First, we must *realise that He is.* Sinner, saint, Christ lives: He who trod the wave of Galilee lives on. He who was marked with the nails rules on. O, sinner does not that comfort you? The Saviour lives, the Redeemer lives; He who forgives sin still lives. Saint, does not this comfort you? The Man of the tender heart still lives, with a bosom still to be leaned upon, and with lips still ready to speak endearing words. There is a tabernacle for the sun; He is not extinct; He shineth still, He blesses still. Bask in His beams, then, by realising that He is.

Then come and *lay your souls beneath His divine influence.* O my soul, if thou art guilty come and rest in His atonement, if thou art unrighteous come and take His righteousness. If thou art feeble lay hold upon His strength. If thou canst not pray accept Him as thine intercessor. If thou art in thyself nothing, take Him to be thy all in all. Some creatures delight to warm themselves in the sun, but oh, what a pleasure it is to sun oneself in the presence of Christ. Never mind how little I am, how nothing I am, how vile I am, how foul I am; all I am He has taken to Himself, and all He has belongs to me. I sin, but He has taken all my sin: He is righteous and all His righteousness is mine. I am feeble, He is mighty; His mightiness is mine, I wrap myself in His omnipotence. Christ is all and Christ is mine. Why, I utterly fail when trying to talk about such things as these; talking is but stuttering on such a theme. Faith must enjoy rather than express her delight. Come, plunge ye all into this sea of sweetness, dive deep into this abyss of happiness—Christ Jesus is yours for ever and for ever. The sun is very great but it is all for me, and Christ is very bright and glorious, but He is all my own.

Then next, if you would sun yourself in His beams, *imbibe the joy of His strength.* He is like a bridegroom rejoicing to run his race. Now, brethren and sisters, I am often afraid lest in serving God, we should grow dispirited and downcast, and think that things are not going on as they should. The joy of the Lord is your strength. If you begin to say, "Our cause is very feeble, the gospel will not prevail among us, you will slacken your efforts." Do not so, but remember that Jesus Christ does not fret or sadden Himself about His kingdom. He runs on full of strength and rejoices as He runs; and I bid you, in the power of the Holy Spirit, do the same. Cast away your doubts and fears, the kingdom is the Lord's, and He will deliver His adversaries into your hands. I fret and worry myself sometimes about these inventors of new doctrines, and those ritualists who bring up the old rags and stale tallow of the past ages. Let us fret no more, but think that these are only like the clouds to the great sun; the gospel will still proceed in its career. Let us laugh the enemies of God to scorn and defy them to their faces. They defy the Lord God of Israel as did the Philistine of old, but God Himself is mightier than they, and the victory is sure to the true Church and to the gospel of His Son. Be ye very courageous! Be not alarmed with sudden fear! Trust in Jehovah, for the Lord will surely give unto His own servants the victory in the day of battle.

And brethren, if you would sun yourselves in Christ's beams, let me bid you *reflect His light* whenever you receive it. He is the sun, and you are the planet, but every planet shines, shines with borrowed light. It conceals no light, but sends back to other worlds what the sun has given to it. Cast back on men the light which Jesus gives you. Triumph in Christ's circuit, that it is so broad as to comprehend the world, and compass all time. Enlarge your own hearts, and let your light shine far and wide, believing that the power of God which gives you light will go with the light which you reflect. Comfort your hearts! "Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Who shall stop the Christ of God in His race? Let him first go and pluck the sun from his sphere. Who shall stay the Champion of God who has girt Himself for His race? Whosoever cometh in His way woe unto him, for if Samson smote a thousand men hip and thigh, what shall our immortal Samson do? Let all the armies of pope and devil come against Him, He will utterly defy them, and drive them like chaff before the wind.

Sing ye unto His name, for He hath triumphed gloriously! Begin the everlasting song, for He is the Lord and God, and to the uttermost ages shall He reign; yea, for ever and ever is He priest and King.

God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE WARNINGS AND THE REWARDS OF THE WORD OF GOD

"Moreover by them is Thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."—Psalm xix. 11.

THIS is the declaration of one of God's servants: "by them is *Thy servant* warned." Only for men made obedient by divine grace is this passage written. My hearer, are you God's servant? Let us begin with that question. Remember that if you are not God's servant, you are the bond-slave of sin, and the wages of sin is death.

The Psalmist, in this psalm, has compared the Word of God to the sun. The sun in the heavens is everything to the natural world; and the Word of God in the heart is everything in the spiritual world. The world would be dark, and dead, and fruitless, without the sun; and what would the mind of the Christian be without the illuminating influence of the Word of God? If thou despisest holy Scripture, thou art like to one that despises the sun. It would seem that thou art blind, and worse than blind; for even those without sight enjoy the warmth of the sun. How depraved art thou if thou canst perceive no heavenly lustre about the Book of God! The Word of the Lord makes our day, it makes our spring, it makes our summer, it prepares and ripens all our fruit. Without the Word of God we should be in the outer darkness of spiritual death. I have not

time this morning to sum up the blessings which are showered upon us through the sun's light, heat, and other influences. So is it with the perfect law of the Lord; when it comes in the power of the Spirit of God upon the soul, it brings unnumbered blessings: blessings more than we ourselves are able to discern.

David, for a moment, dwelt upon the delights of God's Word. He said, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." The revelation of God enriches the mind with knowledge, the heart with comfort, the life with holiness, the whole man with divine strength. He that studies, understands, and appropriates the statutes of the Lord is rich in the truest sense—rich in holiness for this life, and rich in preparedness for the life to come. Thou hast mines of treasure, if thou hast the Word of God dwelling richly in thy heart. But in the sacred Book we find not only an enrichment of gold laid up, but a present abundance of sweetness to be now enjoyed. He that lives upon God's Word tastes the honey of life—a sweetness far superior to honey; for honey satiates, though it never satisfies, it cloys and never contents. The more thou hast of divine teaching, the more thou wilt wish to have, and the more wilt thou be capable of enjoying. He that loves the inspired Book shall have wealth for his mind and sweetness for his heart.

But David is mainly aiming at the practical; so, having introduced the sun as the symbol of God's Word because of its pleasurable influence, he adds, "Moreover by them is Thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." On these two things we will meditate under the following heads:—First, *their keeping us*—"By them is Thy servant warned"; secondly, *our keeping them*—"And in keeping of them there is great reward."

I. First, THEIR KEEPING US: "By them is Thy servant warned."

We are in an enemy's country: we are always in danger; we are most in peril when we think ourselves most secure. You will find in the histories of the Bible that the most crushing defeats have fallen upon armies on a sudden, when they were off their guard. The army of Christ has need always to set its pickets and appoint its sentinels, lest the adversary take us unawares. We can never tell when we are likely to be assailed: we shall be wise to assume that we are always surrounded by enemies. God's Word is our keeper, the watcher of our souls; and when a danger is approaching it rings the alarum and gives us warning. The different parts of Scripture, the statutes, the doctrines, the ordinances, the promises, the precepts—all of these act like pickets to the army, and arouse the Lord's soldiers to resist sudden assaults: "By them is Thy servant warned."

In what way does God's Word warn us? In many forms it thus operates. I would say, first of all, *by pointing out sin and describing its nature and danger.* We have here the mind of the Lord as to moral conduct, and so we are not left to guess-work; but we know by unerring teaching what it is that the Lord abhors. Those ten commandments are like lanterns set around an opening in the street, that no traveller may drive into danger. God only forbids that which would injure us; and He only commands that which will be for our lasting good. Spread out before you the law of God, and you may say of it as you read it, "By these commandments is Thy servant warned." In my walks I see notices bearing the words "TRESPASSERS BEWARE!" and I am kept from wandering.

It is well to be acquainted, not only with the letter of the law of the Lord, but with the spirit of it. Numberless sins are condemned by the ten commandments: truly we may say of the law of God, "Thy commandment is exceedingly broad." All of these are fog-horns warning us of dangers which may cause shipwreck to our souls.

Studying the Word of God, we are made to see that sin is exceeding sinful, since it dishonours God, makes us enemies to our best Friend, yea, and drives us madly to destroy our own souls. Sin, according to God's Word, is murderous: it slew the Saviour of men. Wherever sin comes, death follows it. Sin may bear pleasure in its face, but it has ruin at its heel. Eternal destruction is the finishing of the work of sin. God's Word is very plain and explicit about these grave facts; it forbids our trifling even with the appearance of evil; it warns us against sins of thought and temper, as well as against transgressions of speech and act. He that is graciously familiar with his Bible will be preserved from those pitfalls into which so many have rushed, in their careless contempt of God's Word and holy commandment. A precept of Scripture is like a lighthouse upon a quicksand or a rock; it quietly bids the wise helmsman steer his vessel another way. The whole coast of life is guarded by these protecting lights, and he that will take note of them may make safe navigation; but remember, it is one thing for the Scripture to give warning, and another for us to take it; and if we do not take warning, we cannot say, "By them is Thy servant warned." Oh, that our hearts may be in such a state that a hint from the Word may set us on our watch against evil!

Next, the Word of God warns us *by reminding us of our duties.* We are not only taught negatively what we should not do, but positively what we ought to do; and thus we are warned against sins of omission. I wish that professors who are neglectful of many points in the Saviour's example would study His character more, marking down the points wherein they come short of it. If we were to read the lives of holy men recorded in Scripture, and notice wherein we fail to be like them, it might do us much service. Truly, Lord, Thy servants would be profitably warned if we oftener enquired, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" Turning over these sacred pages we remark a choice blessing coming upon a man of God, in connection with a certain virtue; then are we warned to cultivate that virtue if we would have that blessing. The Lord does not pay us for our work as though we were hirelings and our labour meritorious; but still, according to His grace He rewards His faithful servants, and so encourages them diligently to obey. Every Bible precept should be an arrow aimed at the heart of our carelessness and forgetfulness. Then should we often say with David, "By them is Thy servant warned." Like our Lord in His youth, we must be about our Father's business; and we must continue therein till, like Him, we can say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."

The Word of God also *warns us of our weakness in those duties which it commands, and of our tendency to fall into those sins which it forbids.* It sets before us a noble example, but it bids us remember that only by divine power can we follow it. It spreads

before us a programme of perfect holiness, but it does not flatter us with the notion that by our own strength we can carry it out. It humbles us by showing that we cannot even pray as we ought without the Spirit's teaching, nor so much as think a good thought without His aid. Scripture is continually warning us of the deceitfulness of our hearts, and of the tendency of sin to advance from one stage of evil to another. Holy Scripture shows us our spiritual inability, apart from the Divine Spirit; and greatly do we need warnings in this way, for we are given to be self-sufficient. Pride will shoot forth with the very least encouragement. We buckle on our harness, and begin at once to shout as if the battle were won. How soon we think ourselves near perfection when indeed we are near a fall! We are apt to sit down and imagine that we have won the race, whereas we have not yet traversed one half of the way. The Word of God continually checks our carnal confidence, and disturbs our self-satisfaction. It bears constant protest against our imagining that we have already attained, when we are as yet only babes in grace. How plainly it tells us, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool"! It shows us where our great strength lieth; but it calls us off from all trust in our own past experience, or firmness of character, or strength of determination, or depth of sanctification, to lean solely and alone upon heavenly grace, which we must receive hour by hour. If we give way to pride, it is against the admonitions of the divine statutes; for in this matter, "By them is Thy servant warned."

So does the Word continually *warn us against the temptations which are in the world in which we live.* Read its story from the first day of Adam's fall to the last chapter of its record, and you shall find it continually representing the world as a place of trial for the heir of heaven. It is indeed as a sieve, in which the true corn has no rest, but much tossing to and fro. Christ seems praying over us every day as we read the Scripture, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." If you fancy that your position in life puts you beyond temptation, you are sadly deluded. Poverty has its evil side, and riches are full of snares. Even in a Christian family we may be seduced into great sin, as well as among the ungodly. There is no place under heaven where the arrows of temptation cannot reach us. With this also comes persecution; for because we are not of the world, the world hateth us. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," is a sure prophecy. If you meet with no persecution, you should remember that the smiles of the world are even more dangerous than its frowns. Beware of prosperity! Thank God if you have the world's wealth; but hold it tenderly, and watch over your heart carefully, lest you bow before the golden calf. Adversity has less power to harm than prosperity. Of the evils peculiar to various positions, the Holy Spirit tells us in these sacred pages: "By them is Thy servant warned." We are continually warned to put on the whole armour of God, and not to lay aside the shield of faith for a moment. We are urged to watch at all times, and to pray without ceasing; for in the most quiet life, in the most pious company, and in the regular work of the day, dangers are lurking. Where we think we may be very much at ease, lying down as on a bank of flowers, we are most likely to be stung by the deadly serpent. We are like the first settlers in America: the cunning Red Indians of temptation may be upon us with the deadly tomahawk of lust while we are dreaming of peace and safety.

Here, let me add, *we are warned over and over again against the temptations of Satan.* Certain theologians, nowadays, do not believe in the existence of Satan. It is singular when children do not believe in the existence of their own father: but it is so, that those who are most deluded by him are the loudest in repudiating all faith in his existence. Any man who has had experience of his temptations knows that there is a certain mysterious personage, invisible, but almost invincible, who goes about seeking whom he may devour. He has a power far beyond that which is human, and a cunning that is equal to that of a thousand of the most clever of men. He will endeavour to influence our minds in a way which is contrary to their true intent; to turn our thoughts in directions which we abhor; to suggest questions about truths of which we are certain, and even blasphemies against Him who, in our heart of hearts, we worship lovingly. But, beloved, the power of Satan in a Christian man's life is a force with which he must reckon, or he may fail through ignorance. Some especially have had sore conflict with this evil one, and certain tried ones are scarcely a day without being tormented either by the howling of this dog or else by his snapping at their heels. He cannot possess us as he possesses many of the ungodly; but he worries whom he can't devour with a malicious joy. Whatever "modern thought" ministers may have to say about him, the inspired Scripture does not leave us ignorant of his devices, but sets us on our guard against his terrible power, bidding us pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One." The temptations of the world, and of the flesh, are more upon our level than the assaults of Satan: he is the prince of the evil forces, and his attacks are so mysterious, so cunningly adapted to our infirmities, and so ingeniously adjusted to our circumstances, that unless the Lord the Holy Spirit shall daily cover us with His broad shield of grace, we shall be in the utmost jeopardy. O Lord, by these words of Thine is Thy servant warned to resist the enemy and escape his wiles! Glory be to Thy loving care!

The teachings of the Lord also *warn us to expect trial.* The Bible never promises the true believer an easy life: the rather does it assure him that he is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. There is no soaring to heaven on the wings of luxurious ease: we must painfully plod along the pilgrim way. We see on the page of inspiration that we cannot be crowned without warfare, nor honoured without suffering. Jesus went to heaven by a rough road, and we must follow Him. Every believer in the cross must bear the cross. If things go easily with you for a long time, do not, therefore, say, "My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved"; for God has only to hide His face, and you will be troubled. Those happiest of men, of whom it could be said that God had set a hedge about them and all that they had, these, in due course, had to take their turn at the whipping-post and smart under the scourge. Even Job, that perfect and upright man, was not without his troubles. Beloved, expect to be tried; and when the trial comes, count it not a strange thing. Your sea will

be rough, like that which tossed your Lord. Your way will be hot and weary, like that which your Master trod. The world is a wilderness to you, as it was to Him. "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." Seek not to build your mansion here; for a voice cries to you out of the Word, "This is not your rest, for it is polluted." Think of that verse of our favourite hymn—

> "Why should I complain of want or distress,
> Temptation, or pain? He told me no less.
> The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,
> Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."

Therefore, beloved, you are forewarned that you may be forearmed.

God's Word also warns us by prophesying to us of things to come. I cannot enter just now into what is a very interesting point of experience, namely, the singular fact that the Bible is used of God to warn individuals of events about to occur to them. The Book is full of prophecies for nations, but at times it becomes prophetic to individual believers. Have you never had impressed upon your mind a passage of Scripture which has followed you for hours, and even days, and you could not tell why, till an event has happened which has so exactly tallied with that Scripture, that you could not but remark it, as having prepared you for the circumstance? Will not your morning reading sometimes forestall the sorrow or the duty of the day? Have you not often found that if you read the Bible consecutively, somehow or other, the passage which comes in due course, will prove to be as truly a lesson for the day, as if it had been written on purpose to meet your case? I am far from being superstitious, or wishful to encourage faith in mere impressions, but I cannot shut my eyes to facts which have happened to myself. I know that I have received, through this Book of God, messages to my heart, which have come with peculiar power and suitability; so that I have been compelled to say, with emphasis, "Moreover by them is Thy servant warned."

But the Bible warns us all of certain great events, especially of the Second Advent of the Lord and the coming judgment. It does not clearly tell us when our Lord will appear, but it warns us that to the unprepared He will come as a thief in the night. It warns us of the general judgment, and of the day when all men shall live again, and stand before the great white throne. It warns us of the day when every secret shall be revealed, and when every man shall receive for the things that he has done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil. "By them is Thy servant warned." If I live like one of yonder cattle, in the immediate present, if I have no eye for the future that is hurrying on, if my soul never places herself in vision before the judgment-seat of Christ, if I never foresee the day when heaven and earth, before the presence of the great Judge, shall flee away; why, then I cannot be a diligent reader of the Word of God. If I search the Scriptures I shall be called to walk in the light of the last day, and shall be made to gird up my loins to face the dread account. Oh, that we might all be warned to be ready, that we may give in our account with joy! Oh, that we may so take the warnings of holy writ as to be ready for death, ready for judgment, and ready for that final sentence which can never be reversed If we were truly wise, these warnings would put salt into our lives, and preserve them from the corruption which is in the world through lust.

Beloved, I trust that every one of us who knows the Lord will use His holy Book as the constant guard of his life. Let it be like a fog-signal to you, going off in warning when the road is hidden by a cloud. Let it be like the red lamp on the railway, suggesting to you to come to a stand, for the road is dangerous. Let it be like a dog at night, waking you from sleep because a robber is breaking in; or as the watch on board a ship, who shouts aloud, "Breakers ahead!" Let the Word of God be like one who, during the great flood in America, rode on a white horse down the valley, crying out, as he rode along, "To the hills! To the hills! To the hills!" The waters were following fast behind him, and he would have the people escape to the mountains, lest they should be destroyed. O precious Book, thus bid me seek the hills! Ring the alarm bell in my ear, and compel me to flee from the wrath to come. Day and night, wherever I may be, may a word from the oracle of God sound in my ears, and keep me from sleeping on the brink of the abyss! May no enemy be able to steal upon us when sleeping in false security; for it is high time that we awake out of sleep; and this Book tells us so.

So far have we spoken upon the Word as keeping us.

II. And now, secondly, I have to speak to you upon OUR KEEPING THE WORD OF GOD.

"In keeping of them there is great reward." What is meant by keeping the testimonies of God's Word? You know right well that it will not suffice to have the holy Book in your houses, to lie upon the table, so that visitors may see that you have a family Bible. Nor is it enough to place it on the book-shelf where the dust may thickly cover it, because it is never used. That is not keeping the Bible, but burying it. It does not warn you, for you smother it; you do not keep it, for you dishonour it by neglect. You must have a reverent esteem for it, and a growing familiarity with it, if you would keep it. "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly."

To keep the Word of God is, first of all, *earnestly to study it* so as to become acquainted with its contents. Know your Bible from beginning to end. I am afraid there is but little Bible searching nowadays. If the Word of God had been diligently studied there would not have been so general a departure from its teachings. Bible-reading people seldom go off to modern theology. Those who feed upon the Word of God enjoy it too much to give it up. Comparing spiritual things with spiritual, they learn to prize all revealed truth, and they hold fast the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Dear young people, if you never read a single book of romance you will lose nothing; but if you do not read your Bibles you will lose everything. This is the age of fiction, and hence the age of speculation and error: leave fiction, and give yourself wholly to the truth. Eat ye that which is good, and spend not your money on that which is not bread. The Bible is the Thesaurus of heavenly knowledge; the Cyclopædia of divine science: read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the same, and then you will be keeping the sayings of God.

But we cannot keep them without going further than this: *we must be zealous in their defence.* May

it be said of each one of us, "Thou hast kept my word." When you find others denying God's truth, hold you the faster to it. When they argue against it, be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. It is not an easy task to stand fast in the faith to-day; for the current which runs towards unbelief is strong as a torrent, and many have been taken off their feet by it, and are being carried down to the cataracts of error. May God help you to say with the pilgrims in Vanity Fair, "We buy the truth"! Buy it at any price, and sell it at no price. It ought to be dearer than life, for it was so to the martyrs of our own country, and to the Covenanters of Scotland, in whose steps we would tread. They cared little whether their heads were struck off or no; but they cared everything for King Jesus and the statutes of His Word. Beloved, happy in the end will that man be who for a while has suffered contempt, and misrepresentation, and separation from his brethren, because of fidelity to the truth of God! Come what may, he that sides with truth will be no loser in the end. Oh, for more Luthers nowadays: we want them! Those who truckle to error are everywhere: even those in whom we trusted have betrayed their Lord.

But this is not all, we must get much further: *there must be a careful observance of the law of the Lord.* We cannot be said to keep God's Word if we never carry it out in our own lives. If we know the commandments, but do not obey them, we increase our sin. If we understand the truth and talk about it, but are slow to live according to it, what will become of us? This is not to keep God's Word, but to hold the truth of God in unrighteousness. This may, in some cases, be a presumptuous sin. When thy knowledge far exceeds thy practice, take heed lest thou be guilty of sinning wilfully. We must keep the Word of God in the sense in which our Lord used the word when He said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

Once more, even this is not enough: we are to keep the truth of God, not only by reverent study of it, by zealous propagation of it, by careful observance of it in our heart of hearts. What thou believest thou must also love if thou art to keep it. If it come to thee in the power of God, it may humble thee, it may chasten thee, it may refine thee as with fire; but thou wilt love it as thy life. It will be as music to thine ear, as honey to thy palate, as gold to thy purse, as heaven to thy soul. Let thy very self be knit to the faithful Word. As new-born babes desire the unadulterated milk, so do thou desire the teachings of the Spirit, that thou mayest grow thereby. Every word of God must be bread to us, after which we hunger, and with which we are satisfied. We must love it even more than our necessary food. For that which God has spoken, we must have an ever-burning, fervent love, which no floods of destructive criticism can quench, or even damp.

But now the text says, "In keeping of them there is great reward"; and here you must have patience with me while I set out *the great reward which comes to obedient believers.* There are many rewards, and the first is, *great quiet of mind.* "Great peace have they which love Thy law; and nothing shall offend them." When a man hath done what God bids him do, his conscience is at peace; and this is a choice boon. I can bear anybody to be my foe rather than my conscience. We read of David, "David's heart smote him." That was an awkward knock! When a man's conscience is his foe, where can he run for shelter? Conscience smites home, and the wound is deep. But when a man can conscientiously say, "I did the right thing; I held the truth; I honoured my God"; then the censures of other men go for little. In such a case, you have no trouble about the consequences of your action; for if any bad consequence should follow, the responsibility would not lie with you: you did what you were told. Having done what God Himself commanded you, the consequences are with your Lord, and not with you. If the heavens were likely to fall, it would not be our duty to shore them up with a lie. If the whole church of God threatened to go to pieces, it would be no business of ours to bind it up by an unhallowed compromise. If you should fail to achieve success in life, as men call success, that is no fault of yours, if you cannot succeed without being dishonest. It will be a greater success to be honest, and to be poor, than to grow rich through trickery. If, through grace, you have done the will of God, your peace shall be like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Can you think of a greater reward than this? I cannot. A quiet conscience is a little heaven. A martyr was fastened to the stake, and the sheriff who was to execute him expressed his sorrow that he should persevere in his opinions, and compel him to set fire to the pile. The martyr answered, "Do not trouble yourself, for I am not troubling myself. Come and lay your hand upon my heart, and see if it does not beat quietly." His request was complied with, and he was found to be quite calm. "Now," said he, "lay your hand on your own heart, and see if you are not more troubled than I am; and then go your way, and instead of pitying me, pity yourself." When we have done right we need no man's pity, however painful the immediate consequence. To do right is better than to prosper. A heart sound in the truth is greater riches than a houseful of silver and gold. There is more honour in being defeated in the truth than in a thousand victories gained by policy and falsehood. Though fame should give you the monopoly of her brazen trumpet for the next ten centuries, she could not honour you so much as you will be honoured by following right and truth, even though your integrity be unknown to men. In keeping the Word of the Lord there is great reward, even if it bring no reward. The approbation of God is more than the admiration of nations. Verily this is great reward.

The next great reward is *increase of divine knowledge.* If any man will know the will of Christ, let him do that will. When a young man is put to learn a trade, he does so by working at it: and we learn the truth which our Lord teaches by obeying His commands. To reach the shores of heavenly wisdom every man must work his passage. Holiness is the royal road to Scriptural knowledge. We know as much as we do. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." It may be, you sit down and consider the doctrine, but you cannot understand it. You turn it over and consult a learned divine; but still you cannot understand it. Be obedient, pray for a willing heart to do the will of God, and you have already received enlarged capacity, and with it a new light for your eyes: you will learn more by holy practice than by wearisome study. The Lord help us to follow on to

know the Lord, for then shall we know! Practice makes perfect. Obedience is the best of schools, and love is the aptest of teachers. To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, is the gift of grace to the faithful: is not this a great reward?

Moreover, in keeping the commandments *we increase in conformity to Christ, and consequently in communion with God.* He that doeth as Christ did is like Christ; for our likeness is moral and spiritual. In measure we receive His image as we work His deeds; and then, as Christ lived in constant fellowship with God, because He did always the things that pleased God, so do we walk in the light, as God is in the light, when we yield obedience to the divine will. If thou walkest in sin, thou canst not walk with God. If thou wilt be obedient, then shall all clouds be chased away, and thy light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. Sinning will make you leave off communion with God, or else communion with God will make you leave off sinning: one of the two things must occur. If thou be kept from sin and made to be obedient, thou shalt bear the image of the heavenly, and with the heavenly thou shalt have daily intercourse.

This will be followed by the fourth great reward, namely, *power in prayer.* Jesus says, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." If you will read in the Gospel of John, you will frequently see how success in prayer is, in the case of the believer, made to depend upon his complete obedience. If thou wilt not hearken to God's Word, neither will He hearken to thy word. Some people complain that they have no power with God: but has God any power with them? Look at the faultiness of your lives, and cease to wonder at the failure of your prayers. An inconsistent life downstairs means unprofitable prayer upstairs—if indeed there be any prayer at all. You cannot have God's ear in the closet if He never has your ear in the shop. If you live as worldlings live, the Lord will treat you as He did Cain, to whose offering He had no respect. Wonder not at your leanness in private devotion, if there is license in your public life. O Lord God the Holy Ghost, sanctify us in our daily lives, so shall we obtain access to God through Jesus Christ, and our pleading shall be accepted in Him.

One great reward is *habitude in holiness.* The man who has, by divine grace, long kept the way of the Lord, finds it more easy to do so, because he has acquired the habit of obedience. All things are difficult at the beginning, but all things grow easy as we proceed. I do not say that holiness is ever easy to us: it must always be a labour, and we must always be helped by the Holy Spirit; but at the same time, it is far easier for a man to obey who has obeyed, than for one to obey who has lived in constant rebellion. If thou hast faith, thou wilt have more faith almost as a necessary consequence. If thou prayest much, thou wilt pray more: it is all but inevitable that thou shouldst do so. There are believers whom the Lord has put on the rails of life; they do not run on the road, like common vehicles; but they are placed on tram lines of habit, and so they keep the ways of the Lord. Sometimes a stone gets into the rails, and there is an unhappy jolt; but still they do no iniquity, but keep on in one straight line even to their journey's end. This is a great reward of grace. If you are obedient, you shall be rewarded by being made more obedient. As the diligent workman becomes expert in his art, so shall you grow skilful in holiness. Use is second nature. What a joy it is when holiness becomes our second nature, when prayer becomes habitual as breathing, and praise is as continual as our heartbeats! May hatred to sin be spontaneous, and may desire for the best things be the habit of our soul! I scarcely know of a greater reward than this habitude of holiness which the Lord in His grace bestows on us.

This will generally be followed by another great reward, namely, *usefulness to others.* He that keepeth the commandments of the Lord will become an example that others may copy, and He will wield an influence which shall constrain them to copy Him. Do not you think that many Christians are spiritually childless because they are disobedient? How can God give me to bring others to Himself if I myself backslide from Him? The power to bless others must first be a power within ourselves. It is useless to pump yourself up into a pretended earnestness at a meeting, and then to think that this sort of thing will work a real work of grace in others: the seed of pretence will yield a harvest of pretenders, and nothing more. Nothing can come out of a man unless it is first in him; and if it is in him it will be seen in his life as well as in his teaching. If I do not live as I preach, my preaching is not living preaching. I could indicate men of great talent who see no conversions; and one does not wonder, for in their own lives there is no holiness, no spirituality, no communion with God. I could mention Christian people, with very considerable gifts, who have no corresponding measure of grace, and hence their labour comes to nothing. Oh, for more holiness! Where that is manifest there will be more usefulness.

Lastly, we shall have the great reward of *bringing glory to the grace of God.* If we are made holy, men, seeing our good works, will glorify our Father who is in heaven; and is not this the very end of our existence? Is not this the flower and fruit of life? I pray you, therefore, walk humbly and carefully with God, that He may be honoured in you.

There are two things I want to say before I sit down. The first is, *let us hold fast, tenaciously, doggedly, with a death grip, the truth of the imspiration of God's Word.* If it is not inspired and infallible, it cannot be of use in warning us. I see little use in being warned when the warning may be like the idle cry of "Wolf!" when there is no wolf. Everything in the railway service depends upon the accuracy of the signals: when these are wrong, life will be sacrificed. On the road to heaven we need unerring signals, or the catastrophes will be far more terrible. It is difficult enough to set myself right and carefully drive the train of conduct; but if, in addition to this, I am to set the Bible right, and thus manage the signals along the permanent way, I am in an evil plight indeed. If the red light or the green light may deceive me, I am as well without signals as to trust to such faulty guides. We must have something fixed and certain, or where is the foundation? Where is the fulcrum for our lever if nothing is certain? If I may not implicitly trust my Bible, you may burn it, for it is of no more use to me. If it is not inspired, it ceases to be a power either to warn or to command obedience. Beloved, others may say what they will, but here I stand bearing this witness: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

While you hold fast its inspiration, *pray God to*

prove its inspiration to you. Its gentle but effectual warning will prove its inspiration. This precious Book has pulled me up many times, and put me to a pause, when else I had gone on to sin. At another time I should have sat still had it not made me leap to my feet to flee from evil or seek good. To me it is a monitor, whose voice I prize. There is a power about this Book which is not in any other. I do not care whether it be the highest poetry, or the freshest science; each must yield to the power of the Word of God. Nothing ever plays on the cords of a man's soul like the finger of God's Spirit. This Book can touch the deep springs of my being, and make the life-floods to flow forth. The Word of God is the great power of God; and it is well that you should know it to be so by its power over you. One said, "I cannot believe the Bible." Another answered, "I cannot disbelieve it." When this question was raised: "Why cannot you disbelieve?" the believer answered, "I know the Author, and I am sure of His truthfulness." There is the point; if we know the Author, we know that His witness is true, and knowing it to be true, we take His warnings and follow His commands. May the Lord work in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure; then shall the Book be more and more precious in our eyes; and this sense of its preciousness will be one of the rewards which come to us in keeping the statutes of the Lord. So be it unto you through Christ Jesus! Amen.

PRESUMPTUOUS SINS

"Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins."—Psalm xix. 13.

ALL sins are great sins, but yet some sins are greater than others. Every sin has in it the very venom of rebellion, and is full of the essential marrow of traitorous rejection of God. But there be some sins which have in them a greater development of the essential mischief of rebellion, and which wear upon their faces more of the brazen pride which defies the Most High. It is wrong to suppose that because all sins will condemn us, that therefore one sin is not greater than another. The fact is, that while all transgression is a greatly grievous sinful thing, yet there are some transgressions which have a deeper shade of blackness, and a more double scarlet dyed hue of criminality than others. Now the presumptuous sins of our text are just the chief of all sins: they rank head and foremost in the list of iniquities. It is remarkable that though an atonement was provided under the Jewish law for every kind of sin, there was this one exception. "But the soul that sinneth presumptuously shall have no atonement; it shall be cut off from the midst of My people." And now, under the Christian dispensation, although in the sacrifice of our blessed Lord there is a great and precious atonement for presumptuous sins, whereby sinners who have sinned in this manner are made clean, yet without doubt, presumptuous sinners, dying without pardon, must expect to receive a double portion of the wrath of God, and a more wonderful manifestation of the unutterable anguish of the torment of eternal punishment in the pit that is digged for the wicked.

I shall this morning first of all endeavour to *describe presumptuous sins;* then, secondly, I shall try, if I can, to *show by some illustrations why the presumptuous sin is more heinous than any other;* and then thirdly, I shall try to *press this prayer upon your notice*—the prayer, mark you, of the holy man—the prayer of David. "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins."

I. First, then, WHAT IS A PRESUMPTUOUS SIN? Now, I think there must be one of four things in a sin in order to make it presumptuous. It must either be a sin against light and knowledge, or a sin committed with deliberation, or a sin committed with a design of sinning, merely for sinning's sake, or else it must be a sin committed through hardihood, from a man's rash confidence in his own strength. We will mark these points one by one.

1. A sin that is *committed wilfully against manifest light and knowledge,* is a presumptuous sin. A sin of ignorance is not presumptuous, unless that ignorance also be wilful, in which case the ignorance is itself a presumptuous sin. But when a man sins for want of knowing better—for want of knowing the law, for want of instruction, reproof, advice and admonition, we say that his sin, so committed, does not partake to any great extent of the nature of a presumptuous sin. But when a man knows better, and sins in the very teeth and face of his increased light and knowledge, then his sin deserves to be branded with this ignominous title of a presumptuous sin. Let me just dwell on this thought a moment. *Conscience* is often an inner light to men, whereby they are warned of forbidden acts as being sinful. Then if I sin against conscience, though I have no greater light than conscience affords me, still my sin is presumptuous, if I have presumed to go against that voice of God in my heart, an enlightened conscience. You, young man, were once tempted (and perhaps it was but yesterday) to commit a certain act. The very moment you were tempted, conscience said, "It is wrong, it is wrong"—it shouted *murder* in your heart, and told you the deed you were about to commit was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Your fellow apprentice committed the same sin without the warning of conscience; in him it was guilt—guilt which needs to be washed away with the Saviour's blood. But it was not such guilt in him as it was in you, because your conscience checked you; your conscience told you of the danger, warned you of the punishment, and yet you dared to go astray against God, and therefore you sinned presumptuously. You have sinned very grievously in having done so. When a man shall trespass on my ground, he shall be a trespasser though he have no warning, but if straight before his face there stands a warning, and if he knowingly and willingly trespasses, then he is guilty of a presumptuous trespass, and is to be so far punished accordingly. So you, if you had not known better; if your conscience had been

less enlightened, you might have committed the deed with far less of the criminality which now attaches to you, because you sinned against conscience, and consequently sinned presumptuously.

But, oh! how much greater is the sin, when man not only has the light of conscience, but has also *the admonition of friends*, the advice of those who are wise and esteemed by him. If I have but one check, the check of my enlightened conscience, and I transgress against it, I am presumptuous; but if a mother with tearful eye warns me of the consequence of my guilt, and if a father with steady look, and with affectionate determined earnestness, tells me what will be the effect of my transgression—if friends who are dear to me counsel me to avoid the way of the wicked, and warn me what must be the inevitable result of continuing in it, then I am presumptuous, and my act in that very proportion becomes more guilty. I should have been presumptuous for having sinned against the light of nature, but I am more presumptuous, when added to that, I have the light of affectionate counsel and of kind advice, and therein I bring upon my head a double amount of divine wrath. And how much more is this the case, when the transgressor has been gifted with what is usually called a religious education; in childhood he has been lighted to his bed by the lamps of the sanctuary, the name of Jesus was mingled with the hush of lullaby, the music of the sanctuary woke him like a matin hymn at morning; he has been dandled on the knee of piety and has sucked the breasts of godliness; he has been tutored and trained in the way he should go; how much more fearful I say, is the guilt of such a man than that of those who have never had such training, but have been left to follow their own wayward lusts and pleasures without the restraint of a holy education and the restraints of an enlightened conscience!

But, my friends, even this may become worse still. A man sins yet more presumptuously, *when he has had most special warning from the voice of God against the sin.* What mean you? say you. Why, I mean this. You saw but yesterday a strong man in your neighbourhood brought to the grave by sudden death; it is but a month ago that you heard the bell toll for one whom once you knew and loved, who procrastinated and procrastinated until he perished in procrastination. You have had strange things happen in your very street, and the voice of God has been spoken loudly through the lip of Death to you. Aye, and you have had warnings too in your own body, you have been sick with fever, you have been brought to the jaws of the grave, and you have looked down into the bottomless vault of destruction. It is not long ago since you were given up; all said they might prepare a coffin for you, for your breath could not long be in your body. Then you turned your face to the wall and prayed; you vowed that if God would spare you you would live a goodly life, that you would repent of your sins; but to your own confusion you are now just what you were. Ah! let me tell you, your guilt is more grievous than that of any other man, for you have sinned presumptuously, in the very highest sense in which you could have done so. You have sinned against reproofs, but what is worse still, you have sinned against your own solemn oaths and covenants, and against the promises that you made to God. He who plays with fire must be condemned as careless; but he who has been burned out once, and afterwards plays with the destroying element, is worse than careless; and he who has himself been scorched in the flame, and has had his locks all hot and crisp with the burning, if he again should rush headlong into fire, I say he is worse than careless, he is worse than presumptuous, he is mad. But I have some such here. They have had warnings so terrible that they might have known better; they have gone into lusts which have brought their bodies into sickness, and perhaps this day they have crept up to this house, and they dare not tell to their neighbour who stands by their side what is the loathsomeness that even now doth breed upon their frame. And yet they will go back to the same lusts; the fool will go again to the stocks, the sheep will lick the knife that is to slay him. You will go on in your lust and in your sins, despite warnings, despite advice, until you perish in your guilt. How worse than children are grown-up men! The child who goes for a merry slide upon a pond, if he be told that the ice will not bear him, starteth back affrighted, or if he daringly creepeth upon it how soon he leaves it, if he hears but a crack upon the slender covering of the water! But you men have conscience, which tells you that your sins are vile, and that they will be your ruin; you hear the crack of sin, as its thin sheet of pleasure gives way beneath your feet; aye, and some of you have seen your comrades sink in the flood, and be lost; and yet ye go sliding on, worse than childish, worse than mad are you, thus presumptuously to play with your own everlasting state. O my God, how terrible is the presumption of some! How fearful is presumption in any! Oh! that we might be enabled to cry, "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins."

2. I said again, that another characteristic of a presumptuous sin was *deliberation*. A man perhaps may have a passionate spirit, and in a moment of hot haste he may utter an angry word of which in a few short minutes he will sincerely repent. A man may have a temper so hot that the least provocation causes him at once to be full of wrath. But he may also have a temperament which has this benefit to balance it, that he very soon learns to forgive and cools in a moment. Now, such a man does not sin presumptuously, when suddenly overcome by anger, though without doubt there is presumption in his sin, unless he strives to correct that passion and keep it down. A man, again, who is suddenly tempted and surprised into a sin, which is not his habit, but which he commits through the force of some strong temptation, is guilty, but not guilty of presumption, because he was taken unawares in the net and caught in the snare. But there are other men who sin deliberately; there are some who can think of a lust for weeks beforehand, and dote upon their darling crime with pleasure. They do, as it were, water the young seedling of lust until it grows to the maturity of desire, and then they go and commit the crime. There are some to whom lust is not a passer by, but a lodger at home. They receive it, they house it, they feast it; and when they sin they sin deliberately, walk coolly to their lusts, and in cold blood commit the act which another might haply do in hot and furious haste. Now, such a sin has in it a great extent of sinfulness, it is a sin of high presumption. To be carried away as by a whirlwind of passion in a moment is wrong; but to sit down and deliberately resolve upon revenge is cursed and diabolical. To sit down and deliberately

fashion schemes of wickedness is heinous, and I can find no other word fitly to express it. To deliberate carefully how the crime is to be done, and Haman-like to build the gallows, and set to work to destroy one's neighbour, to get the pit digged that the friend may fall into it and be destroyed, to lay snares in secret, to plot wickedness upon one's bed—this is a high pitch of presumptuous sin. May God forgive any of us, if we have been so far guilty!

Again, *when a man continues long in sin, and has time to deliberate about it*, that also is a proof that it is a presumptuous sin. He that sins once, being overtaken in a fault, and then abhors the sin, has not sinned presumptuously; but he who transgresses to-day, to-morrow and the next day, week after week and year after year, until he has piled up a heap of sins that are high as a mountain, such a man, I say, sins presumptuously, because in a continued habit of sin there must be a deliberation to sin; there must be at least such a force and strength of mind as could not have come upon any man if his sin were but the hasty effect of sudden passion. Ah! take heed, ye that are sodden in sin, ye that drink it down as the greedy ox drinketh down water, ye who run to your lust as the rivers run to the sea, and ye who go to your passions as the sow to her wallowing in the mire. Take heed! your crimes are grievous, and the hand of God shall soon fall terribly on your heads, unless by divine grace it be granted to you to repent and turn unto Him. Fearful must be your doom, if unpardoned, God should condemn you for presumptuous sin. Oh! "Lord, keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins."

3. Again: I said that a presumptuous sin must be *a matter of design*, and have been committed with the intention of sin. If at your leisure at home you will turn to that passage in the Book of Numbers, where it says there is no pardon for a presumptuous sin under the Jewish dispensation, you will find immediately afterwards a case recorded. A man went out on the Sabbath-day to gather sticks; he was taken in the act of Sabbath-breaking, and the law being very stringent under the Jewish dispensation, he was ordered at once to be put to death. Now, the reason why he was put to death was not because he gathered sticks on the Sabbath merely, but because the law had just then been proclaimed, "In it thou shalt do no manner of work." This man wilfully, out of design, in order, as it were, to show that he despised God—to show that he did not care for God—without any necessity, without any hope of advantage, went straight out, in the very teeth of the law, to perform not an act which he kept in his own house, which might perhaps have been overlooked, but an act which brought shame upon the whole congregation, because infidel-like, he dared to brazen it out before God; as much as to say, "I care not for God. Has God just commanded, 'Ye shall do no manner of work?' Here am I; I do not want sticks to-day; I do not want to work; not for the sake of sticks, but with the design of showing that I despise God, I go out this day and gather sticks." "Now," says one "surely there are no people in the world that have ever done such a thing as this." Yes, there are; and there are such in the Surrey Music Hall this day. They have sinned against God, not merely for the pleasure of it, but because they would show their want of reverence to God. That young man burned his Bible in the midst of his wicked companions—not because he hated his Bible, for he quivered and looked pale as the ashes on the hearth when he was doing it; but he did it out of pure bravado, in order to shew them, as he thought, that he really was far gone from anything like a profession of religion. That other man is accustomed sometimes to stand by the wayside, when the people are going to the house of God; and he swears at them, not because he delights in swearing, but because he will show that he is irreligious, that he is ungodly. How many an infidel has done the same—not because he had any pleasure in the thing itself, but because out of the wickedness of his heart he would spit at God, if it were possible, having a design to let men know that though the sin itself was cheap enough, he was determined to do something which would be like spitting in the face of his Maker and despising God who created him! Now, such a sin is a masterpiece of iniquity. There is pardon for such a one—there is full pardon to those who are brought to repentance; but few of such men ever receive it; for when they are so far gone as to sin presumptuously, because they *will* do it—to sin merely for the sake of showing their disregard of God and of God's law, we say of such, there is pardon for them, but it is wondrous grace which brings them into such a condition that they are willing to accept it. Oh that God would keep back His servants here from presumptuous sins! And if any of us here have committed them, may He bring us back, to the praise of the glory of His grace!

4. But one more point, and I think I shall have explained these presumptuous sins. A presumptuous sin also is one that is committed *through a hardihood of fancied strength of mind*. Says one, "I intend to-morrow to go into such-and-such a society, because I believe, though it hurts other people, it does me no hurt." You turn round and say to some young man, "I could not advise you to frequent the Casino—it would be your ruin." But you go yourself, sir? "Yes." But how do you justify yourself? "Because I have such strength of principle that I know just how far to go, and no farther." Thou liest, sir; against thyself thou liest; thou liest presumptuously in so doing. Thou art playing with bombshells that shall burst and destroy thee; thou art sitting over the mouth of hell, with a fancy that thou shalt not be burned. Because thou hast gone to haunts of vice and come back, tainted, much tainted, but because thou art so blind as not to see the taint, thou thinkest thyself secure. Thou art not so. Thy sin, in daring to think that thou art proof against sin, is a sin of presumption. "No, no," says one; "but I know that I can go just so far in such-and-such a sin, and there I can stop." Presumption, sir; nothing but presumption. It would be presumption for any man to climb to the top of the spire of a church, and stand upon his head. 'Well, but he might come down safe, if he were skilled in it.' Yes, but it is presumptuous. I would no more think of subscribing a farthing to a man's ascent in a balloon, than I would to a poor wretch cutting his own throat. I would no more think of standing and gazing at any man who puts his life in a position of peril, than I would of paying a man to blow his brains out. I think such things, if not murders, are murderous. There is suicide in men risking themselves in that way; and if there be suicide in the risk of the body, how much more in the case of a man who puts his own soul in jeopardy just because he thinks he has strength of mind enough to prevent its being ruined

and destroyed. Sir, your sin is a sin of presumption; it is a great and grievous one; it is one of the masterpieces of iniquity.

Oh! how many people there are who are sinning presumptuously to-day! You are sinning presumptuously in being to-day what you are. You are saying, in a little time I will solemnly and seriously think of religion; in a few years, when I am a little more settled in life, I intend to turn over a new leaf, and think about the matters of Godliness. Sir, you are presumptuous. You are presuming that you shall live; you are speculating upon a thing which is as frail as the bubble on the breaker; you are staking your everlasting soul on the deadly odds that you shall live for a few years, whereas, the probabilities are, that you may be cut down ere the sun shall set: and it is possible, that ere another year shall have passed over your head, you may be in the land where repentance is impossible, and useless were it possible. Oh! dear friends, procrastination is a presumptuous sin. The putting off a thing which should be done to-day, because you hope to live to-morrow, is a presumption. You have no right to do it—you are in so doing sinning against God, and bringing on your heads the guilt of presumptuous sin. I remember that striking passage in Jonathan Edward's wonderful sermon, which was the means of a great revival, where he says, "Sinner, thou art this moment standing over the mouth of hell, upon a single plank, and that plank is rotten; thou art hanging over the jaws of perdition, by a solitary rope, and the strands of that rope are creaking now." It is a terrible thing to be in such a position as that, and yet to say, "to-morrow," and to procrastinate. You remind me, some of you, of that story of Dionysius the tyrant, who, wishing to punish one who had displeased him, invited him to a noble feast. Rich were the viands that were spread upon the table, and rare the wines of which he was invited to drink. A chair was placed at the head of the table, and the guest was seated within it. Horror of horrors! The feast might be rich, but the guest was miserable, dreadful beyond thought. However splendid might be the array of the servants, and however rich the dainties, yet he who had been invited sat there in agony. For what reason? Because over his head, immediately over it, there hung a sword, a furbished sword, suspended by a single hair. He had to sit all the time with this sword above him, with nothing but a hair between him and death, you may conceive the poor man's misery. He could not escape; he must sit where he was. How could he feast? How could he rejoice! But, oh my unconverted hearer, thou art there this morning, man, with all thy riches and thy wealth before thee, with the comforts of a home and the joys of a household; thou art there this day, in a place from which thou canst not escape; the sword of death above thee, prepared to descend; and woe unto thee, when it shall cleave thy soul from thy body! Canst thou yet make mirth, and yet procrastinate? If thou canst, then verily thy sin is presumptuous in a high degree. "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins."

II. And now I come to the second part of the subject, with which I shall deal very briefly. I am to try and show WHY IT IS THAT THERE IS GREAT ENORMITY IN A PRESUMPTUOUS SIN.

Let me take any one of the sins: for instance, *the sin against light and knowledge.* There is greater enormity in such a presumptuous sin than in any other. In this our happy land it is just possible for a man to commit treason. I think it must be rather difficult for him to do it; for we are allowed to say words here which would have brought our necks beneath the guillotine, if they had been spoken on the other side of the channel; and we are allowed to do deeds here which would have brought us long years of imprisonment, if the deed had been done in any other land. We, despite all that our American friends may say, are the freest people to speak and think in all the world. Though we have not the freedom of beating our slaves to death, or of shooting them if they choose to disobey—though we have not the freedom of hunting men, or the freedom of sucking another man's blood out of him to make us rich—though we have not the freedom of being worse than devils, which slave-catchers and many slave-holders most certainly are—we have liberty greater than that; liberty against the tyrant mob, as well as against the tyrant king. But I suppose it is just possible to commit treason here. Now, if two men should commit treason—if one of them should wantonly and wickedly raise the standard of revolt to-morrow, should denounce the rightful sovereign of this land in the strongest and most abominable language, should seek to entice the loyal subjects of this country from their allegiance, and should draw some of them astray, to the hurt and injury of the common weal. He might have in his rebellious ranks one who joined incautiously, not knowing whereunto the matter might tend, who might come into the midst of the rebels, not understanding the intention of their unlawful assembling, not even knowing the law which prohibited them from being banded together. I can suppose these two men brought up upon a charge of high treason: they have both, legally, been guilty of it; but I can suppose that the one man who had sinned ignorantly would be acquitted, because there was no malignant intent; and I can suppose that the other man, who had wilfully, knowingly, maliciously and wickedly raised the standard of revolt, would receive the highest punishment which the law could demand. And why? Because in the one case it was a sin of presumption, and in the other case it was not so. In the one case the man dared to defy the sovereign, and defy the law of the land, wilfully, out of mere presumption. In the other case not so. Now, every man sees that it would be just to make a distinction in the punishment, because there is—conscience itself tells us—a distinction in the guilt.

Again: some men, I have said, sin *deliberately*, and others do not do so. Now, in order to show that there is a distinction here, let me take a case. To-morrow the bench of magistrates are sitting. Two men are brought up. They are each of them charged with stealing a loaf of bread. It is clearly proved, in the one case that the man was hungry, and that he snatched the loaf of bread to satisfy his necessities. He is sorry for his deed, he grieves that he has done the act; but most manifestly he had a strong temptation to it. In the other case the man was rich, and he wilfully went into the shop merely because he would break the law and show that he was a law-breaker. He said to the policeman outside, "Now, I care neither for you nor the law; I intend to go in there, just to see what you can do with me." I can suppose the magistrate would say to one man, "You are discharged; take care not to do the like

again ; there is something for your present necessities; seek to earn an honest living." But to the other I can conceive him saying, " You are an infamous wretch ; you have committed the same deed as the other, but from very different motives ; I give you the longest term of imprisonment which the law allows me, and I can only regret that I cannot treat you worse than I have done." The presumption of the sin made the difference. So when you sin deliberately and knowingly, your sin against Almighty God is a higher and a blacker sin than it would have been if you had sinned ignorantly, or sinned in haste.

Now let us suppose one more case. In the heat of some little dispute some one shall insult a man. You shall be insulted by a man of angry temper ; you have not provoked him, you gave him no just cause for it ; but at the same time he was of a hot and angry disposition ; he was somewhat foiled in the debate, and he insulted you, calling you by some name which has left a stain upon your character, so far as epithets can do it. I can suppose that you would ask no reparation of him, if by to-morrow you saw that it was just a rash word spoken in haste, of which he repented. But suppose another person should waylay you in the street, should week after week seek to meet you in the market place, and should after a great deal of toil and trouble at last meet you, and there, in the centre of a number of people, unprovoked, just out of sheer, deliberate malice, come before you and call you a liar in the street ; I can suppose that Christian as you are, you might find it necessary to chastise such insolence, not with your hand, but with the arm of that equitable law which protects us all from insulting violence. In the other case I can suppose it would be no trouble to you to forgive. You would say, " My dear fellow, I know we are all hasty sometimes—there, now, I don't care at all for it ; you did not mean it." But in this case, where a man has dared and defied you without any provocation whatever, you would say to him, " Sir, you have endeavoured to injure me in respectable society ; I can forgive you as a Christian, but as a man and a citizen, I shall demand that I am protected against your insolence."

You see, therefore, in the cases that occur between man and man, how there is an excess of guilt added to a sin by presumption. O ! ye that have sinned presumptuously—and who among us has not done so ?—bow your heads in silence, confess your guilt, and then open your mouths, and cry, " Lord, have mercy upon me, a presumptuous sinner."

III. And now I have nearly done—not to weary you by too long a discourse—we shall notice THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THIS PRAYER—" Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins."

Will you just note, that this prayer was the *prayer of a saint*, the prayer of a holy man of God ? Did David need to pray thus ? Did the " man after God's own heart " need to cry, " Keep back Thy servant ? " Yes, he did. And note the *beauty* of the prayer. If I might translate it into more metaphorical style, it is like this : " Curb Thy servant from presumptuous sin." " Keep him back, or he will wander to the edge of the precipice of sin. Hold him in, Lord ; he is apt to run away ; curb him ; put the bridle on him ; do not let him do it ; let Thine overpowering grace keep him holy ; when he would do evil, then do Thou draw him to good, and when his evil propensities would lead him astray, then do Thou check him." " Check Thy servant from presumptuous sins ? "

What, then ? Is it true that the best of men may sin presumptuously ? Ah ! it is true. It is a solemn thing to find the apostle Paul warning saints against the most loathsome of sins. He says, " Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, inordinate affection," and such like. What ! do saints want warning against such sins as these ? Yes, they do. The highest saints may sin the lowest sins, unless kept by divine grace. You old experienced Christians, boast not in your experience ; you may trip yet, unless you cry, " Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." Ye whose love is fervent, whose faith is constant, whose hopes are bright, say not, " I shall never sin," but rather cry out, " Lord, lead me not into temptation, and when there leave me not there ; for unless Thou hold me fast I feel I must, I shall decline, and prove an apostate after all." There is enough tinder in the heart of the best men in the world to light a fire that shall burn to the lowest hell, unless God should quench the sparks as they fall. There is enough corruption, depravity, and wickedness in the heart of the most holy man that is now alive to damn his soul to all eternity, if free and sovereign grace does not prevent. O Christian, thou hast need to pray this prayer. But I think I hear you saying, " Is thy servant a dog that I should do this thing ? " So said Hazael, when the prophet told him that he would slay his master ; but he went home, and took a wet cloth and spread it over his master's face and stifled him, and did the next day the sin which he abhorred before. Think it not enough to abhor sin, you may yet fall into it. Say not, " I never can be drunken, for I have such an abhorrence of drunkenness ; " thou mayest fall where thou art most secure. Say not, " I can never blaspheme God, for I have never done so in my life ; " take care ; you may yet swear most profanely. Job might have said, " I will never curse the day of my birth ; " but he lived to do it. He was a patient man ; he might have said, " I will never murmur ; though He slay me yet will I trust in Him ; " and yet he lived to wish that the day were darkness wherein he was brought forth. Boast not, then, O Christian : by faith thou standest. " Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

But if this need to be the prayer of the best, how ought it to be the prayer of you and me ? If the highest saint must pray it, O mere moralist, thou hast good need to utter it. And ye who have begun to sin, who make no pretensions to piety, how much need is there for you to pray that you may be kept from presumptuously rebelling against God.

Instead, however, of enlarging upon that point, I shall close my few remarks this morning by just addressing myself most affectionately to such of you as are now under a sense of guilt by reason of presumptuous sins. God's Spirit has found some of you out this morning. I thought when I was describing presumptuous sin that I saw here and there an eye that was suffused with tears ; I thought I saw here and there a head that was bowed down, as much as to say, " I am guilty there." I thought there were some hearts that palpitated with confession, when I described the guilt of presumption. I hope it was so. If it was, I am glad of it. If I hit your consciences, it was that I meant to do. Not to your ears do I speak, but to your hearts. I would not give the snap

of this my finger to gratify you with mere words of oratory, with a mere flow of language. No, God is my witness. I never sought effect yet, except the effect of hitting your consciences. I would use the words that would be most rough and vulgar in all our language, if I could get at your heart better with them than with any other; for I reckon that the chief matter with a minister is to touch the conscience. If any of you feel, then, that you have presumed against God in sinning, let me just bid you look at your sin, and weep over the blackness of it; let me exhort you to go home and bow your heads with sorrow, and confess your guilt, and weep over it with many tears and sighs. You have greatly sinned, and if God should blast you into perdition now, He would be just; if now His fiery thunderbolt of vengeance should pierce you through, if the arrow that is now upon the string of the Almighty should find a target in your heart, He would be just. Go home and confess that, confess it with cries and sighs. And then what next wilt thou do? Why, I bid thee remember that there was a Man who was God. That Man suffered for presumptuous sin. I would bid thee this day, sinner, if thou knowest thy need of a Saviour, go up to thy chamber, cast thyself upon thy face and weep for sin; and when thou hast done that, turn to the Scriptures, and read the story of that Man who suffered and died for sin. Think you see Him in all His unutterable agonies, and griefs, and woes, and say this—

"My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear,
When hanging on th' accursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there."

Lift up your hand, and put it on His head who bled, and say—

"My faith would lay its hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin."

Sit down at the foot of His cross, and watch Him till your heart is moved, till the tears begin to flow again, until your heart breaks within you; and then you will rise and say—

"Dissolved by His mercy I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found."

O sinner, thou canst never perish, if thou wilt cast thyself at the foot of the cross. If thou seekest to save thyself thou shalt die; if thou wilt come, just as thou art, all black, all filthy, all hell-deserving, all ill-deserving, I am my Master's hostage, I will be answerable at the day of judgment for this matter, if He does not save thee. I can preach on this subject now, for I trust I have tried my Master myself. As a youth I sinned, as a child I rebelled, as a young man I wandered into lusts and vanities: my Master made me feel how great a sinner I was, and I sought to reform, to mend the matter; but I grew worse. At last I heard it said, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth;" and I looked to Jesus. And oh! my Saviour, Thou hast eased my aching conscience, Thou hast given me peace; Thou hast enabled me to say—

"Now freed from sin I walk at large,
My Saviour's blood's a full discharge;
At His dear feet my soul I lay,
A sinner saved, and homage pay."

And oh! my heart pants for you. Oh that you who never knew Him could taste His love now. Oh that you who have never repented might now receive the Holy Ghost who is able to melt the heart! And oh that you that are penitents would look to Him now! And I repeat that solemn assertion—I am God's hostage this morning; ye shall feed me on bread and water to my life's end, aye, and I will bear the blame for ever, if any of you seek Christ, and Christ rejects you. It must not, it cannot be. "Whosoever cometh," He says, "I will in nowise cast out." "He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him." May God Almighty bless you; and may we meet again in yonder paradise; and there will we sing more sweetly of redeeming love and dying blood, and of Jesus' power to save—

"When this poor lisping, stammering tongue,
Lies silent in the grave."

EXCEEDING GLADNESS

"For Thou hast made Him most blessed for ever: Thou hast made Him exceeding glad with Thy countenance."—Psalm xxi. 6.

YOU have heard a great many sermons upon the Man of Sorrows. I am sure that you have not heard too many; and if, from this time to the end of your life, you should every Sabbath hear of Him, and of His sufferings, you will not be nauseated with that theme. You will still feel an intense pleasure in hearing the story of your Lord's griefs, and in having fellowship with Him in His sufferings, for by His agonies and death He has redeemed you unto Himself. Probably you have never listened to a discourse upon "The Man of Joys!" I venture thus to name the Christ of God. We do not often enough meditate upon the happiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame; and the expectation of joy is joy.

The light of His coming reward shone on our Lord's daily path, and made it bright with a glorious hope. Sin is the mother of sorrow, and Jesus knew no sin; conscience never made Him a coward; remorse never pricked His heart; malice, envy, and discontent never gnawed at His soul. He was the Prince of Peace, even when He was despised and rejected of men. Deep as were His griefs, we may reckon Jesus of Nazareth among the happiest of men. There was nothing of that efflorescence, that effervescence, that froth of joy, which carnal men value

so highly ; but there was a deep peace, a calm content, which is beyond all price. Jesus did not enter into such mirth as might have befitted Herod's palace, or Dives' gilded saloons, or Cæsar's luxurious banquets ; but He knew such joy as the Son of God must know when His Father heareth Him always, and as the Saviour of men must know when His every word and act are blessing a fallen race. He felt a supreme delight in doing the will of the Father, and in carrying out the purpose of His own gracious mind. He was filled with a mighty resolve, so strong that it beat off every force which would have turned His mind aside from His chosen path ; and He felt an infinite love, which found intense satisfaction in yielding up everything for its objects. There was, in fact, even in the midst of the sorrows which were necessary to His service, a satisfaction in bearing those sorrows, a delight in passing through those depths of agony which were necessary for the accomplishment of His grand design.

A man cannot be full of such benevolence as that which filled the heart of Christ, and yet be utterly miserable. Unselfishness brings with it necessarily a measure of joy. A man could not open blind eyes, and unstop deaf ears, make lame men leap, heal lepers, and raise the dead, and yet remain comfortless himself ; as well suppose that the sun, which scatters so much heat, may be itself a huge globe of ice. The fountain which yields such streams of blessing has its own flash and sparkle ; we feel sure of it. As pearls may lie in plenty in caverns, over which there rolls a dread tempestuous sea, so there slept in the heart of Jesus treasures of joy, even when the ocean of His holy soul was lashed with hurricanes of woe. There is a joy in doing good which cannot be separated from the doing of the good ; and the Saviour possessed it beyond conception. There is a joy in living entirely out of oneself for the good of others, and this Jesus drank to the full. There is a joy in achieving a great purpose, even when it is only by sorrow that our design is wrought out, and that also our Redeemer knew. In Him was perfectly explained that enigma of Paul, "As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing."

I am not going to say more of the joy of our Lord on earth ; and only for a few moments shall I enlarge upon the exceeding gladness of the God-man, Christ Jesus, at this present moment in heaven, though it is to this that our text primarily refers. Jesus has gone up into His glory, and the eye of faith can see Him at the right hand of the Father, for ever exalted as Head of the Church, and Head over all things for her sake. In that position our Lord is filled with superlative felicity. His death is rewarded by the Father with an endless life of bliss : "He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it Him, even length of days for ever and ever. His glory is great in Thy salvation : honour and majesty hast Thou laid upon Him. For Thou hast made Him most blessed for ever : Thou hast made Him exceeding glad with Thy countenance."

I need not enter into the joy of Christ as God, for this is inseparable from His Godhead ; but I speak of Him now as Mediator, in His complex person standing between God and man. In that capacity, as risen from the dead, and gone into glory, He is supremely glad—*glad because His work is finished.* Such a work as His had so taken up His whole heart, and engrossed His whole being, that it became a baptism to be baptized with, and he was straitened until it was accomplished. It is accomplished now, and the straitening is ended. He has not another act to do by way of obedience to the law ; He has not another pang to bear by way of fulfilment of penalty due for our guilt. "It is finished," is the *finis* of His God-like labour. There is not another drop of blood to be shed ; no more chastisement of our peace is to be laid on Him ; no more stripes are to be exacted for our healing.

"No more the bloody spear ;
The cross and nails no more ;
For hell itself shakes at His name,
And all the heavens adore."

"*Consummatum est,*" is written at the foot of His throne. His work is so finished that all the results of it are sure ; those for whom He died are safe ; that which he purchased by His blood He has obtained. He has left nothing undone in any point, so that a degree of failure may yet occur. He has left no stone of the wall to tumble from its place ; His work is so completely done that, as He looks upon it all, He feels unmingled joy and content. The Father, looks upon Him with such a perfect satisfaction in His glorious work, that our text is fulfilled beyond the letter. "Thou hast made Him exceeding glad with Thy countenance."

"A life eternal as Thy years,
A glory infinite like Thine,
Repays Him for His groans and tears,
And fills His soul with joy divine."

Nor is this all, for Jesus Christ our Lord rejoices to think that now, from this day forth, *God has made Him to be the foundation of priceless, numberless, endless blessings to men.* Observe the first clause of our text, and remember that it may be read thus,—"Thou hast made Him blessings for ever," that is to say, God has now opened in His Son Jesus Christ, a well of blessings, which will never cease to flow as long as there are men to drink thereat. He is no curse to men, but only blessing ; He is not one blessing only, but all blessings ; these blessings are the chief boons that even God can give, and they are in Christ Jesus to all eternity. The Lord Jesus, who was once the centre of grief, has now become the source of love, favour, help, healing, benediction, delight, heaven, and whatever else may be called blessing.

"Immortal joys come streaming down,
Joys, like His griefs, immense, unknown."

Nay, blessings do not only come from Him, but He is blessings ; He is Himself made or constituted blessings to all eternity. O Thou blessed Lord, we pause to adore and bless Thee even now ! This makes our Lord exceeding glad, to think that He is in His own proper person the very centre of all blessing to His people. Fulness of blessing abides in Him. There is no blessing that you want, poor sinner, but what Jesus has it, has it for you. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." No blessing that you want, dear child of God, shall be denied you, for "of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." That fulness abides where it is ; it has never diminished, and it never will be diminished throughout eternity.

"Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

Whenever God makes any one of you to be the channel of blessing to other people, are you not happy? Yes, certainly, in your measure. But what must be the superlative gladness of the Christ in being the centre of centres, the fountain of fountains, to all those who draw near to Him? God has made Him, beyond all others, and inclusive of all others, to be blessings for evermore. Must He not be filled with gladness?

Our Lord has made joy beyond this. I want you to think much of His gladness that you may be able to obey Him now, should He say to you, "Enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord." At this very hour may His joy be in you, that your joy may be full. Jesus sympathizes with you in your sorrows; will you not sympathise with Him in His joys? Should we not rejoice with them that do rejoice, and especially with Him, the Bridegroom of our souls? This is a further part of His gladness,—He *joys in the conversion, the comfort, the justification, the salvation of every soul that comes to Him.* "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Almost everybody who preaches from that text is content with the undoubted truth that the angels rejoice over sinners that repent. No doubt they do so; but the text does not tell us so. It says, "There is joy *in the presence of* the angels of God"; that is to say, they are present where there is joy, they look upon the face of Christ, and see the joy which fills His heart as His redeemed ones are renewed by grace. Angels behold the delight that fills the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost as sinners turn from the error of their ways. If, at this moment, a sinner, conscious of his sin, is flying to the cross for refuge, he is making Christ happy. If he is now bowing the knee, and crying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," that cry of his is music to the soul of his loving Saviour. When that repenting sinner casts himself upon the great atonement, and rests in the sacrifice of Jesus, the heart of Jesus receives a part of its infinite reward, and the promise is in a measure fulfilled, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." You know the meaning of the suggestive figure couched in those words: the soul of Christ was in pangs, like a woman in travail, for these souls, and they are born to eternal life as the result of His soul's labour; and then, as the mother sees the child, and remembereth no more her sorrow for joy that a man is born into the world, so does the Saviour see each one of His beloved ones born to Himself, and feels a joy so great that He is more than recompensed for having died on the cruel tree. Oh, the joy of Christ over a soul that turns to Him! O my hearer, think of it! Consider! It is really so? You are capable of making the heart of Christ to throb with joy unspeakable even now! My beloved hearer, you have lived in sin, and I fear you will die in it. Nobody thinks much of you, and you feel the neglect. You are even now sighing, "No man careth for my soul"; but Jesus cares for you, and if you come to Him, you shall fill His loving heart with gladness: your forgiveness, renewal, and salvation will cause Him to rejoice in spirit. What say you? If the Christ in glory values you, I beseech you do not trifle with yourself, or lie down in despair.

Moreover, I believe that Jesus in glory finds great *joy of all the deeds of His saved people.* Whenever He sees one of His believing people counting His reproach to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, our Lord is glad. When He sees a heart that has been washed in His blood true to Him, refusing to believe false doctrine, or to do that which is unjust, then is Christ glad over His disciple. When He sees you plotting and planning how you can honour Him, when He marks your self-denials, when He sees you prayerful, earnest, active, spiritual, loving, His gladness is great. I tell you all the love you have to Him He delights in; and your childlike confidence in Him, and your little struggling light which seeks after more light, and your earnest longings for His coming and His kingdom, and those broken words of yours by which you speak to others of His love:—all those things He sees with exquisite pleasure. These are flowers that would not have grown in your garden if He had not sown them there. If there be anything that is honest, and true, and holy, and heavenly, and Christly, it is all His work; and He is right glad to see it. I know you will think that He sees in us much to grieve Him, and I grant you that He does: but He knows our frame, and He remembereth that we are dust; but when He sees anything that His own Spirit has wrought in us He beholds it with intense complacency, and deigns to take a continual pleasure therein.

Moreover—and I speak gently and softly here—I believe that our Master derives a divine satisfaction from *the holy sufferings of His people,* when they bear pain with patience, when they praise His name on their beds, and adore Him in the fires, and when coming to die, they bear themselves calmly in the last dread article, behaving themselves as men who know no fear. When they walk through the very jaws of death, fearing no evil, simply confiding in the eternal Christ; then is Jesus glad to see how well they have learned the lesson which he taught them. When they come up on the other side of Jordan, like sheep from the washing: when they appear before His throne, "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," when the shining ones draw near before Him, and, cast their crowns at His dear feet; when they lift their united hallelujahs unto Him that loved them and washed them from their sins in His precious blood, —then is the King exceeding glad. My tongue cannot possibly tell out to you the *joy of our Lord in His people's joy.* It is from Christ that heaven's gladness comes, and it is into Christ that heaven's gladness flows. He gives the redeemed all their bliss, and He receives from them all that bliss as they lovingly ascribe their salvation to Him alone. He at this moment is heaven's centre, the happiest of the happy, the blessed Leader of a blessed company, the triumphant Captain of a triumphant band, who, having gone forth conquering and to conquer, have at last finished the fight, and sheathed the sword, and shared their Master's victory. They cry unto Jehovah, "Thou hast made *him* exceeding glad with Thy countenance," and they themselves partake of that gladness.

All this is my preface at this time, and I need not apologize for the length of it, since its theme might fitly have been that of the whole discourse.

The sermon shall be somewhat short, and I trust it will be sweet. This is the subject of it: I desire that the Lord's people may enter into this joy of Christ, and that, as each one of them is made a king, the text may be fulfilled in each one of them. I have not described to you the gladness of our Lord as it ought to be described, but I can do no better. If you will endeavour to share in it, you will make up for my deficiencies. May the Holy Spirit aid you!

I. First, I would remark, that GLADNESS IS THE PECULIAR PRIVILEGE OF SAINTS. "Happy art thou, O Israel!" "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous."

Why should we not be glad? *It is all right between us and God.* If, having rebelled against Him, we had never repented, and had never been reconciled, we ought to be miserable. He that is out of order with God may well be out of order with himself. But we have been brought nigh; we have been adopted into the family of God; we have obtained reconciliation through the precious blood, and have enjoyed the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace; ought we not to be glad? Dear heart, there is no quarrel between Thee and God: peace has been made through Jesus Christ; the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, doth keep thy heart and mind through Christ Jesus. If thou hast not a right to be happy, who has? In a well-ordered government, those that are friendly with their prince have a right to rejoice in his courts; and in the government of God, it seems but right and natural that those who are made to be at peace with God should be among the gladdest of heaven's courtiers. It is meet that we should make merry and be glad. Let us take advantage of that right, and may the Spirit of joy make us glad at this good hour!

In addition to the fact that they are right with God, *believers have their present solaces* in many ways. Grace endows them with immediate joys. I like that part of our song which we sang just now,—

> "The hill of Zion yields
> A thousand sacred sweets,
> Before we reach the heavenly fields,
> Or walk the golden streets."

If I were to try and tell all the things that make Christians glad, even here below, I should have to make an endless catalogue. Where should I begin? Once beginning, where should I leave off? You can count your sorrows, dear brother, I dare say. You are quite *au fait* at adding them all up; but I would have you to recapitulate your joys with equal readiness. Why not? Review the shining ranks of your mercies. Are they not new every morning? Is not the faithfulness of God exceeding great? O, my brothers, God has done so much for us that we are glad! He has surprised us with the greatness of His goodness! If I had been sure, thirty-five years ago, that I should have possessed, in the covenant of grace, such a portion as I have at this hour, I think I should have leaped out of my body for joy. When I was under a sense of sin, if I had been assured that I should yet be forgiven, I do not know that I could have contained myself for delight. When I was lying under the chastening hand of God, on account of my trangressions, if I had known that He would turn His face upon me, and smile upon me, and make me His child, and put me into the ministry, and permit me the great privilege of telling out the wonders of His grace, I verily believe that it would have been too great a weight of joy; it would have crushed me with too much delight. And yet, at this moment, I am not half as glad as I should be warranted in being, because of the unspeakable mercy of God to me. Just apply that reflection to your own cases. Is there not about you now that which would have made your mouth water if you had known twenty years ago that you would be what you now are? Aye, fifty or sixty years ago, mayhap, if it could have been revealed to you that you would live to be a man verging upon eighty, still rejoicing in God, you would have said, "No, not I. I shall fall a prey to the enemy long before that. I shall go back and prove to be a hypocrite long before that." You would not have credited that the Lord would ever have done so much for you as He has actually done. Come, do not rob your God of His praises. Defraud not your King of His revenue of glory. Do not get fretting and stewing about nothing at all; but rejoice in the Lord always, and then again rejoice. This is an appointed feast; let us keep it. "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." I heard a brother in a prayer-meeting say, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we *desire to be* glad"; and I wanted to jump down that man's throat, and pull that passage back again, and put it into its natural shape. What business had the brother to mend the Bible, and talk such wretched stuff? "Whereof we *desire to be glad*!" Why, if the Lord has done great things for us, we *are* glad, we cannot help it, and blessed be His name we do not wish to do so!

In addition to that, *we have a brilliant future before us.* We are the heirs of great expectations. The children of God not only possess present mercies, like the leaves and flowers of summer, but things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, laid by in store, like the fruits of autumn. Come, think of heaven for a moment or two, and anticipate its glory. Put on your crown for a little while, and wear your white garments! Can you not take a palm-branch in your hand in imagination, and sing the new song in your heart? You know that you will be thus arrayed, and thus occupied, within a short time; then go through your part, rehearsing it by a lively hope. The glorious hour will soon arrive when you shall be near and like your God, and reign with Him for ever. At the present moment there is a place in heaven for me that nobody can ever fill but my own self; and Jesus has gone before, not only to prepare it, but to prepare it *for me.* There is a crown that no head but mine can ever wear, and a song that no tongue but mine can ever sing; and I shall soon cast my crown at Jesu's feet, and chant before Him my hallelujahs. That is true of every believer here. Wherefore, be glad; yea, rejoice before the Lord with all your might. Brother, you have not much here, but you will have everything hereafter. You have but a little farther to journey through the great and terrible wilderness, and you will be in Canaan, and possess the land that floweth with milk and honey. Wherefore be glad.

The children of God have further cause to be glad, because *they have all blessings secured to them,* so that they shall never lose them. That which their God has promised them shall never be alienated from them. They are in a position of indisputable security for they are hidden in the wounds of Christ, as in the clefts of the Rock of Ages. They shall never die, for they are members of His body who is immortal. They are in that Hand from which none can ever snatch them. "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish: neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." Wherefore let us begin to be merry, as it is said in the parable of the prodigal son. "They began to be merry." I have read that parable ever so many times, and I have looked to see whether it is written that they ever left off being merry, and I cannot find that they did. "They began to be merry." Very well, let us begin to be merry at this hour, dear friends, and let us never leave off as long

as we live. Let us rejoice *evermore*. As long as we have a God to rejoice in, let us rejoice. As long as we have a heaven to go to, let us rejoice. As long as we have an eternal covenant ordered in all things and sure, let us rejoice. As long as we have any being, let us rejoice in the Lord.

II. Secondly, let us remark that THE SAINT'S GLADNESS IS OF A PECULIAR SORT.

That gladness which is peculiar to the children of God is *a gladness that God has wrought in them*. "*Thou* hast made him exceeding glad." Oh, yes, I heard him! He seemed very glad, but when he began to explain to me his gladness, I could tell by his hiccough where he got it: he owed it to the deadly cup. Shame on him! Oh, yes, he was exceeding glad; but when I saw his merriment, I could tell that it was his youth and his good health that gave him his gladness! These will soon vanish away. But the child of God owes his gladness to a deeper source; God has made him glad. He that can touch the secret springs of the heart, apart from circumstances, or conditions, has often made a man glad when he has been racked with pain, or when he has been in the depths of poverty, or when he has been suffering at the demoniacal hands of inquisitors.

Saints drink from a spring which neither dries in summer nor freezes in winter; for *that which is of God's making remains*. "Your joy no man taketh from you." If God has made you glad, then the devil cannot make you sad. If God has made you glad, then it is not the weather, and it is not your property, and it is not your health, and it is not your friend, neither is it your foe that can make you unhappy. If it is written. "Thou hast made him glad," then the man is glad indeed. Beloved, I wish that every one of you had that joy which only God can give you, that better part which, once obtained, none can take away. It comes from God, and from God alone, and when He bestows it, it is yours for ever, for His gifts are without repentance; He never takes back that which He has once granted. This is the joy which is worth having, for it is full, deep, lasting, everlasting. They say that philosophers can be merry without music; and certainly Christians can joy in God without outward comforts. and they can even take joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Happy people, to whom even losses are gains, and burdens are helps!

Notice, next, in the text, that the gladness which God gives to His people is no ordinary gladness, but *an exceeding joy*. "Thou hast made him *exceeding* glad,"—exceeding: exceeding hope, exceeding measure, exceeding the gladness of others, exceeding any delight that can come from any other source. "Thou hast made him exceeding glad": one man has become wealthy, and he is glad; but the child of God, if the Lord has smiled upon him, is exceeding glad. Here is one that feels his blood leaping in his veins with health, and he is merry as the birds in summer-time because of it; but when the Lord turns again the captivity of His people, and smiles upon them, they are exceeding glad. I wish that I could tell you how our eyes sometimes flash and sparkle, how our whole spirit dances within us for excessive joy, when a sense of divine love is poured into our souls. I cannot communicate by any description what it is, but, brethren, you can surely guess, for you perhaps have felt the same; and if you have, you would not change with Cæsar for his empire, nor with an archangel for his starry throne. No, when God lifts up the light of His countenance upon His people, it is a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory which He lays upon them. Then do they sing, "Joy, joy, joy!" I speak what I do know, and testify what I have felt. May you know it! May you feel it now!

I know that worldlings imagine that we Christians are a miserable crew, and I fear that too often we turn our worst side foremost when we are with them. I am told that many shop-keepers are so poor that they put the most of their goods in the shop-window; but this is a method which few Christians follow; for the opposite is the fact, their window is badly set out, and yet they have a costly stock upon their shelves. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light, in this as well as other things. I would recommend such believers to dress their window a little, and show some of their better things. Put your ashes into the backyard, but pour out the oil of joy in the parlour. Let people see that, after all, there are great advantages in belonging to the Lord's household. But whether we *seem* to be happy or not, I can speak as one who has not been without abundant affliction and trial, we who believe in Jesus *are* a happy people, an enviable people. "Happy art thou, O Israel," said Moses; and we can bear witness that he spake the truth. I would change with no man. So long as I know whom I have believed, I would prefer my own lot to that of any I have ever seen or heard of. I leave that point; but be ye sure of this, that God-given joy is no common treasure.

But, according to the text, this joy *comes to us in one way*. "Thou hast made him exceeding glad *with Thy countenance*." Have you not sometimes been made very glad with the look of a friend's face? I believe that there is more heart-cheer in the sight of some countenances than in sun, and moon, and stars. Oh, the joy that I had a little while ago in looking upon one dear face that I shall not see again for many a day, for it must needs be seen on the other side of the globe! What joy I have had in looking upon some of you when you have come to tell me what the Lord has done for you, and I have seen your joy in the Lord! "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Certain friends of ours carry with them countenances which are always a half-day's holiday to me whenever I look on them. I do not say that this is true of all of you, for I know some knights of the rueful countenance, whose faces are long and dismal; and I would urge these to look into the face of Jesus till His brightness illuminates them. There are those among us who are so brimming over with sacred joy that a glance at their faces refreshes our hearts. Now, catch my thought—What must the countenance of God be? The countenance of a friend to a friend, of a bridegroom to his bride, of a wife to her husband, of a father to his child; each of these spreads gladness: but what is the countenance of God to His elect? It is a countenance that seems to say, "I am reconciled; your sin is put away." Oh, the gladness of seeing that face! It is a face that seems to say, "I am watching you; I am caring for you; I am smiling upon you." Is not this a gladdening look? Lord, Thou hast made me glad with Thy countenance. "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! Carefully and continually Thou dost think upon me, and watch over me, to do me good." Thus to see the observing countenance of God is a great delight to His people.

What shall I say of His approving countenance? When God has looked upon you, and seemed to say, "You are doing right. Men blame you, but I accept you. Dear child of Mine: you are doing My will. You are following Me in reproach, and I will abundantly reward you,"—this makes a man exceeding glad, and nerves him to bear reproach and misunderstanding, however cruelly they may assail him.

Again, when you come before God in prayer, and you are pleading with Him, and your faith discerns that glorious face—the face of Jesus, your heart cries, "I am accepted: God is hearing my prayer. I may ask what I will, and it shall be done unto me. I am not praying like a stranger; I am pleading like a child. I have my Father's ear and heart, and His countenance is toward me." Oh, then it is a glad time with you! You are being heard, and answered, and your heart beats to music.

When the Lord looks on His chosen follower, and says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love. I love thee inexpressibly; I love thee without measure I love thee as I love My Only-Begotten; and I will love thee when time shall be no more. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,"—then again our heart is glad, and our glory rejoiceth; we should not be afraid for our flesh to rest in hope, for at such a time we could either live or die without a question, so fully is our heart filled with God. Then does our face shine like that of Moses when he came down from the mount. Out of heaven, there is no gladness that is worthy to be compared with the bliss of knowing that the Lord has set His love upon us. This is the fulness of the vintage, and all beside is as the gleaning of the grapes when the summer is ended.

I have not time, you see, to open up this grand subject fully, but such is the joy of God's people. It comes from a clear sense of the divine approbation. We must walk with God, and be heartily agreed with Him, or we shall not possess this felicity. Whenever the child of God feels, "I was wrong; God is grieved with me"; then he goes slinking off to bed like a child that cannot have a good-night kiss; and there is no gladness for him. But when, on the contrary, the Lord turns to him in love and mercy, and says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee"; and when He smiles upon us in Christ Jesus, then we can say with the Psalmist, "Thou hast made me exceeding glad with Thy countenance."

I will not detain you many minutes more, except to say that this joy of the believer *comes to him through many channels*. Heaven has many windows, and out of each one of them the Lord pours benedictions upon His chosen.

Let me read a part of the psalm. "The king shall joy in *Thy strength, O Lord.*" Oh, it is a great thing, when you are weak, to be strong in God, for then you will be happy. Divine strength brings divine gladness with it.

"And in *Thy salvation* how greatly shall he rejoice!" God's salvation, the election that brings us into it, the redemption that makes us full possessors of its blessings, the effectual calling which leads us to accept it, the eternal love which holds us fast in it,—why, in all these how greatly do we rejoice!

Next, *answers to prayer* make us rejoice. "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips." When a man comes from the mercy-seat, like Luther, saying, "I have conquered, I have won my suit with God," what gladness has the Lord given him!

"For Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness." God is beforehand with us: He outruns us in love. Here is another source of joy—when God *gives us mercies before we seek them*,—when He lays them in our road, and there they are ready for us before we come to the spot. When David was made a king, I am sure he said, "I never thought, nor sought, nor wrought to be a king." Many of us have received choice blessings, of which we said when we obtained them,—"Whence is this to me? I never dreamed of this. This was not in my programme. I never proposed this to my soul in her hours of largest desire. Thou preventest me with the blessings of Thy goodness."

Brethren, such things as these tend to make God's people glad in their hearts.

This is my last words to you,—be glad in the Lord. I do not ask you to simulate happiness—to pretend to be glad when you are not; I do not ask you to sing when your heart feels that it must sigh: but I do ask you to be glad when there is reason so to be. Be true and real in all your expressions; but let that truth and that expression spring from an educated soul that has been in the school of Christ, and has learned what the facts of the case really are. Let your feelings be according to truth, and your condition of heart according to the eternal settlements of immutable love. What are the facts of the case? Here they are,—"O Lord, I will praise Thee: though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedest me." If I do not praise Thee, the timber out of the wall must cry out against me. If I do not rejoice in Thee, I shall be a traitor to my own consciousness, and false to my own convictions, for Thou hast brought my soul up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and Thou hast set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and I must have a new song in my mouth, even praise for evermore. I would, if I could, stir you all up to a burst of holy joy, a blaze of sacred gladness. Put on your silver sandals, and your bridal ornaments. Take off your weeds, and gird yourselves in white raiment. Doff the sackcloth and ashes, and put on your beautiful array. Cast aside your chains; leave them for those to wear who love them; and walk at large, in liberty, bedecked with the jewels of infinite grace, and crowned with the diadem of loving-kindness. Sing unto the Lord a new song; and end it not till you get to heaven, and then it will never end. "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being."

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ,
Who hath blessed us with such blessings, all uncounted and unpriced!
Let our high and holy calling, and our strong salvation be,
Theme of never-ending praises, God of sovereign grace, to Thee!"

Hallelujah! Amen.

GOOD NEWS FOR SEEKERS

"They shall praise the Lord that seek Him."—Psalm xxii. 26.

THESE are the words of Jesus on the cross, which the inspired prophet wrote beforehand concerning Him. When the Saviour uttered this sentence He had just passed through the experience of a seeker as far as it was possible for Him to do so. He had been engaged in earnest, fervent, pleading prayer, on account of His having been left without His Father's presence. He had cried, "Be not Thou far from Me, O Lord: O My strength, haste Thee to help Me." With strong crying and tears He had implored salvation from the lion's mouth. He had at last been heard and delivered, and He exclaimed with joy, "He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him He heard. My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear Him." Thus, you see, because He had known the agony of an anxious seeker, had been heard in His seeking, and therefore felt praise rising in His own soul, He learned sympathy with all seeking souls of every age, and foresaw that they also would magnify the name of the Lord. Jesus knows every experience, for He has passed through the same. Does not this thought already whisper comfort to your soul? My seeking friend, is it not a good omen that Jesus was heard in that He feared? Does not the fact that Jesus can sympathize with you raise some hope in your heart? It is true He never lived without the presence of God, as you have done, in consequence of personal sin; but for a grand reason, namely, because He stood in our stead, He was forsaken of God, and therefore was compelled to cry after Him, even as you are doing, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me?" Therefore He understands the grief which troubles your fainting heart, and enters into all your distresses while you are bewailing yourself and lamenting that you cry in the daytime and the Lord hears not, and that in the night season you plead in vain. This reflection at the outset of our discourse should be as the note of a silver bell, soft, and restful to your wearied ear. Jesus foretells your success in seeking as the result of His own experience.

Our Lord's great object in laying down His life upon the cross was the Father's glory. No other object was worthy of Him. He sought the salvation of men in order to the glory of God, and so in His extreme agonies our Lord Jesus placed this joy before Him, and consoled Himself by foreseeing that God would be praised by seeking souls in consequence of His death. He solaces Himself with the reflection, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship Thee." He dwells upon the truth that "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him," and He sees in this honouring of God the reward which His soul sought after. What He foresaw from His look-out upon the cross is actually taking place every day: for seekers are learning to be singers. The choirs of heaven, how shall they be filled? As yet there are many vacant seats, and the full chorus is not as yet heard. Whence shall they come who shall complete that orchestra? They shall be called by grace from among ungodly men, and led to long for God: "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him." Fear not, for the number of the elect shall be accomplished, and no part of heaven's music shall flag for lack of minstrels. From the choirs of earth the saintly souls are being withdrawn one by one to unite in the harmonies of heaven. Just when their voices become most mellow, and most clear, they leave us for the ivory palaces and their ceaseless melodies. How shall the praises of God be maintained here below? If one by one the sweet voices grow dumb, and the singers are laid in the sepulchre, whence shall we replenish our numbers and maintain the daily praise? Fear not, there are new voices on the way. "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him." There are souls now weeping for sin and longing for a Saviour who will soon find Him, and then will become most hearty singers of the new song. They are coming, coming in their thousands even now. The music of praise shall be continued as long as the sun, and the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. From generation to generation shall the name of the Lord be praised. This brings great gladness to my spirit as a pastor, for I know that there are some present here this day who are seeking the Saviour, and it rejoices me to know that they will soon be among the most earnest in praising the name of the Lord. They will not always wear sackcloth, they will put on the silken garments of praise ere long. We do not know where they are, for seekers are usually very quiet and retired, but there are some present whom I suspect of secret searches after my Lord. The Lord has seen them as He did Nathanael under the fig tree, and even His servant begins to spy them out. There are young children seeking: boys and girls who dare not yet speak to their parents are in private praying for grace. Blessed be the Saviour of the young, these little ones shall grow up and praise God when their fathers have gone to their reward. Young men and maidens too are turning to Christ, though perhaps they would blush if personally charged with the holy search. Men, too, who are in their prime are coming to Jesus to spend their strength in the service of the Redeemer. The Lord is gently touching many hearts, and drawing them to Himself, and each one when he finds the Lord will make a sweet singer to swell the tune of grace divine. Perhaps in this place there may even be some aged people whose voices are becoming feeble with lapse of years, who nevertheless will sing with their hearts most melodiously to the glory of the God of all long-suffering. Be they who they may, when they have found the Lord Jesus Christ, they must and will glorify the God of their salvation. So you see the great object of our Lord Jesus was that God might be praised, and He foreknew that this object would be effected by the praises of those who in seeking should find His grace.

This assurance which Christ here gives, that "they shall praise the Lord that seek Him," ought to be very encouraging to all seekers: for, my dear

friends, it were wise for you to seek the Lord even if you had no stronger hope than a mere "peradventure He will save us." It would be wise to do as the men of Nineveh did, to repent and turn to God, even if you had nothing better than "who can tell?" to encourage you in so doing; but since our Lord Jesus Christ in dying felt confident that seekers would find peace and joy, and so would come to praise God, we have double comfort. He could not have been mistaken, rest you sure of that; and therefore seekers shall have reasons for praising the Lord. It is from the fact that He died upon the cross that it becomes certain that the seeker shall be a finder. This it was which made Him sustain the scorn of men, the faintness of fever, the darkness of death, and the horror of desertion, because He knew that His prostration in agony, and His yielding up the ghost, would render it certain that no seeking soul should ever seek the Lord in vain. Had there been no suffering Saviour there had been no way to God; had there been no dying Christ there had been no living consolation; but, now that His atoning work is accomplished, and He has said, "It is finished," they shall live that seek Him, and their lives shall be spent in His praise.

The subject of this morning is the plain statement of the text, which I shall handle in all simplicity of speech. "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him": and you have here three things—*the persons, the promise, and the praise.*

I. Observe first of all THE PERSONS—"They shall praise the Lord *that seek Him.*" Notice how unrestricted the description of the persons is. It does not say certain persons who seek God, but any persons who seek Him shall ultimately praise Him; you, my friend, among the rest. None are excluded from the sweep of this precious promise, provided they are really seekers. In other matters many seek and but few find, but the rule of the gospel kingdom is "He that seeketh findeth," and the rule has no exceptions.

But what is meant by "seeking" the Lord? Who are the seekers to whom this promise is made? They include, first, *those who really desire to commune with God.* Some when they say a prayer are satisfied with the mere form, but he who really prays desires to converse with God in prayer; he longs that his desires should be heard by the Most High, and that he should obtain the needed blessings for which he asks. No devotion can ever satisfy a true heart but that which brings him into contact with the Most High. We do not seek fine words in prayer, we do not seek choice music in praise, we do not seek the church, we seek God, and when any man is really aroused to seek after God, although he may know but very little yet of the true faith, he has a desire within him to which the Lord always gives an answer of peace. You may be a stranger and a foreigner, and you may have stepped in here, dear friend, quite ignorant of the doctrine and teaching of the Lord Jesus, but if in any nation any man shall really seek after the one only living and true God he shall receive further light, and shall ultimately come to praise the Lord.

Those who seek after God Himself very soon *discover that they are at a distance from Him,* so that one mark of a true seeker is that he is humbly conscious of his having gone astray from the Lord his God. What a man hath he doth not seek after, and what is close at hand is not an object of search; but when the man longeth after God there suddenly springeth up in his soul a consciousness that he has departed from the Most High, and so he crieth unto the Lord to remove the separating mountains, and to fill up the dividing valleys, and he that doeth this in very deed is the man who shall yet live to praise God.

The soul that is by the Holy Ghost made conscious of distance from God, if it be really seeking God, is *anxious that everything should be taken away which created the distance, and which keeps it apart from God.* If it be unpardoned sin, the true seeker longs for such forgiveness as God may justly give. If it be the power of sin in his members, the earnest seeker cries for power to overcome every thought of evil. The awakened soul soon becomes conscious that nothing separates it from God like the love of sin, and therefore, it seeks to have sin slain, and lust crucified, and the enmity towards God for ever destroyed. Oh how we long to be delivered from every false way, from every pollution, and even from every appearance of evil which would tend to prevent our walking in happy fellowship with God. We know that two cannot walk together except they be agreed, and hence seeking after the Lord leads the soul to grieve over sin, and to strive with all its might with holy violence to break away from pernicious habits which bind it, and to tread under foot tendencies which would lead it astray. Are you conscious, dear friend, of such a seeking of God as this? Do you desire Him as the weary watcher on the castle wall desires the morning light? Do you pray to have everything taken away from you which separates between you and your God? Do you long for someone to bridge the chasm and to bring you near to the Lord in spirit and in truth? If such be the case, the promise of the text is certainly yours. "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him."

What the seeker longs for is that he may so approach the Lord as to *feel himself a friend of God,* and know that divine love is most surely all his own. Oh, the sweetness of knowing that there is nothing between God and you but amity and love, that all the sad past is forgiven and even blotted out of the Lord's remembrance, and that now you may speak to Him without fear, and trust in Him without dread. Atonement has removed His righteous wrath and settled fast His boundless love. Now you may come and lie in His bosom, for it is your Father's bosom; and hide even under the dark shadow of His wing, for it is your Father's wing, and it will cover you from all harm even as a hen covereth her chickens. It is the prelude of heaven to feel that—

> "The God that rules on high,
> And thunders when He please,
> That rides upon the stormy sky,
> And manages the seas,
> This awful God is ours."

All His power is for our protection, all His wisdom for our direction, all His tenderness for our consolation, all His truth for our encouragement, all His grandeur for our ennobling, all the infinity of His nature for our eternal glorification. He wills that we should be partakers of the divine nature, and dwellers in the divine blessedness. This is very sweet, and this is what the soul that seeks God is following after. It aspires to walk with God, and to dwell with God; it longs to abide in Him, to be for

ever His beloved, to be accepted in Christ Jesus, and to become daily more and more conformed to the divine image. To be cleansed from everything which is alien to the design and the nature of God, and to be perfectly at one with God is our grand ambition. O beloved, this is a blessed longing for a soul to have; and he that hath it, though he may mourn and languish now, shall one day praise and bless God.

It may help you to discern whether you have such longings if I say that the man who really has them is in earnest to seek after God *now*. He hates the idea of postponement. A moment's delay to a seeking soul is a dreadful thought: he desires immediate salvation, he would be reconciled to God at once. As the hungry man does not wish the meal to be postponed, but would fain be fed directly, so in the true seeker; his heart and his flesh cry out after God, for the living God; even as the hart panteth after the water brooks so does his soul pant after God. This desire is abiding, and cannot be turned aside to another object. Not always can a man perceive this desire with equal vividness, because he is in the world, and his thoughts must be somewhat diverted by his ordinary business, and the cares thereof, but still the desire is always alive in his soul, and whenever the stress of worldly care is taken from his mind, his heart flies back to its longings, and begins again to sigh and cry after God. Such a man will break away from his fellows to plead with God alone; he will be praying without so much as the movement of his lips, even when he is in company. He will lie at night tossing on his bed, and saying, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him": he will wake in the morning with this desire strong upon him, and will seek the Lord as one that searcheth for hid treasure. This desire hovers over the man who is subject to it, overshadows his being, and masters him completely: I have known it deprive food of its tastefulness and home of its comfort, and make the seeker cry, "Woe is me until I find my God: I draw near unto the gates of death until He appeareth. Let others ask for the increase of their corn and wine: Lord lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me, for this and this only will content my soul."

Now, beloved, all this seeking of the soul which I have feebly described, prepares a man for praising God when he finds mercy at the cross, as you will readily see upon reflection. This is the Holy Spirit's way of tuning the harp for future psalmody. No man can praise God like the believer who has sought the Saviour, sorrowing as His mother and Joseph did in the days of His flesh, and at the last found Him. The seeker knows the bitterness of sin, and therefore he can appreciate the sweetness of pardoning mercy. He has been made to know his own lost estate, and in consequence he will be the more rejoiced when he is found by the Good Shepherd and restored to his home by his Great Father. He knows his helplessness, no one knows it better, for he has tried the works of the law and failed, he has even tried prayer and gospel ordinances, and he has not succeeded in them so as to find rest unto his soul in them: he knows that he is broken in pieces, all asunder; and therefore when he finds his help in the Lord Jesus, even he who feels himself to be such a helpless worm, what praises Christ will have, and what love in return for all His gracious aid? The poor seeker has known in his own heart what he deserves at the hands of the law: he has had a glimpse of the world to come, and the terrors of judgment and the burnings of eternal wrath, and with the fire unquenchable scorching his very face, he must and will praise his deliverer, who has plucked him as a brand out of the burning. All his seeking, I say, helps him to prize divine mercy when he receives it, and trains him to praise God according to the promise of our text, "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him." Never is a babe so dear to its mother as when it has just been restored from a sickness which threatened its life; never does a father rejoice over his little child so much as when he has been long lost in the woods, and after a weary search is at last brought home. No gold is so precious to a man as that which he has earned by hard labour and self-denial: the harder he has toiled to gain it, the more rejoiced is he when at length he has enough to permit him to rest. No freedom is so precious as the new found liberty of a slave, no enlargement so joyous as that of one who has long been sitting in the valley of the shadow of death, bound in affliction and iron. No return to a country is so full of delight as that of sorrowful exiles who come back from cruel Babylon, by whose waters they sat and wept, yea, wept when they remembered Zion. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like men that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." If there be any seekers here at this good hour, I hope that if they have seen themselves in the picture which I have outlined, they will still further be enabled to take heart and be of good courage. I am labouring this morning to drop words of consolation, even as the reapers, when Ruth came into the field of Boaz, let fall handfuls on purpose for her, that she might glean and return with a full portion.

II. Now we come to THE PROMISE—"They shall praise the Lord that seek Him." Blessed promise! It is gradually but surely fulfilled.

First, *it is fulfilled unconsciously while the man is seeking.* Did you ever think of this? Without knowing it, the humble seeker is already praising God. That confession of sin which he made with so many tears was a glorifying of God by bearing witness to the justice of God's law and the truth of the charges which it brings against our fallen nature. "My son," said Joshua even to Achan, "I pray thee give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him." There is a measure of true praise in confession, and it is as pure and real as that which angels present before the sapphire throne. The seeker when he acknowledges that he deserves to be sent to hell is, in fact, praising justice—he is adoring the Judge of all. Even though in so doing there is a mixture of unbelief and a forgetfulness of other attributes, yet there is a firm belief in divine justice, and a suppliant adoration of it which is far from being unacceptable. There is also in the seeker a measure of delights in God's mercy, for while the poor sin-smitten soul is craving for pardon it confesses heartily how sweet mercy is in itself if it might but obtain it, how gracious forgiveness is, how precious loving-kindness is if it might but be favoured with them. No living man has so keen an eye to the tender attributes of God as he whose soul is covered all over with wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores, through a sense of sin. Meanwhile, the seeking soul

is really praising the Lord Jesus by appreciating the preciousness of His love and the value of His blood, and saying within itself, "Oh that I might know the value of these in my own case! Oh that I could but touch the hem of His garment for myself! Would God I did but know what it is to be washed in His blood, and to be covered with His righteousness!" There is in all these emotions a measure of latent praise none the less accepted of the Lord because it is not perceived by man. There is a precious fragrance of deep reverence and holy awe about a seeker's prayers which render them sweet unto the Lord. So, you see, the seeker is already praising God, and thus in a measure the promise is fulfilled.

But the praise exceedingly abounds when the desire is granted. As a bird lies hidden among the heather, but is seen when at last it is startled and made to take to the wing, so doth praise take to the wing and display itself when at last those who seek the Lord are permitted to find Him. What thunderclaps of praise come from poor sinners when they have just found their all in all in God in the person of Christ Jesus. Then their joy becomes almost too much for them to hold, vastly too much for them to express. Oh, the praises, the day and night praises, the continuous praises, which rise from the returning, repenting soul which has at last felt the Father's arms around its neck and the Father's warm kisses on its cheek, and is sitting down at the table where the happy household eat and drink and are merry. Praising time has come indeed when finding time has arrived. Happy day! Happy day! when we meet with God in Jesus Christ.

Now, dear soul, the promise secures that you shall find God in Christ, because the promise is that you shall praise Him, and you cannot praise Him until you have found His grace and favour in Christ. Therefore I am sure you will enjoy salvation ere long. Oh, it is not to be thought of that a soul should seek after God and not find Him. Imagine the penitent prodigal son seeking after his father, reaching his father's house, searching in the chambers of his father's mansion, going abroad into his father's fields, and crying, "My father, my father, I have lost thee; wilt thou not be found of me?" and doing this by the month and the year together, and not finding his father after all. There is no such parable as that in Holy Writ, nor could there be one, it would not be Godlike or Christlike. There is nothing like it, as a matter of fact, nor shall there ever be, except where unbelief comes in and wickedly misrepresents the Lord. My God, in Thy universe Thou thinkest of everything: the beast hath its lair and the sea bird hath its home; the fish findeth its food, and even the insect hath a table provided for it; and as for thy poor creature man, though greatly erring, Thou dost not forget him; but Thou hast made us wonder that Thou art so mindful of him, that Thou hast such tender regard unto him, and dost visit him so graciously. It is not possible that any one of all Thy creatures should be seeking after Thee like a child that cries after its mother in the dark, and not find Thee after all. Thou art not far from any of us.

God may try you, He may let you wait a while before He grants to you the comforts of realised pardon; there may be that about you, especially that unbelief about you, which prevents your finding Him, but found of you He must be and He shall be before long. Which of you hath a child who hath offended but who with many tears comes to you and saith, "My father, forgive"; and will you not forgive? You know that for a while you may chide and say, "The offence is great, it has been oft repeated; I cannot readily pass by it this time"; but if you see your child still weeping and still with broken heart imploring your favour, do not your bowels yearn over him? do you not long to say, "My child, I have forgiven and forgotten your fault?" You know you do; and if you, being evil, know how to forgive your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give pardon and free grace to them that seek Him. You *shall* praise the Lord that seek Him. Lay hold on that promise.

Well, and when you have found Him to the joy of your heart, the promise of the text shall be fulfilled in a third sense, *for you shall go on seeking and you shall go on praising.* Seeking the Lord is sometimes used in Scripture as the *alias* for true religion, and it very aptly describes it, for our life consists in endeavouring to know the Lord yet more and more. Now, since Christ has died, true religion is praise. The genius of the Christian religion is joy, its proper spirit is delight, and its highest exercise is praise. "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him." Now we go up to the house of the Lord with the congregation of the faithful with songs of holy joy: now we draw near to the feast of communion at the Lord's table with delight, and ere we depart we sing a hymn; now we go forth to the good fight of faith, and our battle song is a jubilant psalm; now do we even go to our beds of painful sickness and sing the Lord's high praises there. Since Jesus died our heaviness is dead; our murmuring is buried in His tomb. Since Jesus endured the wrath of God, which was due to us, that wrath has passed away for ever, and it s now the privilege, nay, the duty of every Christian to rejoice in the Lord. Let all the people praise Him, and let the redeemed of the Lord be foremost in the joy.

Nor is this all. There cometh another day, and another state, when we shall be in another place, and then we shall praise the Lord, even we who seek Him. *Every soul that has sought God on earth shall see Him and delight in Him in heaven.* What praises will you and I pour forth then! There are reasons why I consider myself to have been the greatest debtor to God of any man that ever lived; I can see special undeservings in my own case, and special mercies on the part of God towards me. I challenge you all to bear witness that I am under bond to praise the name of the Lord more ardently than you, because I am more deeply indebted to His grace. Each one of you, I have no doubt, enter into the same vein of thought, and not without reason. You will each feel as if you had the most cause to magnify His blessed name when you find yourself seated among the blood-washed, and in your hands the palm branch of eternal victory. Oh, what a song shall go up then; what "shouts of them that triumph, and songs of them that feast" shall make heaven's high arches ring in that glad day when "they shall praise the Lord that seek Him."

What a promise this is. I leave it in your hands, only remarking that it takes the most delightful shape possible, because if you are a true seeker the thing you want above all things is to be able to glorify God; you desire to be pardoned, and to be renewed in heart with this object, that you may be able to render acceptable praise to Him whom you

have offended. Well, that is the very blessing which is promised you, "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him," and it includes, of course, the removal from your heart of everything that would prevent your praising Him, and the breaking down of every barrier that would keep you back from joining yon celestial choirs who, day without night, with their eternal symphonies circle His throne rejoicing.

III. Thirdly, THE PRAISE. "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him." What will the praise be about? What will be the subject of the song? Ah, now I have before me an utterly endless task if I am to catalogue the subjects of praise for a seeking soul when it has found peace with God. Why, beloved, *we praise Him to think that we found Him as we did.* Some of you found Him so readily, you only heard a sermon and that one sermon led you to Christ. Others of us did not find Him so soon or so easily, and yet we found Him at the very nick of time. Just when we were going to lie down in despair, when Satan suggested that no hope remained, then man's extremity was God's opportunity, and we found the Lord exactly to the tick of the clock, at the best moment. Blessed be His name! Oh, to find Him at all! How great a boon! If a man should be a thousand years in the prison of despair, yet if he did but find Christ at last it were worth while to have suffered the thousand years of daily death. If we may but at last say, "My God, my God," with unfaltering tongue, and a heart that feels itself reconciled to Him, we shall make it our heaven to praise Him with all our might.

The chief point of praise, perhaps, with most saved ones is *that they found such a Saviour.* Our Lord is represented as on the cross when He utters this promise, "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him," and when we find the Lord we always find Him in Christ upon the cross, and the atonement becomes a chief feature in our joy. Do you recollect the first time you had a view by faith of the incarnate God bearing human sin, when that grand doctrine of substitution flashed on your soul like the first sight of the sun to a man that had been blind? Do you remember when you first really knew that God did lay on Christ your iniquities, and that He was punished instead of you, so that you cannot by any possibility be punished, for it were unjust twice to exact the penalty for one offence? Did you ever get the glory of that light concentrated on your soul, so that you knew of a surety that God for Christ's sake had forgiven you, and justly forgiven you, because of the blood of Jesus? Did you ever drink in the meaning of those words, "faithful and just to forgive us our sins?" Then I know after the first overwhelming impression of intense delight you did praise God, aye, and you have not left off doing so, for there is enough in that one simple fact to set you praising God throughout the ages of eternity. Salvation by substitution so satisfies the conscience that it fills the heart with overflowing delight.

"The love I prize is righteous love,
Inscribed on the sin-bearing tree;
Love that exacts the sinner's debt,
Yet, in exacting sets him free.

"Love that condemns the sinner's sin,
Yet, in condemning, pardon seals;
That saves from righteous wrath, and yet
In saving, righteousness reveals.

"This is the love that calms my heart,
That soothes each conscience-pang within,
That pacifies my guilty dread,
And frees me from the power of sin."

Oh, to think that such an one as Jesus should be our Saviour, that heaven's darling should condescend to assume our nature, and become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, that He should live such a life and die such a death, that He should present to God a work so perfect, without flaw, without excess! Is there not room for praises here? Now we are as clean before the Lord, because we have been washed in Christ's blood, yea, we are as pure as if we had never sinned, and standing arrayed in Christ's righteousness, we are more righteous even than Adam before the fall, for he had only a human righteousness, but we have a righteousness divine. In Christ Jesus, the second Adam, we are nearer to God than if we had been born of Adam the first while untainted by sin. Now, there is a man who is akin to God, even Jesus our brother, who is also very God of very God. Man is exalted to the highest conceivable degree in the person of Jesus Christ, and we have become heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ. As the seeking soul learns more and more of this it praises God more and more. Is it not so? Does not your soul bless the Saviour? Yea, and the longer we live, and the more we know about the Lord the more we find causes for extolling Him; indeed, everything around us, within us, and above us seems to suggest a reason for blessing His name.

Think of *our security* at this moment, and again praise God. Many a song has been poured from my soul as I have remembered that my Lord has given me a life that cannot die; that He has written me on His heart, from whence my name can never be erased; that He has made a covenant with me to which He has pledged His honour and His word, and sealed it with His blood; that I am His child, and that He never did and never can tear from His heart's love even the least of His children, that the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but the covenant of His peace can never be removed for so hath He declared.

"My name from the palms of His hands,
Eternity cannot erase;
Impressed on his heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace.

"Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy but not more secure
The glorified spirits in heaven."

There is abundant raw material for praise in all this: where can you find better? "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him."

Brethren, *we see cause for praise in the very fact that we ever sought the Lord at all.* Think what it was which made us seek Him; what but sovereign grace? What bedewed our eye with the first tear of repentance? What fetched from our soul the first sight of desire after Christ? What, I say, but grace? And whence came that grace but from His eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus or ever the world was? And whence that purpose but from His divine sovereignty, even as it is written, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Therefore let us glorify His holy name, and think

not of works or merits, or anything in man that could have won for us the love of the Most High; boasting is excluded, but praise is secured. Give all the glory to His holy name for ever and for ever, and let the text stand true in your case, "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him."

Our final thought on this occasion shall be, if these things be so, let us praise the Lord, even we who have sought Him. If our poor friends the seekers are soon to bless His name, let us show them the way. We sought and we found; let us magnify the Lord at once. Do you think we praise our heavenly Father half enough? Do we not rob Him of His glory by getting down in the dumps, and giving way to care and perhaps to murmuring? This is not the right spirit for a Christian man. Where there is so much undeserved mercy there ought to be more grateful joy. Do you think we are demonstrative enough in our praise? I am sure we are not. Few around us would ever dream that we were half as favoured as we are. Do we sing one-tenth as much as Christians ought to sing? We hum over a tune now and then very quietly, but we are terribly afraid of being heard and of annoying people. I do not find the giddy world much afraid of annoying us with their songs; do they not wake us up at night with their lewd discords? If we were half as earnest as we ought to be, we should sometimes at least make the streets ring with the praises of God. It would be well to be a little indiscreet occasionally, and now and then provoke the charge of fanaticism, for this would be a proof of earnest sincerity. Once at least in our lives we should let our Lord ride through the streets again in public triumph amid our own most hearty enthusiasm, till Pharisees rebuke us and say "Hearest thou what these say?"

> "Oh, for this love let rocks and hills
> Their lasting silence break;
> And all harmonious human tongues
> Their Saviour's praises speak."

Yes, and all inharmonious tongues too. Let all creatures that have breath praise the Lord.

> "Yes we will praise Thee dearest Lord,
> Our souls are all on flame.
> Hosanna round the spacious earth
> To Thine adored name!"

May the Lord set our hearts on fire; may we be full of exalting praise; marching on with hosannahs and hallelujahs, magnifying, praising, and extolling the Lord, whom we sought in the hour of trouble, and whom we found in the day of His grace.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."—Psalm xxiii. 1.

DOES not this sound just like poetry or like singing? If you read the entire Psalm through, it is written in such poetic prose that, though it is not translated into metre, as it should have been, it reads just like it. "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." It sounds like music for this, among other reasons, because it came from David's heart. That which cometh from the heart always hath melody in it. When men speak of what they do know, and from the depths of their souls testify to what they have seen, they speak with what we call eloquence, for true eloquence is speaking from the soul. Thus David spake of what he knew what he had verified all his life long, and this rendered him truly eloquent.

As "truth is stranger than fiction," so the truth that David spake is more sweet than even fancy could have imagined; and it hath more beauty than even the dream of the enthusiast could have pictured. "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." How naturally it seems to strike on the ear as uttered by David, who had himself been a shepherd boy! He remembers how he had led his flock by the waters in the warm summer, how he had made them lie down in shady nooks by the side of the river; how, on sultry days, he had led them on the high hills that they might feel the cool air; and how, when the winter set in, he had led them into the valley that they might be hidden from the stormy blast; well could he remember the tender care with which he protected the lambs, and carried them; and how he had tended the wounded of the flock. And now, appropriating to himself the familiar figure of a sheep, he says, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." I will try to preach experimentally to-night, and I wonder how many of you will be able to follow the Psalmist with me whilst I attempt to do so.

First of all, *there are some preliminaries* before a man can say this: it is absolutely necessary that he should feel himself to be like a sheep by nature, for he cannot know that God is his Shepherd unless he feels in himself that he has the nature of a sheep. Secondly, *there is a sweet assurance*; a man must have had some testimony of divine care and goodness in the past, otherwise he cannot appropriate to himself this verse, "The Lord is my Shepherd." And thirdly, *there is a holy confidence.* I wonder how many there are here who can place all their future in the hand of God, and can join with David in uttering the last sentence, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

I. First, then, we say THERE IS A CERTAIN CONFESSION NECESSARY BEFORE A MAN CAN JOIN IN THESE WORDS; we must feel that there is something in us which is akin to the sheep; we must acknowledge that, in some measure, we exactly resemble it, or else we cannot call God our Shepherd.

I think the first apprehension we shall have, if the Lord has brought us into this condition, is this,—we shall be conscious of our own folly; we shall feel how unwise we always are. *A sheep is one of the most unwise of creatures.* It will go anywhere except in the right direction; it will leave a fat pasture to wander

into a barren one; it will find out many ways, but not the right way; it would wander through a wood, and find its way through ravines into the wolf's jaws, but never by its wariness turn away from the wolf; it could wander near his den, but it would not instinctively turn aside from the place of danger; it knoweth how to go astray, but it knoweth not how to come home again. Left to itself, it would not know in what pasture to feed in summer, or whither to retire in winter.

Have we ever been brought to feel that, in matters of providence, as well as in things of grace, we are truly and entirely foolish? Methinks, no man can trust providence till he distrusts himself; and no one can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," until he has given up every idle notion that he can control himself, or manage his own interests. Alas! we are most of us wise above that which is written, and we are too vain to acknowledge the wisdom of God. In our self-esteem, we fancy our reason can rule our purposes, and we never doubt our own power to accomplish our own intentions, and then, by a little manœuvring, we think to extricate ourselves from our difficulties. Could we steer in such a direction as we have planned, we entertain not a doubt that we should avoid at once the Scylla and the Charybdis, and have fair sailing all our life long. O beloved, surely it needs but little teaching in the school of grace to make out that we are fools. True wisdom is sure to set folly in a strong light.

I have heard of a young man who went to college and when he had been there a year, his father said to him, "Do you know more than when you went?" "Oh, yes!" said he, "I do." Then he went the second year, and was asked the same question, "Do you know more than when you went?" "Oh, no!" said he, "I know a great deal less." "Well," said the father, "you are getting on." Then he went the third year, and was asked, "What do you know now?" "Oh!" said he, "I don't think I know anything." "That is right," said the father; "you have now learnt to profit, since you say you know nothing." He who is convinced that he knows nothing as he ought to know, gives up steering his ship, and lets God put His hand on the rudder. He lays aside his own wisdom, and cries, "O God, my little wisdom is cast at Thy feet. Such as it is, I surrender it to Thee. I am prepared to renounce it, for it hath caused me many an ill, and many a tear of regret, that I should have followed my own devices, but henceforth I will delight in Thy statutes. As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistresss, so shall mine eyes wait upon the Lord my God. I will not trust in horses, or in chariots; but the name of the God of Jacob shall be my refuge. Too long, alas, have I sought my own pleasure, and laboured to do everything for my own gratification. Now would I ask, O Lord, Thy help, that I may seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and leave all the rest to Thee." Do you, O my friends, feel persuaded that you are foolish? Have you been brought to confess the sheepishness of your nature? Or are you flattering your hearts with the fond conceit that you are wise? If so, you are indeed fools. But if brought to see yourself like Agur when he said, "I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man," then even Solomon might pronounce thee wise. And if thou art thus brought to confess, "I am a silly sheep," I hope thou wilt be able to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I cannot have any other, I want none other; He is enough for me."

Again, a sheep is not only foolish, but *it is a very dependent creature.* The sheep, at least in its domesticated state, as we know it, must ever be dependent. If we should take a horse, we might turn him loose upon the prairie, and there he would find sufficient for his sustenance; and, years after, we might see him in no worse condition than that in which we left him. Even the ox might thus be treated, and still be able to provide for itself. But as for the silly sheep, set it alone in the wilderness, let it pursue its own course unheeded, and what would be its fate? Presently, if it did not wander into places where it would be starved, it would ultimately come to ruin, for assuredly some wild beast would lay hold upon it, and it hath no means of defence for itself.

Beloved, have we been brought to feel that we have, of ourselves, no means of subsistence, and no power of defence against our foes? Do we perceive the necessity for our dependence upon God? If so, then we have leanrt another part of the great lesson, that the Lord is our Shepherd. Some of us have yet this lesson to learn. Fain would we cater for ourselves, and carve for ourselves; but, as the good old Puritan says, "No child of God ever carves for himself without cutting his fingers." We sometimes fancy that we can do a little for ourselves; but we shall have that conceit taken out of us very soon. If we indeed be God's people, He will bring us to depend absolutely upon Him day by day. He will make us pray, "Give us *this* day our daily bread"; and make us acknowledge that He openeth His hand, and giveth us our meat in due season. Sweet is the meal that we eat, as it were, out of His hand. Yet some will rebel against this dependence as very humiliating. Men like to vaunt their independence; nothing is more respectable in their eyes than to live in independent circumstances. But it is no use for us to talk of being independent; we never can be. I remember a dear Christian man, who prayed very sweetly, each Sunday morning, at a certain prayer-meeting that I once attended, "O Lord, we are *independent* creatures upon Thee." Except in such a sense as that, I never knew any independence worth having. Of course he meant, "we are *dependent* creatures upon Thee." So we must be. We cannot be independent even of one another, and certainly we are not independent of God: for, when we have health and strength, we are dependent upon Him for their continuence; and if we have them not, we are dependent upon Him to restore them to us. In all matters whatsoever, it is sweet, it is blessed, to see the tokens of His watchful care. If I had a thing of which I could say, "God has not given me this," I hope, by divine grace, I should turn it out of doors. Food, raiment, health, breath, strength, everything, cometh from Him, and we are constantly dependent upon Him. As Huntington used to say "My God gives me a hand-basket portion. He does not give me an abundance at once; but He gives it basket by basket, and I live from hand to mouth." Or, as old Hardy once said, "I am a gentleman commoner on the bounty of God; I live day by day upon morning commons and evening commons; and thus I am dependent upon Him, independent of the world, but dependent upon God." The sheep is a dependent creature, always needing some help; and so is the Christian; and he realizes

the blessedness of His dependence when he can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

These are the two principal points upon which we view this truth with regard to providence. I might wander from what I wished to be the subject of this evening, and I might be doing good if I were to show you some other points of comparison between the Christian and the sheep. O beloved, there are some of you here present who know yourselves to be sheep *by reason of your frequent wanderings.* How often have we made this confession, "We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep," and we do feel it this night, bitterly rueing the waywardness of our hearts. But it is well to be the sheep of God's pasture, even if we have been wandering sheep. We do not read of wandering dogs, because dogs are naturally wild, while sheep are always accounted to be someone's property. The straying sheep has an owner; and however far it may stray from the fold, it ceases not to belong to that owner. I believe that God will yet bring back into the fold every one of His own sheep, and they shall all be saved. It is something to feel our wanderings, for if we feel ourselves to be lost, we shall certainly be saved; if we feel ourselves to have wandered, we shall certainly be brought back.

Again, we are just like sheep *by reason of the perverseness of our wills.* People talk about free-will Christians, and tell us of persons being saved and coming to God of their own free will. It is a very curious thing, but though I have heard a great many free-will sermons, I never heard any free-will prayers. I have heard Arminianism in preaching and talking, but I have never heard any Arminian praying. In fact, I do not think there can be any prayer of that sort; it is a style that does not suit prayer. The theory may look very nice in argument, and sound very proper in discourse, though we somewhat differ from it; but for practical purposes it is useless. The language will not suit us in prayer, and this alone would be sufficient reason to condemn it. If a man cannot pray in the spirit of his own convictions, it shows they are a delusion from beginning to end; for if they were true, he could pray in that language as well as in any other. Blessed be God, the doctrines of grace are as good to pray with as to preach with! We do not find ourselves out of order in any act of worship when once we have the old fundamental doctrines of the blessed gospel of grace. Persons talk about free-will Christians coming back to Jesus of themselves. I intend to believe them when they find me a free-will sheep that has come back of itself; when they have discovered some sheep, after it has gone from its fold, stand bleating at its master's door, asking to be taken in again. You will not find such a sheep, and you will not find a free-will Christian; for they will all confess, if you thoroughly probe the matter, that it was grace, and grace alone that restored their souls,—

> "Grace taught our souls to pray,
> And made our eyes o'erflow;
> 'Tis grace that keeps us to this day,
> And will not let us go."

II. The next thing is, THE ASSURANCE THAT THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD.

It is very easy to say, "The Lord is *a* Shepherd"; but how shall we appropriate the blessedness to ourselves, and be able to say, "The Lord is *our* Shepherd?" I answer, that He hath had certain dealings with our souls in the past which have taught us that he is our Shepherd. If every man and every woman in this assembly should rise up and say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," I feel convinced it would be, in many instances, the solemn utterance of an untruth; for there are, it is to be feared, many here who have not God for their Shepherd. He is their Guide, it is true, in some sense, because He overrules all the hearts and controls all the affairs of the children of men; but they are not the people of His pasture. They are not the sheep of His hand; they do not believe, therefore they are not of His fold. And if some of you should say that you are, your own conscience would belie you. How, then, does a man come to know that the Lord is his Shepherd?

He knows it, first, *because Jesus Christ has brought him back from his wanderings.* If there be anyone here who, after a course of folly and sin, has been fetched back from the mountains of error and the haunts of evil, if there be one who has been stopped in a mad career of vice, and has been reclaimed by the power of Jehovah Jesus, such an one will know, by a happy experience, that the Lord is his Shepherd. If I once wandered on yon mountain top, and Jesus climbed up, and caught me, and put me on His shoulders, and carried me home, I cannot and dare not doubt that He is my Shepherd. If I had belonged to some other sheep-owner, He would not have sought me; and from the fact that He did seek me, I learn that He must be my Shepherd. Did I think that any man convinced me of sin, or that any human power had converted me, I should fear I was that man's sheep, and that he was my shepherd. Could I trace my deliverance to the hand of a creature, I should think that a creature might be my shepherd; but, since he who has been reclaimed of God must and will confess that God alone has done it, and will ascribe to His free grace, and to that alone, his deliverance from sin, such an one will feel persuaded that the Lord must be his Shepherd, because He fetched him back from his wanderings, He snatched him out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear.

We know still further that, like a shepherd, *He has supplied our wants.* Some of you, beloved, know of a surety that God is your Provider. You have been brought, sometimes, into such straits that, if it had not been for an interposition of heaven itself, you never could have had deliverance. You have sunk so deep down into poverty, and lovers and acquaintances have stood so far aloof from you, that you know there is but one Arm which could have fetched you up. You have been reduced, perhaps, to such straits that all you could do was to pray. You have wrestled at the throne, and sought for an answer, but it has not come, you have used every effort to extricate yourself, and still darkness has compassed your path. Again and again you have tried, till hope has well-nigh vanished from your heart, and then, adding vows to your prayer, you have said in your agony, "O God, if Thou wilt deliver me this time, I I will never doubt Thee again!" Look back on the path of your pilgrimage. Some of you can count as many Ebenezers as there are milestones from here to York; Ebenezers piled up, with oil poured on the top of them; places where you have said, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped me." Look through the pages of your diary, and you will see, time after time, when your perils and exigencies were such as no earthly skill could relieve, and you felt constrained to witness

what others among you have never felt,—that there is a God, that there is a providence,—a God who compasseth your path, and in acquainted with all your ways. You have received deliverance in so marvellous a way, from so unseen a hand, and so unlikely a source, under circumstances, perhaps, so foreign to your wishes, and yet the deliverance has been so perfect, so complete, and wonderful, that you have been obliged to say, "The Lord *is* my Shepherd." Yes; *He is.* The sheep, we know, fed day by day in good pasture, may forget its shepherd; but if, for a time, it is taken from the pasture, and then brought home again, after having been nearly starved, it says "Truly, He is my shepherd." If I had always been supplied with bread, without the pinch of anxiety I might have doubted whether He had given it, and ascribed it to the ordinary course of passing events; but, seeing that "everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need," I own that it is my God who supplies all my need; yea, and with gratitude I will write it down for a certainty, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

But, beloved, do not be distressed, even though you should not have had these particular trials and deliverances, for there is a way whereby we can tell that the Lord is our Shepherd without encountering so many rough and rugged passes, as I will show you presently. I have heard it said, by some, that a man cannot be a child of God unless he has gone through a certain set of trials and troubles. I recollect hearing a sermon from these words, "Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well." Certainly, the preacher did not make his sermon a well, for it was as dry as a stick, and not worth hearing. There was nothing like cheerfulness in it; but a flood of declamation, all the way through, against hopeful Christians, against people going to heaven who are not always grumbling, and murmuring, and doubting, fumbling for their evidences amidst the exercises of their own hearts, ever reading and striving to rival Job and Jeremiah in grief, taking the Lamentations as the fit expression of their own lips, troubling their poor brains, and vexing their poor hearts, and smarting, and crying, and wearying themselves with the perpetual habit of complaining against God. saying with poor Job, "My stroke is heavier than my groaning." Such persons measure themselves by their troubles, and trials, and distresses, and tribulations, and perplexities, and no end of these things that we will not stop to recount. We believe, indeed, that such things will come to a child of God; we think every Christian will be corrcted in due measure; we should be the last to deny that God's people are a tried people. They must all pass through the furnace of affliction, and He has chosen them there; but, still, we believe that religion is a blessed and a happy thing, and we love to sing that verse,—

> "The men of grace have found
> Glory begun below;
> Celestial fruits on earthly ground
> From faith and hope may grow."

And what though some of my hearers have not yet had to swin through the rivers, though they may not have had to pass through the fiery furnace of providential trial, they have had trials enough, and trials that no heart has known except their own, sufferings which they could not tell to flesh and blood, which have gnawed their very souls, and entered into the marrow of their spirits; bitter anguish and aching voids such as those who boast about their trials never felt, such as mere babbling troublers did never know, deep rushings of the stream of woe with which little bubbling narrow brooks could never compare. Such persons fear to murmur, they cannot tell their sufferings, because they think it would be showing some want of trust in God; they keep their trials to themselves, and only tell them into that ear which heareth, and hath no lips to babble afterwards.

"But," you say, "how can you tell that the Lord is your Shepherd if you have not been tried in any of those great deeps?" We know that He is, *because He has fed us day by day in good pasture.* And if He has not suffered us to wander so far away as others, we can lift up our eyes to Him, and each one of us say, "Lord, Thou art my Shepherd; I can as fully prove that Thou art my Shepherd by Thy keeping me in the grassy field, as by Thy fetching me back when I have wandered; I know Thou art as much my Shepherd when Thou hast supplied my wants day by day as if Thou hadst suffered me to go into poverty, and given me bitterness; I know Thou art as much my Shepherd when granting me a continual stream of mercy, as if that stream had stopped for a moment, and then had begun to flow again." Persons say, if they have had an accident, and been nearly killed, or have narrowly escaped, "What a providence!" Yet it is as much a providence when you have no accident at all. A good man once went to a certain place to meet his son. Both his son and himself had ridden from some distance. When the son arrived, he exclaimed, "Oh father! I had such a providence on the road." "Why, what was that?" "My horse stumbled six times, and yet I was not thrown." "Dear me!" said his father, "but I have had a providence too." "And what was that?" "Why, my horse never stumbled at all, and that is just as much a providence as if the horse had stumbled six times, and I had not been thrown." It is a great providence when you have lost your property, and God provides for you; but it is quite as much a providence when you have no loss at all, and when you are still able to live above the depths of penury; and so God provides for you. I say this to some of you whom God has blessed, and continually provided for from your earliest youth; you, too, can each of you say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." You can see this title stamped on your mercies; though they come daily, they are given to you by God; and you will say, by humble faith, the word "*my*" as loudly as anyone can. Do not get despising the little ones of the flock because they have not had so many trials as you have had; do not get cutting the children of God in pieces because they have not been in such fights as you have. The Shepherd leads the sheep where He pleases, and be you sure that He will lead them rightly; and as long as they can say from their hearts, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," do not trouble yourselves about where or how they learned it.

III. Now, we finish up with THE HOLY CONFIDENCE OF THE PSALMIST: "I shall not want."

"There," poor unbelief says, "I am wanting in everything; I am wanting in spirituals, I am wanting in temporals; and I shall want. Ah! such distress as I had a little while ago; you cannot tell what it was; it was enough to break one's heart; and

it is coming again ; I *shall* want." That is what you say, unbelief, but you must write your own name at the bottom, and then I will repeat to you this, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." That is what David said, and I think David's faith far preferable to your unbelief. I might take your evidence in some matters, but I really would not take it before David's. I would accept your testimony as an honest man in some respects, but the words of inspiration must be preferable to your words of apprehension. When I find it written, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," I would rather take one of David's affirmations than fifty of your negations.

Methinks I hear someone saying, "I would bear the want of any temporal good, if I could but obtain spiritual blessings. I am in want this night of more faith, more love, more holiness, more communion with my Saviour." Well, beloved, the Lord is thy Shepherd, thou shalt not want even these blessings ; if thou askest of Him, He will give them to thee, though it may be by terrible things in righteousness that He will save thee. He often answers His people in an unexpected manner ; many of God's answers to our letters come down in black-edged envelopes ; yet, mark you, they will come. If you want peace, joy, sanctification, and such blessings, they shall be given to you, for God hath promised them. The Lord is your Shepherd, you shall not want. I have often thought of that great promise written in the Bible,—I do not know where there is a larger one,—"No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." "No good thing!" It is a mercy that the word "good" was put in, for if it had said, "He will withhold nothing," we should have been asking for many things that would be bad for us ; but it says, "no good thing!" Now, spiritual mercies are good things, and not only good things, but the best things, so that you may well ask for them ; for if no good thing will be withholden, much more will none of the best things. Ask, then, Christian, for He is thy Shepherd, and thou shalt not want ; He will supply thy need ; He will give thee whatever thou requirest ; ask in faith, nothing doubting, and He shall give thee what thou really needest.

But still there are some who say, "The text applies to temporal matters," and persist in it. Well, then, I will accept this sense,—the Lord is your Shepherd, you shall not want for temporal blessings. "Ah!" cries one, "I was once in affluence, and now I am brought down to penury. I once stood among the mighty and was rich, now I walk amongst the lowly and am poor." Well, David does not say, "The Lord is your Shepherd, and you shall not come down in society ;" he does not say, "The Lord is your Shepherd, and therefore you shall have five hundred or a thousand pounds a year ;" he does not say, "The Lord is your Shepherd, and therefore you shall have whatsoever your soul lusteth after." All David says is, "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want." There are different ways of wanting. There are many people whose foolish craving and restless anxiety make them always in want. If you gave them a house to live in, and fed them day by day, they would always be wanting something more. And after you had just relieved their necessities, they would want still. The fact is, theirs are not real wants, but simply fancied wants. David does not say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore I shall not fancy that I want ;" for though God might promise that, it would need His omnipotence to carry it out ; for His people often get fancying that they want, when they do not. It is real wants that are referred to. "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not really want." There are many things we wish for that we do not really need, but there is no promise given that we shall have all we wish for. God hath not said that He would give us anything more than we need, but He will give us that. So, lift up thy head, and do not be afraid. Fear not, thy God is with thee ; He shall prevent evil from hurting thee ; He shall turn darkness into light, and bitter into sweet. All the way He hath led thee, and all the way He shall lead thee ; this shall be thy constant joy. He is my Shepherd, I shall not really want that which is absolutely necessary. Whatever I really require shall be given by the lavish hand of a tender Father. Believer, here is thy jointure, here is thine inheritance, here is thine income, here is thy yearly living : "He is thy Shepherd, and thou shalt not want." What is thy income, believer ? "Why," you say, "it varies with some and others of us." Well, but a believer's income is still the same. This is it : "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." That is my income, and it is yours, poor little one. That is the income of the poorest pauper in the workhouse who hath an interest in the grace of God ; the Lord is her Shepherd, she shall not want. That is the income of the poor foundling child who has come to know the Lord in early life, and has no other friend ; the Lord is his Shepherd, he shall not want. That is the widow's inheritance ; the Lord is her Shepherd, she shall not want. That is the orphan's fortune ; the Lord is his Shepherd, he shall not want. That is the believer's portion, his inheritance, his blessing.

"Well now," some may say, "what is this truth worth ?" Beloved, if we could change this truth for a world of gold, we would not ; we had rather live on this truth than live on the finest fortune in creation ; we reckon that this is an inheritance that makes us rich indeed : "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want." Give me ten thousand pounds, and one reverse of fortune may scatter it all away ; but let me have a spiritual hold of this divine assurance, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," then I am set up for life. I cannot break with such stock as this in hand ; I never can be a bankrupt, for I hold this security : "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want." Do not give me ready money now ; give me a cheque-book, and let me draw what I like. That is what God does with the believer. He does not immediately transfer his inheritance to him, but lets him draw what he needs out of the riches of His fulness in Christ Jesus. The Lord is his Shepherd ; he shall not want. What a glorious inheritance! Walk up and down it, Christian ; lie down upon it, it will do for thy pillow ; it will be soft as down for thee to lie upon : "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want." Climb up that creaking staircase to the top of thy house, lie down on thy hard mattress, wrap thyself round with a blanket, look out for the winter when hard times are coming, and say not "What shall I do ?" but just hum over to thyself these words, "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want." That will be like the hush of a lullaby to your poor soul and you will soon sink to slumber. Go, thou business man, to thy counting-house again, after this little hour

of recreation in God's house, and again cast up those wearisome books. Thou art saying, "How about business? These prices may be my ruin. What shall I do?" When thou hast cast up thine accounts, put this down against all thy fears, and see what a balance it will leave, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." There is another man. He does not lack anything, but still he feels that some great loss may injure him considerably. Go and write this down in thy cash-book. If thou hast made out thy cash-account truly, put this down: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Put this down for something better than £ *s. d.*, something better than gold and silver: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." He who disregards this truth knows nothing about its preciousness, but he who apprehends it says, "Ah yes! it is true, 'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.'" He will find this promise like Chian wine, of which the ancients said that it was flavoured to the lip of him that tasted it; so this truth shall taste sweet to thee if thy spiritual palate is pure, yet it shall be worth nothing to thee but mere froth if thy taste is not healthy.

But, beloved, we must divide our congregation before we send you away, and remind you that there are some of you to whom this truth does not belong. Perhaps some of you professors of religion may want this truth badly enough; but it is not yours. The Lord is not your Shepherd; you are not the sheep of His pasture and the flock of His hand. You are not sheep, but goats;—unclean creatures, not harmless and undefiled as sheep, but everything that is the very reverse. Oh! it is not only eternal loss, it is not only everlasting injury that you have to regret,—it is also present loss, and present injury; the loss of a jointure on earth, the loss of an inheritance below. To be deprived of such a comfort as this, is a terrible privation. Oh! it is enough to make men long for religion if it were only for that sweet placidity and calm of mind which it giveth here below. Well might men wish for this heavenly oil to be cast on the troubled waters of this mortal life, even if they did not anoint their heads therewith, and enter into glory with the joy of their Lord upon their countenance. Beloved, there are some I know here,—and your conscience tells you whom I mean,—who have a voice within your own hearts which says, "I am not one of Christ's sheep." Well then, there is no promise for you that you shall not want; the promise and the providence are for believers, not for you. There is no promise that all things shall work together for your good; but rather, cursed shalt thou be in thy basket and cursed in thy store, cursed in the field, cursed in thy house, cursed in thy goings out, and cursed in thy comings in, for "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked." It doth not merely peep in at his window, but it is in his house. Yet God "blesseth the habitation of the just." If you do not repent, the curse shall follow you until your dying day, and not having Christ for your Shepherd, you shall wander where that hungry wolf, the devil, shall at last seize upon your soul and everlasting misery and destruction from the presence of Jehovah must be your inevitable, miserable, and inexpressibly awful doom. May the Lord in mercy deliver you from it! And this is the way of salvation: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that believeth and is baptized"—we omit nothing that God has said. "He that believeth and is baptized"—not he that is baptized and then believeth (which would be reversing God's order), but "He that believeth and is baptized"—not he that is baptized without believing, but the two joined together,—he that believeth with his heart, and is baptized, confessing with his mouth,—"he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Do you neglect one part of it? It is at your peril, sir! "He that believeth and is baptized" says God. If any of you have neglected one portion of it, if you have believed, and have not been baptized, God will save you. Still, this promise saith not so. "He that believeth and is baptized"; it puts the two together; and "what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder"; what He hath ordered let no man disarrange. "He that believeth"—that is, he that trusts in Jesus; he that relies upon His blood, His merits, and His righteousness,—"and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

MY RESTORER

"He restoreth my soul."—Psalm xxiii. 3.

THIS sweetest of the Psalms sings of many mercies which the happy soul of the believer receives, and it traces all those benefits to one source, namely to the Good Shepherd Himself. "I shall not want." Why? Because the Lord is my Shepherd. I lie down in delicious repose in green pastures. Why? Because "*He* maketh me." I march onward making holy progress beside the still waters. Why? Because "*He* leadeth me." In the prospect of death I am calm, and free from fear. Why? Because *He* is with me, His rod and staff they comfort me. The crown is composed of many costly things; gold and orient pearls, and rare gems from the land beyond the river, are all blended in one diadem, and that diadem is without a question joyfully placed upon the head of the Great Shepherd of Israel. The poet laureate of Scripture sings surpassingly in this Psalm, and every line is dedicated to the Beloved of his soul, in whom were all his fresh springs. My object while handling a part of one of his verses shall be the same as his own, I also would speak of "things which I have made touching the King," with the view of extolling His name. I desire to glorify Him from one particular point of view, namely, as the Restorer, who His own self brings back our wandering spirits when we forsake His ways. I would just now write the first word of the text in capitals, capitals as large as you can find. "HE restoreth my soul." He, He alone, He and not another. Unto Him be praise!

I. The text is full of lessons and reminders, and reminds us in the first place of OUR TRUE POSITION as believers. Let us dwell upon it in that light. What is the true position of every believer? It is that of a sheep abiding close to its Shepherd; the text suggests that, because the sheep is supposed to have gone astray, and the shepherd brings it back in order to put it into the position which it ought never to have left. The fittest condition of a believer is in communion with Christ. It ought not to be a privilege occasionally enjoyed, it should be the everyday life of the soul. We are to abide in Jesus, walk with Him, and live in Him. Paul did not say, "For me to specially rejoice is Christ, or for me to feast on holydays is Christ;" but, "For me to live is Christ." Christ is the ordinary bread of the common meal as well as the fat things full of marrow for the banquet; He is water from the rock as well as wine on the lees well refined. To us His name is the watchword of earth as we expect it to be our passport into heaven. We need fellowship with Jesus not as a luxury for red-letter days and Sabbaths, but as the necessary provision of every work day of our lives. "Abide in Me" is His word to us for all seasons, and we ought to strive to realise it; so that always, by night and by day, on the Sabbath and equally on the week days, in our joys and in our cares, we should abide in Him. Christ is not merely a harbour of refuge, but a port for all weathers. Do not think, beloved, that I am setting up too high a standard when I say this. I am so sure I am not that I will repeat what I have said—the proper condition of a child of God at all times is that he should sit with Mary at the Master's feet, or with John should lean his head upon the beloved Redeemer's bosom.

I think this will be clear, first, if we *remember our obligations to Jesus.* When we were newly converted, and first knew our sins to be blotted out, if we had been asked how we should in future act towards our Lord, we should have set up a very high ideal. "Did He die for me, bearing all my sins in His own body? Then I will for ever view His death as the grandest miracle of love, and my grateful heart shall have communion with Him by love and praise. Has Jesus really forgiven me? Am I clean through being washed in His most precious blood, clean every whit, and made a child of God, and accepted in the Beloved? Oh, then, I will praise Him, and bless Him, and magnify Him, and live to Him, all my days. As to ever being weary of Him, impossible! As to ever growing cold and indifferent towards Him, better my heart should cease to beat than that it should ever be." Do I not accurately describe what you thought at the first? Have I not truthfully described the ardour of your espousal love? You have not realised your ideal, but that is what you rightly judged to be consistent, and, beloved, it is what you ought to have realised. It is not a higher condition than your solemn obligations to Christ really demanded. If an angel had never heard of men before, and should suddenly alight upon this earth and meet with one of our race, and hold conversation with him, he would be filled with wonder at what he discovered. Suppose that we should tell him that we fell into sin and were condemned to die, but that the great Maker of heaven and earth condescended to take upon Himself our nature, and died in our stead; can you conceive the angel's astonishment at the condescension of the Son of God? After his first amazement had passed away, he would say to us, "And do you not love Him infinitely? Are you able, within the limits of your little heart, to hold all the love you feel for such unutterable grace? How do you live? Do you not feel that you cannot do half enough for Him? You certainly will never fail in obedience to Him, in trust of Him, in zeal for Him; that would be quite impossible!" How deeply should we blush and strive to cover our faces as we confessed to our angelic questioner that for such surprising love we have made but a poor return. I am quite sure, however, that we should quite agree with the angel as to what was due to our Lord, our conscience and our heart awarding Him the highest affection, and the most constant service. Such deeds of love as Jesus has performed for us can never be adequately requited, but at the very least they ought not to be insulted by lukewarm and casual intercourse; they demand our heart, our soul, our all. With Him who has healed us we desire evermore to remain. With our Ransomer we would live in lifelong discipleship, and be His servants, to go no more out for ever.

Moreover, *our relationships to the Lord Jesus* require perpetual communion with Him. Know ye not that ye are the friends of Christ? And if ye be friends, will ye not show yourselves friendly? But how can ye be friendly if by the space of a week ye have no converse with Him in the house, or in the field, or by the way? Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Ye are more than friends, ye are His brethren. "The same is My brother, and sister, and mother," said He, and can you treat a brother so ill as to walk towards him as if he were a stranger and a foreigner, and scarcely exchange a token of affection by the month together Is this brotherly? Did David treat his Jonathan thus? More than that, in wondrous love Jesus has called Himself your husband, and taken you to be His spouse. Is not that strange love, or the want of it, which would allow a married pair to live together week by week without the fellowship of affection? Surely, their marriage bands would be bonds, and their unity would be misery. I can conceive of scarcely any worse torment than conjugal union without affectionate communion. Shall I be the bride of Jesus, and my love never be displayed in converse with Him? Shame upon me, a thousand times shame, if I allow a day to pass unblest with thoughts, and words, and deeds of love. Yet more, the Lord has been pleased to call us members of His body. Now, every member of the body must carry on vital fellowship with the head, it must exercise inevitable though not always conscious fellowship. In the spiritual body communion should be consciously enjoyed at all times. Shall the hand become indifferent to the head, or the foot refuse commerce with the brain? If we be in good health, no such schism in the body will ever occur, but with the head all the members will abide in affectionate, unbroken communion. We may suspect paralysis if life ceases to flow through the entire body corporate, and so communion is suspended. It is clear to all who are taught of God that our relationships certainly require of us that we abide in the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, beloved, this case ought to want no pleading, for if *we would have happiness*, where is happiness to be found but in walking near to Jesus? I speak what I do know, and the common testimony

of all saints is with me, when I say that out of heaven there is no heaven but nearness to Christ; fellowship with Him is Paradise without a serpent in it, it is Canaan itself without the Canaanitish foe. Communion with Jesus is the porch of glory, it is the Saturday night of the eternal Sabbath, the dawn of the heavenly day. Communion with Christ, if it be not actually heaven, is certainly the choicest suburb of the new Jerusalem. Well did our poet cry,

> "Where can such sweetness be,
> As I have tasted in Thy love,
> As I have found in Thee?"

Now, men do not ordinarily need to be stirred up to that which is their delight; their spirits fly after their joys as eagles to the spoil. Where their heart moves with pleasure, it draws all their powers after it; and if indeed it be so (and who shall contradict it?), that fellowship with Christ is the richest of all joys, the intensest of all delights, why are we so hard to move? Oh, how sluggish are our hearts, how dull our spirits, that we do not fly after Jesus with rapture of desire, and do not labour perpetually to abide in Him.

While this should draw us, another consideration should drive us, namely, that *our daily necessities* demand that we should live in fellowship with Him. If we be foolish and ignorant, where should we dwell but with the Teacher? If always weak, to whom should we resort but to the strong for strength? Let the child abide by its parent, the scholar with the master, the patient by his physician, the poor man with his helper. To whom should we go in our hourly needs but to Him who has hitherto been our all in all? Israel could not afford to be a single day without the manna, nor can we be satisfied for an hour without the bread of life. "Without Me, ye can do nothing," saith our Lord, and we have proved His words to be true. Do we want more humiliating evidence? Are we willing to fall into a condition in which we can do nothing else but sin? I hope not. We ought never be satisfied except when, abiding in Jesus, we are clothed with His power, and are bringing forth much fruit to His praise.

Remember yet further that when out of fellowship with Christ *our perils are infinite*. When unfaithful to His love we are readily seduced by every temptation. Without His love in our hearts we become victims to other loves, which lead us into idolatry, plunge us into hurtful lusts, and poison the wells of our joy. We must either be enthralled by the surpassing love of Jesus, or we shall be fascinated by the world's deceits. One of the two masters must rule us, either the Prince of the power of the air, or the King of Kings. When Christ is with us we are safe, for what wolf can rend a sheep when it is close to the shepherd's hand? When we are away from Jesus, we are not only in peril, but are already despoiled; to lose fellowship with Jesus is loss enough in itself, even if no further calamity occur. Ships without a pilot, cities without watchmen, babes without a nurse, are we without Jesus. We cannot do without Him, the less we attempt it the better. Samson without his locks is the sad type of a believer out of fellowship. How dare we go forth to business on any one day without the presence of the Lord? As well might the warrior go to battle without shield and buckler. Should we not daily pray, "If Thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence"? How can we go to our beds till He has kissed us with the kisses of His mouth? May not even the dreams and visions of the night prove our bane if our souls be not committed to His keeping? For my part, I love to murmur to myself, as I place my head on my pillow, those charming lines—

> "Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,
> I lay me down to rest,
> As in th' embraces of my God,
> Or on my Saviour's breast."

The benefits of fellowship with Christ should constrain us to abide in it. If any man would grow in grace, if he would be filled with the Spirit, if he would know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, specially if he would be made like to Him in all things who is the Head, he must abide in Christ. The whole compass of a Christian's permissible ambition is to be realised in fellowship with Jesus, and nowhere else. All that I ought to be, or can desire to be, when I am in a right state, I can in my Lord enjoy by walking near to Him. Nothing good can any believer obtain by forsaking his Master. Following Christ afar off is evil, only evil; and that continually abiding in Him is peace, joy, holiness, heaven. Therefore, beloved, I here say again, let us strive after that which ought to be the habitual position of every Christian, namely, abiding in Christ; this is for babes in grace as well as men in Christ Jesus, for the obscure as well as the famous.

II. Our text, in the second place, reminds us of OUR FREQUENT SIN. "He restoreth my soul"—He often does it; He is doing it now. Now, the Lord would not do what is unnecessary, and therefore this shows me that I often wander from Him, for else I should not need to be brought back. Beloved, I grieve to say that with many professors of godliness suspended communion is the chronic state of things. I must confess my inability to comprehend the Christian life of many who are called Christians. It is not for us to judge their real condition before God, nor will we attempt to do so, but we cannot help observing the inconsistency of their acts. They have believed in Christ, let us hope; let us hope also that that faith does produce enough of good works to prove itself to be a living faith; but, for all that, their religion is cold, joyless, passionless. There are thousands of Christian people whose religion seems to lie entirely in attending religious services on the Sunday, and occasionally perhaps coming out on a week-day to a lecture; they observe private devotions of a very stereotyped order, and keep a Bible somewhere or other, and this is about all. To them prayer is a formality, praise is forgotten, the reading of the Bible is a drudgery, meditation a mere memory, and their whole Christianity more like a mummy than a thing of life. With them the complaint that they are out of communion with Jesus is superseded by the question, "Were they ever in it?" I am afraid we have in this church and in all churches, scores and hundreds of members whose highest emotions in reference to love to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ reaches no higher than the inquiry—

> "Do I love the Lord or no?
> Am I His, or am I not?"

Conscious enjoyment of the love of Jesus and familiar intercourse with Him they know nothing of, and indeed they look upon such things as the luxuries

of a high class of saints, very pleasant to read of in biographies, but not matters of daily possession. They heartily admire the good people who can attain to such eminent positions, but to dwell there themselves has not occurred to them as at all possible. Beloved, this is a sad state of things. It is a condition of life in which I tremble for you, because you are starved in the midst of plenty, you are wilfully pinching yourselves with penury while infinite wealth is all around you. You live as hired servants and not as sons, you get the duty of religion without the enjoyment of religion; you wear its yoke but do not feed in its pasture, you seem to me to forego all the cream of our holy faith, and to partake of nothing but its skimmed milk. You leave the sunny plains of communion for the frozen regions of negligent living, and hence you shiver with fear while others exult with gladness. You have chosen your position in the outer courts of the temple, you never enter into the holy of holies; you do not pass within the veil, to behold the glory of the Lord. You are sailing to heaven, but you are stowed away in the hold in the dark. You appear to me in your religion to live like the beggars who come round to our back doors for the bones and the stale crusts; and therefore I am not much surprised when I hear that some of you feel a craving for amusements and say that you are very dull, and need lively company and gaiety to make life bearable. If my child were to say that he must go continually to the confectioner's or to the eating-house, I should say to myself, "Surely the food on my table is sufficient for him"; but if upon inquiry I found that he did not eat at my table except occasionally, and that he always made choice of the barest bones, and driest crusts, I should be at no loss to comprehend why he was so frequently seen at other places of supply. If you are not living upon Jesus, and rejoicing in the measureless bliss which He is capable of bestowing upon you, I do not marvel if you go off to the world for your sweetmeats, and feel a leaning towards the leeks and the garlic and the onions of Egypt. O, dear brothers and sisters, if you be indeed His people, may the Holy Spirit save you from the dull religion in which you live, and bring you into that condition in which you shall see your Lord, abide in Him, and rejoice in Him. A miner, who lives the most of his days underground, is not doing his country justice when he speaks of it as dark, close, and suffocating; it is so down below, but it is not so up above. Religion wears but a grim aspect to those who know nothing of its secret joys, its sacred banquets, its ecstasies, and its calm satisfactions. There is a bleak side and a sunny side to every hill; those who are careless in their fellowship will know the worst side of things. The bright-eyed dweller in the sunny south is a very different man from the Esquimaux, who drive their dogs among the ice-fields, and hide away through long months of winter, in which the sun never sends forth a glimmer to cheer the earth. Who cares to be one of the Esquimaux of Christianity, or the Laps and Fins of the church? Yet, alas, these abound on all sides.

We have to confess that others of us in whom this departure from Christ is not chronic are nevertheless subject to acute attacks of declension, and there are seasons when it is indeed well for us that He restoreth our souls. How soon are we turned out of the way! How little a thing may mar our joyful fellowship with Christ! Have you been in worldly company in the evening? Did you marvel that you could not enjoy communion at evening prayer? Have you become fond of your possessions, or have you been eager to increase them? Then your idols have grieved your Lord. Have you been unreconciled to your losses, and fretted against God for His dark providences? "If you walk contrary to Me," saith He, "I will walk contrary to you." When our proud spirits chafe and fret against our heavenly Father, we cannot expect smiles and caresses from Him. We may easily lose fellowship with Christ by pride and self-esteem: if He indulges us with happy hours of sacred joy, we are very apt to think that we are somebody, and straightway we hold our heads very high, and whenever that happens we are very likely to fall into the mire, and lie there until our own garments abhor us, and we cry for help like sinners as we are. Christ delights to meet us on terms of grace. He is to be fulness and we emptiness, He the mighty Helper and we the fainting sinners, He the Saviour and we the lost ones. While we say that we are rich and increased in goods, He knows that we are false, and He leaves us; but when we see that He has the gold and the white raiment, and we the nakedness and the beggary, then are we arrived at terms which befit both Him and us. Vain is it to boast, for beauty we have none; His are the eyes which are as a flame of fire, His the countenance goodly as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars, His the crown of light and the mantle of glory. Unto Him must all honour be ascribed. Those who honour Him He will honour. Humility sits at Jesus' feet, and that is the chosen place of loving fellowship.

We may lose the presence of Christ by forgetfulness of duty, or of truth; we may, on the other hand, lose it by thoughtfulness of evil things, and absorption in fleeting cares. We may lose the company of Christ by inconsistent actions or by idle conversations. "Oh," say some of you, "is that so? Will Jesus be gone from us soon?" It is even so. Those who know Him best have found out that He is like His Father, and there is a trait in His Father's character which is very conspicuous in the Son. It is written, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God," and Jesus is a jealous lover. He will not cast away His people, He is faithful to the worst of them, but if we do not walk with Him in holiness He will withdraw Himself from us. Can two walk together unless they be agreed? If we grieve Him He will make us grieve. Cold, unloving, irreverent walking will soon cause the beams of the Sun of righteousness to glance no more upon us. Blessed be the name of our Beloved, He comes back ere long, and He says, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy will I gather thee," but even the small moments of His forsaking are all too long. A little of His absence is painful for a true spirit to bear. But I leave this mournful point for something more consoling.

III. The text reminds us also of OUR LORD'S FAITHFUL LOVE. "He restoreth my soul." This is not what He might have done, or would have done, had he been changeable as we are. There are some who teach that Jesus leaves His roaming sheep to perish; as a punishment for their wanderings He gives them up to the wolf. I hope that very few believe that doctrine now, it is so dishonouring to the good Shepherd that I hope all God's people will give it up once for all; yet such was the belief of

many at one time. Ah, I do not wonder that some believed it, for I have often been hard pressed with the fear that it would turn out to be so in my own case; but I am here this morning to say concerning my Lord, "He restoreth my soul." He has not cast me off, or left me to myself, or abandoned me to my own devices, but in love to my soul He has plucked my feet out of the net, drawn me up from the horrible pit, and set my feet upon the rock of His immutable love. To leave His sheep to perish is not like our Saviour; the heart refuses credence to such an idea, it is so unlike Him. My witness is that "He restoreth my soul." He has done this so often that He may well be described as always doing it. The psalmist puts it in the present tense, as if the Lord were in the habit of doing so, and were even at this moment in the act of restoring his soul. Truly I must confess that I wander, and He restores me. Child of God, as numerous as your sins have been, so numerous have His restorations been. After a hundred times erring, you might have provoked Him to say, "He is given unto his idols, let him alone; My Spirit shall no longer strive with him." But no, He turns His hand again upon you, and once more leads you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The mother forgets not her suckling, though it is often fretful and peevish; she still has compassion upon the son of her womb: even thus is it with Jesus. We are too deeply graven on the palms of His hands to be at last left to die; we have cost Him too dear for Him to relinquish us. Having restored our soul a hundred times, He still restores it. It is the way of Him; it is the habit of His love. The text lovingly insinuates that He is ready to restore us now. He is at His old work again; even now "He restoreth my soul." Where are you, dear brother? Have you grown very dull and cold of late? Jesus is waiting to make your heart burn within you. Do you feel half dead spiritually? Your Lord and Master is even now ready to quicken you by His word, and to restore unto you the joy of His salvation.

If you ask me why the Lord is thus quick to restore His people, I can find no answer in them or their deservings, but a little further on the psalmist gives you the reason why Christ thus acts in faithfulness and tenderness. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness *for His name's sake*. He would not restore us for our sakes. There is nothing in us which could be pointed out to the eye of justice as a claim for restoration, though much might be remembered which, on the footing of the law, would ensure our ruin. Here is our safety. The Lord Jesus has willed to save us, and He stands to His purpose and decree; He has put forward His own veracity and immutability as guarantees of the covenant, and His own honour would be in jeopardy should one of His people be lost, therefore for His own name's sake He restores the wanderer, lest His enemies should say, "God has forsaken His people," and lest the hosts of hell should boast, saying, "The Lord began to save them, but He was not able to finish the work." "For His name's sake." Deep and blessed reason! Immutable, immovable foundation of comfort! For His name's sake He doth restore our souls when we wander from His way. Strange are the means He uses. Sometimes it is a rod most heavy, at other times a love-call sweetly fascinating. Singular are the modes of dealing with His people; He will break them in pieces and crush them beneath His feet, apparently in hot displeasure, but all with the view of making them sick of sin and eager after Himself. He will rend them as a lion rends his prey, and this not to destroy, but to save them. Is it not written, "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal"? Often by dispensations of terror He leads us into ways of grace, and frequently that which appears to be our utter destruction ends in our complete restoration, according to His grace. There let the text stand as a type and testimony of His immutable love. "He restoreth my soul."

IV. During the short time which remains for me to discourse to you, I want to throw my whole strength into the last consideration. Our text, emphasised as I have emphasised it, reminds us of His SUPREME POWER. "He restoreth my soul." *He*, HE, HE alone restoreth my soul. From first to last my revivals and refreshings come from Him. He Himself first made my soul to live—yea, He was life itself to me. You had no life, beloved, till Jesus passed by and saw you lying dead in sin, and said to you "Live." You were like Lazarus in the tomb, you were beginning to stink with corruption and sin, and His voice, when it said, "Lazarus, come forth," was life to you. You did not help the Saviour in your quickening, how could you? You exercised no concurrent action; He took the first step, and quickened you when you were dead in sin. He began to save you because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. You owe your regeneration entirely to Him, and it is not surprising that your revival should come from the same source. Surely He who regenerated can restore; He who created can renew. Restoration is not a more difficult work—nay, it is but a secondary work compared with the new creating of the soul. The Lord, even Jesus Christ, who did at the first give thee to live, can revive thee again; and He can do it by Himself, being to thy soul her medicine as well as her physician. All the evils under which a Christian smarts arise from the absence of Jesus, or else obtain their power to injure from the fact of the Lord's being away. There are corruptions which dwell always in us, but these do not dare to show their faces when Jesus reigns within in revealed glory. The traitors lurk in their holes when the King is in the city, they will not venture forth till they hear that He is offended and is gone. While the flag flies on the castle to mark that my lord is at home, his enemies are on their best behaviour, for they have a dread of his sword. When our fellowship with Jesus is active, sin lies dormant, or is so thoroughly subdued that it makes but a struggling gasp for life. So, then, if at this time I have become proud, or petulant, or idle, or cannot pray, or will not submit to the divine will, or have fallen into spiritual sickness, it is quite certain that all the mischief is occasioned by the loss of my Lord's company, and it is clear that His coming back to me will restore my soul. If His absence has developed all this evil, then His presence can surely put it away.

Should it happen that the temptation is outward, still no outward temptation has any force when Christ is present. Let all the world's charms attempt to seduce us, they are horrible distortions when contrasted with the loveliness of Jesus. Only let us see His face and all earthly witcheries have lost their enchantment. Suppose that we were tempted to scepticism, Christ is the antidote for that venom.

No man doubts when Christ is present with him. At the sight of Him even Thomas cries, "My Lord and my God." Can we despond while He consoles? Can the children of the bridechamber mourn while the Bridegroom is with them? On the other hand, pride cannot live where Jesus is seen. "When I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead," said the beloved apostle. His presence is the death of every sin, the life of every grace; therefore it is that the text saith, "He restoreth my soul." The hunger, famine, and disease of war need but one cure, and that is peace; the woes of the believer's soul need but one remedy, and that lies in the words "Abide in Me." The presence of Christ has everything in it that the soul can possibly need. I see the green leaves of a plant most dear to all who love the woods in spring. It is now nestling under a hedge upon a shelving bank, just above a trickling stream. I ask it why it does not bloom, and it whispers to me that it will bloom by-and-by. "But, sweet primrose, why not put forth thy lovely flower at once, and gladden us with thy beauty?" She answers, "I am waiting for him." For whom dost thou tarry, thou herald of spring?

> "All love on Thee to rest their weary eyes,
> Reading therein a history of dearest ties."

She meekly answers, I am waiting for my lord, the sun." Dost thou not need other friends and helpers? "Nay," saith she, "the coming of my lord will be enough, and when he putteth forth his strength I shall put on my beauty." But wilt thou not need soft, pearly drops of dew to glisten on thy leaves? Are not thy blossoms most fair to gaze upon when all around keeps time and tune therewith, when the violet and harebell are in thy company, when the buds are swelling and "the green-winged linnet sings"? To which she replies, "*He* will bring them, *he* will bring them all." But art thou not afraid of the killing frosts, and the dreary snowstorms? "*He* will chase them all away," says the little plant: "I shall be safe enough when he brings on the spring." Believer, you are that plant and Jesus is your sun. He will bring you healing beneath His wings, and joy in the light of His countenance.

He restoreth our entire manhood; every regenerated faculty grows strong when He is near. Every grace drinks in new life from communion with Christ. Faith triumphs, love burns, hope prophesies, patience becomes strong for endurance, and courage is bold for conflict. Christ is such fare that all the graces can feed on Him, and all grow strong upon the sacred viands.

The best of all is that He is a restoration which is available now, available at once. I felt the other day heavy at heart, dull, dead: I thought of myself as though I were a branch of a tree cut off, and so I meditated thus with myself: "If I am a branch of the vine, and have been removed from my stem, my only hope is to get back into the place from whence I came, and be grafted in again, and begin to suck the sap again, and feel the life flowing through me." Then was it sweet to remember that there is no possible state into which a believer could fall, even if it were the most desperate that could be conceived, but what Christ can restore him perfectly and at once. Then for my own comfort and renewal I began with my Lord thus: I looked at Him upon the cross; I stood before Him as a sinner, and wondered at Him that He should die for sinners, and I trusted Him, and I said to Him, "Lord, Thou knowest I trust Thee: I have no hope but in Thee, and I cling to Thee as a limpet clings to the rock; with all my heart and soul I cling." I began to feel the sap flow from the stem into my branch at once: directly I had got into contact with my Lord, by a simple faith, I felt that virtue went out of Him to heal my soul. Once having established the flow of the sap, it flowed more, and more, and more; for as I thought about my salvation through Him, being myself guilty, and He my righteousness, I began to love Him; and my soul began to glow with a passion towards Him, and I wanted to be telling others what a dear, good Saviour He was: and in a few moments after I had bemoaned myself as dead to Him, and a castaway, I felt as much warmth of love to Him as ever I had done in all my life, and could say in the language of the spouse, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." Now, I believe that this is the natural process to go through for the restoring of your souls. Some of you professors may be feeling, "I do not know how it is, but I am not what I ought to be; I am out of gear with Christ; I wish to get into a better state of heart, to be more pleasing to God than I am, by walking nearer to Him." If such is your state, mind what you do. Try what I have described; or, unless you are wide awake, there will come to you Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, and tell you there are other ways of getting your souls restored. First, He says, you should repent bitterly of all this wandering of heart. That is correct enough, but who is to give you this repentance? And then, says he, you must be more attentive to the outward means of grace, you must set aside longer times for prayer, and be more diligent in searching the Scriptures privately. That also is all correct. Whatsoever He bids you, that observe and do, as Christ said of the Pharisees, but that is not the way to obtain restoration of soul. The way to heaven is never round by Sinai: always be afraid of directors who lead you in that direction. All our healing lies in Christ. Christ is the physician, and Christ is medicine too. The way to get your soul restored is not to try to restore it yourself, nor to undergo any processes by which it may work itself right; but go straight away to Christ, and lay hold on Him, just as you are, whatever your condition may be. Coming into contact with Him, you shall soon have to sing in the words of the text, "He restoreth my soul." Let others talk of their sacraments, "He restoreth my soul." Let men boast and glory of special ways of raising their souls to heaven, "*He* restoreth my soul." Let some rejoice because their souls want no restoring, but are always strong; I cannot say that, but I can say, "He restoreth my soul." I hope this morning I shall have many beloved brethren and sisters of like mind, who will go out of this house saying not only "I knew He could restore my soul," but "He restoreth my soul. I was very cold when I came in here, as cold as the weather itself, but Jesus has thawed the ice out of my heart." Perhaps you have to confess that you were in a bad state of mind, ugly-tempered and I do not know what besides, worried out of anything like peace and rest; now, then, is the time to try the great Restorer. Before you leave your seat, labour to get into contact with Christ by the power of His Holy Spirit. Do, I pray you, return to Him as at the first. O branch, come back to the stem. Let the sap

flow again. "But I am not in a fit condition," say you. What! have you gone back to that old Sinai idea of fitness? Have you gone back to that legal demand? Come as you are. Come as you are to Jesus. I mean you saints. Are you going to play the fool as sinners do? Sinners say they are to get ready for Christ, and fools they are for saying it. Are you about to say the same? You will be worse fools still. Come just now. Whatever you have been, let the connection between you and Christ be consciously felt and quickened by an immediate application to Him by simple faith, and you shall yet say, as you rise into more than your former vigour, "He restoreth my soul."

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."—Psalm xxiii. 4.

DO you know I had laid this text by? I meant that this choice promise should be kept in store and stock till I came near the river of Jordan, and I hoped that then, in my last hours, I might be privileged to enjoy its sweetness, and sing with joyful lips—

> "Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
> Yet will I fear no ill;
> For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
> And staff me comfort still."

The other day I found that I needed to eat this heavenly loaf at once, and I did so. Fathers tell their children, "You cannot eat your cake and have it too"; but this rule does not hold good of the consolations of God. You can enjoy a promise and have it still. Yes, and have it all the more because your faith has fed upon its fatness. I sucked the honey out of this verse some days ago, when a tempest howled around me, but its sweetness is there still. I shall enjoy it, I doubt not, when I come near death's gate; but I have had it already sealed to my own soul with richness and fulness of comfort by the blessed Spirit of our God. Would to God that every believer who is burdened and cast down might find it as precious to his own heart as I have found it to mine.

This verse is no doubt very applicable to the experience of a believer when he comes to die; but, for certain, that is not its only intent. It has an inexpressibly delightful application to the dying; but it is for the living, too; and at this time if, through any peculiar trials, your soul is cast down within you, and you are walking through the valley of death-shade, I pray you to repeat the words of the text, and may the Lord help you to feel that they are true,—"Yea, though (even now) I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." The words are not in the future tense, and therefore are not reserved for a distant moment. Do not postpone to the future that which you so greatly need in the present. Though I walk, even at this hour, through the dark valley, Thou, O Lord, *art* with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. David was not dying; the psalm is full of happy, peaceful life. He is lying down in green pastures, and following his Lord by still waters; and if a cloud has descended upon him, and he feels himself like one threatened with death, he nevertheless expects goodness and mercy to follow him through all his days. The song is not to lie upon the shelf till our last day, but it is to be sung upon our stringed instruments all the days of our lives; therefore let us sing it at this hallowed hour in the courts of the Lord's house, and in the midst of them that love Him.

I. I call your attention, first, to THE PASS AND ITS TERRORS—"*the valley of the shadow of death.*" Get the idea of a narrow ravine, something like the Gorge of Gondo or some other stern pass upon the higher Alps where the rocks seem piled to heaven, and the sunlight is seen above as through a narrow rift. Troubles are sometimes heaped on one another, pile on pile, and the road is a dreary defile through which the pilgrim on his journey to heaven has to wend his way. Set before your mind's eye a valley shut in with stupendous rocks that seem to meet overhead, a narrowing defile, dark as midnight itself. Through this valley, or rocky ravine, the heavenly footman has to follow the path appointed for him in the eternal purpose of the Infinite mind. Through such a dreary rift many a child of God is making his way at this moment, and to him I speak.

Our first observation about it is that it is *exceedingly gloomy.* This is its chief characteristic. It is the valley of the shadow—the shadow of death. Death is terrible, and the very shadow of it is cold and chill, and freezes to the marrow. I have stood under rocks which have not merely cooled me, but have cast around a horribly damp chill, as though the embrace of death had been about me, and its cold within me. One hastens to escape from such a deadly shade, which has tended to strike you with fever. And such it seems to me is the shade cast by the wing of death when the man feels that he is under such trouble of soul that he cannot live, and would not even wish to do so if he could. The joy of life has been like the sun under an eclipse; and in the chill, dark, damp shade of a terrible sorrow the man has cowered down, and beneath the icy touch of doubt has shivered, has felt fevered and frightened and has been as one out of his mind. I speak to some young hearts here who, I hope, know nothing about this gloom. Do not want to know it. Keep bright while you can. Sing while you may. Be larks, and mount aloft, and sing as you mount; but there are some of God's people who are not much in the lark line; they are a great deal more like owls. They sit alone and keep silence; or if they do open their mouths it is to give forth a discontented hoot. Companions of dragons, and very suitable companions, too, such mournful ones need all the gentle sympathy we can afford them. Even those who are

bright and cheerful do, many of them, occasionally pass through the dreary glen where everything is doleful; and their spirits sink below zero. I know that wise brethren say, "You should not give way to feelings of depression." Quite right, no more we should. But we do; and perchance when *your* brain is as weary as ours you will not bear yourselves more bravely than we do. "But desponding people are very much to be blamed." I know they are, but they are also very much to be pitied; and, perhaps, if those who blame quite so furiously could once know what depression is, they would think it cruel to scatter blame where comfort is needed. There are experiences of the children of God which are full of spiritual darkness; and I am almost persuaded that those of God's servants who have been most highly favoured have, nevertheless, suffered more times of darkness than others. The covenant is never known to Abraham so well as when a horror of great darkness comes over him, and then he sees the shining lamp moving between the pieces of the sacrifice. A greater than Abraham was early led of the Spirit into the wilderness, and yet again ere He closed His life He was sorrowful and very heavy in the garden. In this heaviness, for which there is a needs be, believers have a black foil which sets out the brightness of eternal love and faithfulness. Blessed be God for mountains of joy, and valleys of peace, and gardens of delight; but there is a Vale of Death-shade, and most of us have traversed its tremendous glooms.

Moreover, there are parts of human life which are *dangerous* as well as gloomy. In journeying through the passes of the East an escort is usually needed, for the robber lurks among the rocks, and shoots down upon the traveller, or blocks up his way with sword and spear. The name of the Khyber Pass is still terrible in our memories, and there are Khybers in most men's lives. There are points in human history that are specially dangerous. O, you that are beginners, I do not wish to frighten you; I do not want to tell you that the ways of wisdom are terrible, for they are not. No, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." But, for all that, there are enemies on the road to heaven; and there are "Cut-throat Lanes" where, when the enemy finds your spirits cast down, he pounces upon you unawares with temptation, and before you know it you may be wounded and sore grieved. There are spots in the valley of deathshade where every bush conceals an adversary, where temptations spring out of the very ground like the fiery serpents from amongst the desert sand, where the soul is among lions, even among them that are set on fire of hell. If you have not yet come to that part of your pilgrimage I am glad of it, and I hope that you may be spared it, in answer to that needful prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." But if you are called to walk through this dangerous ravine, what will you do? Why, say this—Yea, though I walk through that dangerous pass of which I have heard, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Recollect that a Christian man is never so much in danger from abundance of temptation as from the carnal security of his own heart. We are often most in jeopardy when we are not tempted; and the worst devil in the world may be no devil at all. "Deliver me," said a man of great experience, "from a sleeping devil, for if he roars at me he keeps me awake; but when he lets me alone then my heart presumes that all is safe, and I am betrayed." You young people, or old people either, who are placed in the course of providence in positions of great trial and temptation, need not wish for an easier pathway, for it may be that you are safer now, being on your guard, than those who are not fiercely tried, but sit at ease, and are in great peril from sloth and spiritual indifference. Better consume with fire than perish of dry rot. The cold mountains of trial are far safer than the sultry plains of pleasure. I am not, therefore, alarmed at manifest danger, neither would I have you greatly dismayed because there is a gloomy gorge between you and heaven.

One of the chief reasons of the gloom is the fact that this terrible pass is *shrouded in mystery*. You do not know what the sorrow is. The shadow,—the shadow of death: what meaneth it? You cannot discern the form which broods over you. You cannot grasp the foe. It is of no use drawing a sword against a shadow. Bunyan represents the pilgrim as putting up his sword when he came into the valley of the shadow of death. He had fought Apollyon with it, but when he came into the midnight of that horrible defile it was of no use to him. Everything was so veiled, magnified, and blackened in the dark. Hob-goblins, as he called them, hovered around, strange shapes and singular forms of doubts, which he could not meet with reasoning, or overcome with argument. A man can pluck up courage against a thing he knows; but an evil which he does not know unmans him. He does not know what the trial is, and yet a strange, joy-killing feeling is upon him. He cannot see the extent of his loss in business, but he fears that his all will go; he does not know the end of his child's illness, but death appears to be threatening. All is suspense and surmise; and the evil of evils is uncertainty. That which frightened Belshazzar when the handwriting was on the wall was, no doubt, that he could see the hand, but he could not see the arm and the body to which the hand belonged. It seemed so singular to see the mystic handwriting in letters of lightning, and no more. So, sometimes it seems to us as if we could not make out our condition,—could not understand God's dealings with us. We have seemed to be at cross purposes with providence. We have come to a place where two seas meet, and we cannot understand the current. Our temptation has been comparable to a cyclone, and we do not know which way the hurricane is sweeping; we are in the power of a whirlwind, jerked to and fro. Such things happen to God's people now and then. And what are they to do when they get into these perplexities, these mysterious troubles, that they cannot at all describe? They must do—and God help them to do—as this blessed man did, who in the peace and confidence of faith went on his way singing, Yea, though I walk through the valley shaded by the mysterious wings of death, and though I know nothing of my way, and cannot understand it, yet will I fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thou knowest the way that I take. There are no mysteries with my God. Thou hast the thread of this labyrinth, and Thou wilt surely lead me through. Why, therefore, should I fear? Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Gloom, danger, mystery, these three all vanish when faith lights up her heavenly lamp, trimmed with the golden oil of the promise.

Nor is this all. The idea of *solitude* is in the text, the path is lonely, and the pilgrim sings, "Yea,

though *I* walk,"—as if he walked alone, no one sharing his shadowed pathway. Solitude is a very great trial to some spirits; and some of us know a great deal of what it means, for we dwell alone, in a spiritual sense. But you will say, "Do you not mingle with crowds?" Aye, and there is no solitude like it. When your office and position set you up as on a mountain all alone, you will know what I mean. For the sheep there are many companions; but for the shepherd few. Those who watch for souls come into positions in which they are divided from all human help. Nobody knows your care, or can guess the burden of your soul, and those who try to sympathize with you fail in the generous attempt. Some of you, perhaps, are in a position in which you complain, "Nobody was ever tried as I am. I feel as if God had set me as a mark for His arrows." Or possibly you murmur, "There may be many more afflicted than I am, but none in my peculiar way. I suffer a singularity of trial." Just so; and that is an essential part of the bitterness of your cup, that you should lament that you are alone. But will you not say, with your divine Master, "You shall leave me alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me"? Now is the time for faith. When you trust God *and a friend*, there is a question whether it is God you trust or the friend; but when the friend has left you, and only God is near, no question remains. If you and I are walking together, and a dog follows us, who knows which is the dog's master? But when you go off to the left and I turn to the right, all men will see which owns the dog, by seeing which he follows. If you can trust God alone, then are you really trusting Him; and if, when creature streams run dry, you can stoop down to the Creator's overflowing well and drink there, then you are a believer, and there is no mistake about it. It is profitable to be driven into loneliness that we may prove whether we are solely trusting in God or not. It is a bad thing to be standing with one foot on the sea and the other on the land: an angel stood in that fashion, and it suits angels, but it is not a safe posture for such burdened beings as men and women. We must get both feet on the Rock of Ages, or the foot which stands upon the sea of changeful self will be our downfall. My soul, wait thou only upon God! When faith's sole foundation is the power and faithfulness of the Lord she learns to glory in the absence of all visible help, and sings with joyful heart,—Yea, though I walk through death's dark valley, unattended by human companion, I will fear no evil, for my God is near.

Let me remark, further, that, though this valley is thus gloomy, dangerous, mysterious, and solitary, yet it is *often traversed*. Many more go by this road than some people dream. Among those who wear a cheerful countenance in public there are many who are well acquainted with this dreary glen; they have passed through it often, and may be in it now. When I wear the sackcloth of sorrow, I try to bind it about my loins under my outer garments, and not where all shall see it; for has not the Master said, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast"? Why should we cast others down? There is enough sorrow in the world without our spreading the infection by publishing our troubles. Story books are sent me to review, and when I perceive that they contain harrowing tales of poverty, I make short work of them. I see quite enough of sorrow in real life, I do not need fiction to fret my heart. If men and women must write works of fiction at all, they might as well write cheerfully, and not break people's hearts over mere fabrications. If I must weep, let it be over an actual grief, and not over a painted affliction. But so it is; some like to tell the story of their sorrows, and care little what may be the influence upon others; they might have a little more consideration for their fellow-men. If my own heart is bleeding why should I wound others? Sometimes it is brave to be speechless, even as the singer puts it—

> "Bear and forbear, and silent be;
> Tell no man thy misery."

It is surely true that a great number of God's best servants have trodden the deeps of the valley of the shadow; and this ought to comfort some of you. The footsteps of the holy are in the valley of weeping. Saints have marched through the Via Dolorosa; see you not their footprints? Above all others, mark one footstep! Do you not see it? Stoop down and fix your gaze upon it! Go on your knees and view it! If you watch it well, you will observe the print of a nail-wound. As surely as this Word of God is true, your Lord has felt the chill of the death-shade. There is no gloom of spirit, apart from the sin of it, into which Jesus has not fallen; there is no trouble of soul, or turmoil of heart, which is free from sin, which the Lord has not known. He says, "Reproach hath broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness." The footprint of the Lord of life is set in the rock for ever, even in the valley of the shadow of death! Shall we not cheerfully advance to the cross and death of Jerusalem when Jesus goes before?

I shall close my remarks upon this Via Mala of terrors by showing that, dark and gloomy as it is, *it is not an unhallowed pathway*. No sin is necessarily connected with sorrow of heart, for Jesus Christ our Lord once said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." There was no sin in Him, and consequently none in His deep depression. We have never known a joy or a sorrow altogether untainted with evil; but in grief itself there is no necessary cause of sin. A man may be as happy as all the birds in the air, and there may be no sin in his happiness; and a man may be exceeding heavy, and yet there may be no sin in the heaviness. I do not say that there is not sin in all our feelings, but still the feelings in themselves need not be sinful. I would, therefore, try to cheer any brother who is sad, for his sadness is not necessarily blameworthy. If his downcast spirit arises from unbelief, let him flog himself, and cry to God to be delivered from it; but if the soul is sighing, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," its being slain is not a fault. If the man cries, "My God, my soul is cast down within me, therefore will I remember Thee," his soul's being cast down within him is no sin. "If need be," says the apostle, "ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Not only "if need be ye are in the temptations," but "ye are in heaviness through them." There is a needs-be for the heart-break, for it is in the heaviness of the spirit that the essence of the trial is found. Does not Solomon say, "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil"? If the blow is not such as to leave its bruise, there has been no chastening that will do us good.

Heaviness of spirit is not, therefore, on every occasion a matter for which we need condemn ourselves, though it will be well always to turn a severe side to oneself. However we may censure ourselves for heart-sorrow we must be careful not to condemn others; for the way of sorrow is not the way of sin, but a hallowed road sanctified by the prayers of myriads of pilgrims now with God—pilgrims who, passing through the valley of Baca, made it a well, the rain also filled the pools: of such it is written, "they go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

Thus much upon the dark and dangerous valley of the shadow.

II. Our second head, upon which we shall speak for a little while, is THE PILGRIM AND HIS PROGRESS. "Yea, though *I walk through* the valley of the shadow of death."

The pilgrim, you observe, first, is *calm in the prospect of his dreary passage.* I do not think it is one half so hard to bear a trouble as it is to think of it beforehand. The poet well said that many of us

"Feel a thousand deaths in fearing one."

The outriders of trouble are often of a fiercer countenance than the trouble itself. We suffer more in the dread of trial than in the endurance of the stroke. Here we have a man of faith who is calm in expectancy of ill: "I shall walk," says he, "through the valley of the shadow of death. I expect to do so, but I will fear no evil." Have you, my friend, a trouble evidently drawing near to you? Are there tokens of a storm all around you? Then look bravely at the future. Let not your heart fail you while waiting for the thunder and the hurricane. David said, "Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." Encamped enemies generally trouble us more than actually contending foes. When once the enemy raises the war-cry, and comes on, we are aroused to valour, and meet him foot to foot, but while he tarries and holds us in suspense our heart is apt to eat itself with perplexity. We can see that our deadly foe is in his camp, but we do not know whether he will attack us at the middle watch of the night, or at the dawn of the day, or when his onslaught will be: this suspense distresses the soul; and hence the glory of a faith that can say—"Though I know that I shall soon suffer, yet in the prospect of it I am at rest. I fear no evil." Beloved, pray to be calm in the prospect of trial: it is half the battle. Is it not written of the believer, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord"?

Furthermore, the pilgrim *is steady in his progress.* "Yea, though *I walk* through the valley," says he. He does not run in haste; he walks quietly along. We are generally in a hurry to get our trouble over, like those who say, "If physic must be taken, let it be taken as soon as possible." There is a season for all things. Let us wait till the trouble comes from the hand of the Lord, for He will time it to the second. "There! I must know the worst of it," cries one, "I feel in such a horrible state of suspense that I must end it one way or another." But, my dear friend, faith is not in such a frightful bustle,—"He that believeth shall not make haste." Faith is quick when it has to serve God, but it is patient when it has to wait for Him. There is no flurry about the Psalmist, "Yea, though I walk," says he—quietly, calmly, steadily. The pace of the experienced man of God is a walk. Young people fly, "they shall mount up with wings as eagles"; growing men "run and are not weary"; but when a man of God becomes a father in the church, and is endowed with abounding strength he walks and does not faint. Walking is the regulation pace for veteran soldiers of Christ; all the rest is for the raw recruits. So David in effect declares,—I shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death as quietly as I walk my garden in the evening, or go down the street about my business. My affliction does not unfit me for duty, I am not flurried and worried about it. May God give you, my dear brothers and sisters, this calm faith. I pray that He may give it to me, for I greatly need it. I have often confessed my want of it, and confessed it with shame and confusion of face, for I serve a blessed Master, and I ought never to fear, nor allow pain of body to produce trembling of heart. O Sacred Comforter, shed abroad in my heart the peace of God.

The next point about the pilgrim's progress is that he is *secure in his expectancy.* "Yea, though I walk *through the valley.*" There is a bright side to that word "through." He expects to come out of the dreary pass to a brighter country. Just as the train of his life enters into the dark tunnel of tribulation, he says within himself, "I shall come out on the other side. It may be very dark, and I may go through the very bowels of the earth, but I am bound to come out on the other side." So it is with every child of God. If his way to heaven should lie over the bottom of the sea, hard by the roots of the mountains where the earth with her bars is about him, he will traverse the road in perfect safety. Jonah's road to heaven lay that way, and a special conveyance was started for him: "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." I do not suppose there was ever any other fish of the sort. Naturalists cannot find such a whale, they say, nor need they look for it, for the Scripture says, "The Lord prepared a fish." He knew how to make it to hold Jonah exactly, and the fish accommodated its passenger, and brought him right enough to shore. Providence makes special preparation for every tried saint. If you are God's servant, and are called to very peculiar trial, some singular providence, the like of which you have never read of, shall certainly happen to you to illustrate in your case the divine goodness and faithfulness. Oh, if we had more faith! Oh, if we had more faith! Life would be happy, trial would be light. Brethren, is it not an easy thing to walk through a shadow? If you get up in the morning and saunter down the field, and the spiders have spun their cobwebs across the path in a thousand places, you brush them all away; and yet there is more strength in a cobweb than in a shadow. The Psalmist speaks without fear, for he regards his expected trials as walking through a shadow. Trials and troubles, if we have faith, are mere shadows that cannot hinder us on our road to heaven. Sometimes God so overrules afflictions that they even help us on to glory; therefore let us walk on and never be afraid. Let us be sure that if we walk in at one end of the hollow way of affliction we shall walk out at the other. Who shall hinder us when God is with us?

The main point about this pilgrim and his progress

is that he is *perfectly innocent of fear*. He says, "I shall *fear* no evil." It is beautiful to see a child at perfect peace amid dangers which alarm all those who are with him. I have read of a little boy who was on board a vessel that was being buffeted by the tempest, and everybody was distressed, knowing that the ship was in great peril. There was not a sailor on board, certainly not a passenger, who was not full of alarm. This boy, however, was perfectly happy, and was rather amused than alarmed by the tossing of the ship. They asked him why he was so happy at such a time. "Well," he said, "my father is the captain. He knows how to manage." He did not think it possible that the ship could go down while his father was in command. There was folly in such confidence, but there will be none in yours if you believe with an equally unqualified faith in your Father, who can and will bring safely into port every vessel that is committed to His charge. Rest in God and be quiet from fear of evil.

This pilgrim, while he is thus free from fear, is *not at all fanatical or ignorant*, since he gives a good reason for his freedom from alarm. "I will fear no evil," says he, "for Thou art with me." Was there ever a better reason given under heaven for being fearless than this—that God is with us? He is on our side; He is pledged to help us; he Has never failed us; He must cease to be what He is before He can cast away one soul that trusts Him. Where, then, is there room for terror? The child is confident because his mother is with him; much more should we be serene in heart since the omniscient, the omnipotent, the immutable God is on our side. "Whom shall I fear?" Whom shall we select to honour with our dread? Is there anybody that we need to fear? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" Christ has died, and risen again, and sits up yonder at the right hand of God, our representative; who then can harm us? Let the heavens be dissolved, and the earth be melted with fervent heat, but let not the Christian's heart be moved: let him stand like the great mountains, whose foundations are confirmed for ever, for the Lord God will not forsake His people or break His covenant.

"I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." There is something more here than freedom from fear and a substantial reason for it, for the true believer *rejoices in exalted companionship*. "Thou art with me." Thou—Thou—Thou—the King of kings, before whom every seraph veils his face, abashed before the awful majesty of his Maker. "Thou art with me"—Thou before whom the greatest of the great sink into utter insignificance—Thou art with me. How brave that man ought to be who walks with the Lion of the tribe of Judah as his guard! What steady footsteps should that man take who treads upon a rock, and knows it. "Thou art with me." Trembling brother you would feel perfectly safe if you had your eyes opened to see the companies of angels that surround you. You would rejoice in your security if you saw horses of fire and chariots of fire encompassing you. But such defences are as nothing compared with those which are always around you. God is better than myriads of chariots. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels"; but the glory of it is that "God is among them as in Sinai." God is with every one of His children. We dwell in Him, and He dwells in us. "I in them and they in Me," says Christ. A vital, everlasting union exists between every believing soul and God, and what cause can there be for fear? "Thou art with me." Oh for grace to be brave pilgrims, and to make steady progress with heavenly company as our glory and defence.

III. Now, I shall close with my third head, which is most evidently in the text—THE SOUL AND ITS SHEPHERD; for David says, "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." You see the psalm is all about a shepherd and a soul that feels itself to be like a sheep.

The rod and staff, the tokens of shepherdry, are the comforts of the saints. What are the uses of the rod and staff?

Consider, first, that the rod was used for *numbering the sheep*. "Then shall the sheep pass again under the hand of him that telleth them." The shepherd holds his rod, and the sheep are counted as they pass under it. It is a very blessed thing when the soul can say, "The Lord counts me one of His. I am in the valley of the shadow of death, but I am one of the Lord's own purchased flock. I am in great sadness, but I am numbered with His redeemed." The Good Shepherd keeps all His sheep, and He will preserve them in the gloomy valley. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," and the Lord will show Himself strong on the behalf of His own. He says, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." If He numbers me among His own, though the meanest of them and feeblest in faith, and lowest in grace, yet He will protect me. Since I can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His," I am sure of every good thing. We need no better comfort, for when His disciples rejoiced because the devils were subject unto them, their Master said, "Nevertheless, rejoice not in this, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." If with His rod the Shepherd of Israel has pointed you out as His own, you may well be of good cheer, for the Lord will not lose one part of His portion, nor suffer the enemy to devour one of His flock.

Next, the rod is used *for rule*. The shepherd's crook, which is now put into the hand of a bishop to show that he ought to be a shepherd, is the emblem of power and government. The shepherd is not only the keeper but the lord of the sheep. Remember that your Saviour is your Sovereign. Ye call Him Master and Lord, and ye say well. Do you feel the spirit of obedience? I trust I do, for I long to serve Him. I am not what I ought to be nor what I want to be, but my heart longs to obey His will. I accept His law to be my law, and I wish always to be one of His most loyal subjects. I delight to think that the Lord reigneth. It is a part of my song—"The Lord is King." My heart shouts it. I would proclaim it at the market-cross of every town. Let Jesus reign, and reign for ever and ever. The joy is that He does reign. His rod and staff are the emblems of the Shepherd-King, and as we submit to His supreme sway we find a comfort in His royal power and dignity.

A third meaning—for the words are very full of doctrine—is this: the rod and staff are meant *for guidance*. It is with his rod that the shepherd leads his flock. It is most sweet, most comfortable

to believe that the Lord is guiding us. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." We are not half awake as the sheep of Christ; but if we were to watch our Lord we should see Him gently leading us by a right way. When we are not wilful, but wait upon Him, He leads us on in a way which we should not have chosen of our own accord, but it is the safe and right way. When we do not know which road to take we are not left to make a foolish choice, but we hear a voice behind us saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." It is a blessed thing when we are in a troubled condition to be quite confident that the Lord Himself brought us there, for then we are sure that the road must be right, since our Shepherd never misleads His flock. If we follow where Jesus leads, the Guide is responsible for the road.

The next meaning of the rod and staff is that of *urging onward.* The sheep sometimes are lazy, and will not stir; and then the shepherd pushes them on a bit with his rod and staff. Have you ever felt the divine arousings? Perhaps under a sermon you have had a pretty sharp thrust. I know I have had to lay on the rod at times in the Master's name upon certain fat sheep who are not quite as nimble as they ought to be; but their wool is so thick that I can scarcely make them feel. The Great Shepherd knows how to touch them. He can give such a push when sheep are lingering behind that, on a sudden, you see them leap forward, and you wonder how it is that they go to the front so eager. If I am under a trouble, and I feel that it speeds me on in the right road, if it drives me to prayer, if it makes me honour God more, then the rod and staff comfort me. It is a happy thing to be afflicted towards heaven. It is an evil thing to be comfortable in doing nothing—a horrible thing to be sinking into indifference, and not care whether you get out of it or not, but it is good to be tried, and so made earnest for more grace. It comforts a wise man to perceive that the rod is working for his good.

The rod and staff mean *chastisement;* for if a sheep goes astray the shepherd pulls it back by the leg with his crook, and makes it feel that it cannot wander without suffering for it. So does the Lord chasten us. Blessed be His name for chastening; though it is not joyous but grievous, "nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby." Oh, how blessed are those words "nevertheless afterward." It is a condescending thing for God to take enough notice of you to chasten you. A man does not whip other people's children, and when God afflicts a believer, and his soul within him is broken down, let him say within himself, "Blessed be God for this tribulation! Whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Sweet is the pain that seals the Father's love! Blessed is the anguish caused by our Shepherd's hand! Oh, dreadful pleasure that would arise out of God's letting me alone, let me never taste it; but blessed grief, blessed heartbreak, which assures me that God has not forgotten me. O Lord, Thy rod when it chastens me doth comfort me.

But, last of all, the rod and the staff are used by the shepherd to *protect his flock.* With these he contends against the beasts of the field that the lambs may not be torn. And, oh, how glorious is Christ when He comes forth with the weapons of His eternal power to fight the lion that would rend our soul! Think of Him in heaven pleading for His people, pleading the merits of His blood, using His intercession as a staff with which He smites the wolf, and chases away the lion and the bear, that no one of us may be destroyed. He must, He will protect His own elect. *You* may think that Christ bought His people with His blood and that He will lose them, but I do not believe it. When a thing has cost you dear you take great care of it, and if it cost you your life, you would not readily part with it. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life," and when He has once given up His life, that which He hath purchased with it is dearer to Him than all the world. Christ would sooner lose His life than lose His people. He did die once to save them, and until He dies again they shall never perish. Hath He not said it Himself, "Because I live ye shall live also"? Unless they live He does not live. His life has entered into them, and it can never leave them. "I give," saith He, "unto My sheep eternal life"; and what can "eternal life" mean but a life which lasts for ever?

Oh, may God give to everyone here present the faith which I have been talking about. Perhaps some of you have never trusted your souls with Christ. You know that faith is the way of salvation, why do you not follow it? Simply trust Him; simply trust Him; simply trust Him *now.* It is wonderful the power of faith to change the heart. When you trust a man you love him. You cannot be an enemy to a man in whom you trust. The effect of faith upon the affections is marvellous; it changes their whole nature and bent. God give you to know Christ, for they that know His name will put their trust in Him; and when you know Him and trust Him then shall you confess with us unto the Lord, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee." God bless you, dear friends, for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE OVERFLOWING CUP

"My cup runneth over."—Psalm xxiii. 5.

THE psalm culminates in this expression. The poet can mount no higher. He has endeavoured to express the blessedness of his condition, in having the Lord for his shepherd, but after all his efforts he is conscious of failure. His sonnet has not reached the height of the great argument, nor has his soul, though enlarged with gratitude, been able to compass the immeasurable gifts of grace, and therefore in holy wonder at the lavish superfluities of mercy he cries, "My cup runneth over." In one short but most expressive sentence he does as good as say, "Not only have I enough, but more

than enough; I possess not only all that I am capable of containing, but I inherit an excess of joy, a redundancy of blessing, an extravagance of favour, a prodigality of love;—my cup runneth over."

We do not know when David wrote this psalm. There seems, however, to be no period of his life in which he could have used this expression in reference purely to his temporal circumstances. In his youth he was a shepherd boy and kept his father's flock, and in such an occupation there were many hardships and discomforts, in addition to which he appears to have been the object of the ill-will of his brothers. He was not dandled on the knee of luxury, nor pampered with indulgences; his was a hardy life abroad, and a trying course at home, and unless he had been deeply spiritual, and therefore found contentment in his God, he could not have said, "My cup runneth over." When he had come forth into public life, and lived in the courts of Saul, and even had become the king's son-in-law, his position was far too perilous to afford him joy. The king hated him, and sought his life many times, and if it were not that he spoke of grace and not of outward circumstances, he could not then have said, "My cup runneth over." During the period of his exile, his haunts were in the dens and caves of the mountains, and the lone places of the wilderness, to which he fled for his life like a hunted partridge. He had no rest for the sole of his foot; his thirst after the ordinances of God's house was intense, and his companions were not such as to afford him solace: surely it could only have been in reference to spiritual things that he could then have said, "My cup runneth over." When he came to be king over Israel, his circumstances, though far superior to any which he may have expected to reach, were very troublous ones for a long season. The house of Saul warred against him, and then the Philistines took up arms; he passed from war to war, and marched from conflict to conflict. A king's position is in itself a thorny place, but this king had been a man of war from his youth up, so that, apart from the grace of God and the choice blessings of the covenant, he could not even on the throne have been able to say, "My cup runneth over."

In his later days, after his great sin with Bathsheba, his troubles were incessant, and such as must have well nigh broken the old man's heart. You remember the cry, "O Absalom, my son, my son! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" That was the close of a long trial from his graceless favourite; a trial which had been preceded by many others, in which first one member of his family and then another departed from the paths of right; nor did it close the chapter of his adversities, for the troubles of his heart were enlarged even to the last, and the good old man had to say upon his death-bed that, though he rejoiced in the sure covenant of God yet his house was not so with God as his heart could have desired. We cannot, therefore, take the text and say, "This is the exclamation of a man in easy circumstances, who was never tried; this was the song of a favourite of providence, who never knew an ungratified wish." Not so. David was a man of troubles; he bore the yoke in his youth, and was chastened in all his old age. You have before you, not a Crœsus whose long prosperity became itself a terror, nor an Alexander whose boundless conquests only excited new ambitions, nor even a Solomon whose reign was unbroken peace and commercial gain, but David, the man who cried, "Deep calleth unto deep as the noise of Thy waterspouts; all Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me." So did the spiritual outweigh the natural, that the consolations of the son of Jesse exceeded his tribulation, and even in his most troublous times there were bright seasons of fellowship with the Lord, in which he joyfully said, "My cup runneth over."

Let us think of *some cups which never run over*; and then consider, *if ours runs over, why it does so*; and then, thirdly, *what then?*

I. SOME MEN'S CUPS NEVER RUN OVER. Many even fail to be filled because *taken to the wrong source*. Such are the cups which are held beneath the drippings of the world's leaky cistern. Men try to find full satisfaction in wealth, but they never do. Pactolus fills no man's cup, that power belongs exclusively to the river whose streams make glad the city of God. As to money, every man will have enough when he has a little more, but contentment with his gains comes to no man. Wealth is not true riches, neither are men's hearts the fuller because their purses are heavy. Men have thought to fill their cups out of the foul pools of what they call "pleasure," but all in vain, for appetite grows, passion becomes voracious, and lust, like a horse-leech, crieth, "Give, give." Like the jaws of death and the maw of the sepulchre, the depraved heart can never be satisfied. At the polluted pool of pleasure no cup was ever yet filled though thousands have been broken; it is a corrosive liquor which eats into the pitcher, and devours the vessel into which it flows. Some have tried to fill their souls with fame: they have aspired to be great among their fellow-men, and to wear honourable titles earned in war, or gained in study. But satisfaction is not created by the highest renown; you shall turn to the biographies of the great, and perceive that in their secret hearts they never gained contentment from the grandest successes they achieved. Perhaps, if you had to look out the truly miserable, you would do better to go to the Houses of Parliament and to the palaces of those who govern nations, than to the purlieus of poverty, for awful misery is full often clothed in scarlet, and agony feasts at the table of kings. From the sparkling founts of fame no cups are filled. Young man, you are just starting in life, you have the cup in your hand, and you want to fill it, let us warn you (those of us who have tried the world) that it cannot fill your soul, not even with such poor sickly liquor as it offers you. It will pretend to fill, but fill it never can. There is a craving of the soul which can never be satisfied, except by its Creator. In God only is the fulness of the heart, which He has made for Himself.

Some cups are never filled, for the excellent reason that *the bearers of them suffer from the grievous disease of natural discontent.* All unconverted men are not equally discontented, but some are intensely so. You can no more fill the heart of a discontented man than you can fill a cup which has the bottom knocked out. A contented man may have enough, but a discontented man never can; his heart is like the Slough of Despond, into which thousands of waggon loads of the best material were cast, and yet the slough did swallow up all, and was none the better. Discontent is a bottomless bog into which if one world were cast it would quiver and heave for another. A discontented man dooms himself to the direst form of poverty, yea, he makes himself so great a pauper that the revenues of empires could

not enrich him. Are you the victims of discontent? Young men, do you feel that you never can be contented while you are apprentices? Are you impatient in your present position? Believe me that, as George Herbert said of incomes in times gone by, "He that cannot live on twenty pounds a year cannot live on forty," so may I say: he who is not contented in his present position will not be contented in another though it brought him double possessions. If you were to accumulate property, young man, until you became enormously rich, yet, with that same hungry heart in your bosom you would still pine for more. When the vulture of dissatisfaction has once fixed its talons in the breast it will not cease to tear at your vitals. Perhaps you are no longer under tutors and governors, but have launched into life on your own account, and yet you are displeased with providence. You dreamed that if you were married, and had your little ones about you, and a house, all your own, then you would be satisfied: and it has come to pass, but now scarcely anything contents you. The meal provided to-day was not good enough for you, the bed you will lie upon to-night will not be soft enough for you, the weather is too hot or too cold, too dry or too damp. You scarcely ever meet with one of your fellow-men who is quite to your mind: he is too sharp and rough-tempered, or else he is too easy, and has "no spirit"; your type of a good man you never see: the great men are all dead and the true men fail from this generation. Some of you cannot be made happy, you are never right till everything is wrong, nor bearable until you have had your morning's growl. There is no pleasing you. I know men who if they were in Paradise would find fault with the glades of Eden, and would propose to turn the channels of its rivers, and shift the position of its trees. If the serpent were excluded, they would demand liberty for him to enter, and would grow indignant at his exclusion. They would criticise the music of the angels, find fault with the cherubim, and grow weary of white robes and harps of gold: or as a last resource they would become angry with a place so completely blessed as not to afford them a corner for the indulgence of their spiteful censures. For such unrestful minds the cup which runneth over is not prepared.

Some, too, we know whose cup never will run over, because *they are envious*. They would be very well satisfied with what they have, but some one else has more, and they cannot bear it. If they see another in a better position in society they long to bring him down to their level. There are vices peculiar to the rich, but this is one of the ready faults of poverty. Now, surely, friend, if you find your own lot hard to bear you cannot wish another man to suffer it too: if your case be a hard one, you should be glad that others are not equally afflicted. It is a happy thing when a man gets rid of envy, for then he rejoices in the joy of others; and with a secret appropriation which is far removed from anything like theft, he calls everything that belongs to other men his own, for he is rich in their riches, glad in their gladness, and above all happy that they are saved. Some of us have known what it is to doubt our own salvation, and yet feel that we must always love Jesus Christ for saving other people. I charge you cast out envy! The green dragon is a very dangerous guest in any man's home. Remember, it may lurk in the hearts of very good men. A preacher may not be able to appreciate the gifts of another preacher, because they seem to be more attractive than his own. Good people when they see another useful are too much in the habit of saying, "Yes, but he does not do this," or, "She does not do that," and the remark is made, "He is very useful but very crotchety"; as if there ever was a man who did anything in this world that was not crotchety. Their very crotchets (which are uncomfortable things) God often overrules to be the power of the men and women whom He means to employ in striking out new paths of usefulness. What you call imprudence may be faith, and what you condemn as obstinacy may only be strength of mind needful for persevering under difficulties. Bless God for gracious men as you find them, and do not want them to be other than they are. When divine grace has renewed them, help them all you can and make the best use you can of them, and if their bell does not ring out the same note as yours, and you cannot change its tone, and yet you feel that your note would be discordant to theirs, pray God to tune your bell to harmony with theirs, that from the sacred steeple there may ring out a holy, hallowed, harmonious chime, through the union of all the bells and all their tones, in the sole praise of God. Envy prevents many cups from running over.

So, once more, in the best of men *unbelief is sure to prevent the cup running over*. You cannot get into the condition of the psalmist while you doubt your God. Note well how he puts it. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." He has no fears, or forebodings, or doubts; he has given a writing of divorce between his soul and anxiety, and now he says, "My cup runneth over." What are you fretting about, my sister? What is the last new subject for worry? If you have fretted all your life, your husband, your children, and your servants have had a sad time of it. Your husband feels with regard to you, "Good woman, I know nothing in which I could find fault with her, except that she finds fault with others, and that she grieves when there is no cause for grieving." May the Lord be pleased to string your harp so that it may not give forth such jarring notes as it now does, but may yield the joyful music of praise. Your great need is a more childlike faith in God. Take God's word and trust it, and, good sister, your cup will run over too. What is your trouble, brother? You were smiling just now at the thought of how some women were troubled, for you thought, "Ah, they do not have the cares men have in business!" Little do you know. There is a burden for women to carry which is as heavy as that of their husbands and brothers. But what is your distress? Is it one that you dare not tell to God? Then what business have you with it? Is it one which you cannot tell to God? What is there in your heart that forbids your unburdening it? Is it one which you refuse to tell to God? Then it will be a trouble and a curse to you, and it will grow heavier and heavier till it will crush you to the earth. But, oh, come and tell your great Helper! You believe in God for your soul, believe in Him about your property; believe in God about your sick wife or your dying child; believe in God about your losses and bad debts and declining business. A bosom bare before the Lord is needful to perfect satisfaction. I have proved God, and I speak what I do know: I have had a care that has troubled me, which I could scarcely communicate

to another without, perhaps, making it worse: I have done my best, and I have prayed over it but have not seen a way of escape, and at last I have left it with God, feeling that if He did not solve it, it must go unsolved. I have resolved that I would have nothing more to do with it, and when I have done that the difficulty has disappeared, and in its disappearance I have found an additional reason for confidence in God, and have been able again to say, "My cup runneth over."

We must walk by faith with both feet. Some try to walk by faith with the left foot, but their right foot they will not lift from the earth, and therefore they make no progress at all. Wholly by faith, wholly by faith must we live. He who learns to do that will soon say, "My cup runneth over."

I have not time to enlarge, although much more might be said, for there are cups which never have run over, and never will.

II. But now, secondly, WHY DOES OUR CUP RUN OVER? Assuming that we have really believed in Jesus, and that not with a wavering faith, but in downright solemn earnest, then joy will follow our faith. Our cup runs over, first, because, having Christ, *we have in Him all things.* "He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him, also, freely give us all things?"

> "This world is ours, and worlds to come:
> Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home."

Between here and heaven there is nothing we shall want but what God has supplied. The promise is, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." As the old Puritan puts it, earthly comforts are like paper and string, which you need not go to buy, for you will have them given to you when you purchase more valuable things. Seek the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Our God is not like the Duke of Alva, who promised to spare the lives of certain Protestants and then denied them food, so that they died of starvation. He does not give us eternal life and then deny us that which is needful to the securing of it. He will give us manna all the way from Goshen to Canaan, and cause the gushing rock to follow us all the time we are in the wilderness. "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be." I had climbed a hill the other day, and as I went down the steep side a sharp stone made a tremendous gash in my shoe, and then I thought of that promise, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." If the road be rough a strong shoe shall fit the foot for it. As with the Israelites, their feet did not swell, neither did their garments wax old upon them, so shall it be with you. You shall find all things in God and God in all things.

But there is another reason why our cups run over. They run over *because the infinite God Himself is ours.* "The Lord is my shepherd." "My God," the psalmist styles Him. One of the most delightful renderings ever employed in a metrical translation of the Psalms is that of the old Scotch version of Psalm xlii.

> "For yet I know I shall Him praise,
> Who graciously to me
> The health is of my countenance;
> Yea, *mine own God is He.*"

I feel as if I could stop preaching and fall to repeating the words, "Mine own God," "Mine own God," for the Lord is as much my God as if there were no one else in the world to claim Him. Stand back ye angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, and all ye hosts redeemed by blood! Whatever may be your rights and privileges, ye cannot lessen my inheritance. Assuredly all of God is mine—all His fulness, all His attributes, all His love, all Himself, all, all is mine, for He hath said, "I am thy God." What a portion is this! What mind can compass it? O, believer, see here your boundless treasure! Will not your cup run over now? What cup can hold your God? If your soul were enlarged and made as wide as heaven you could not hold your God; and if you grew and grew and grew till your being were as vast as seven heavens, and the whole universe itself were dwarfed in comparison with your capacity, yet still you could not contain Him who is infinite. Truly, when you know by faith that Father, Son, and Spirit are all your own in covenant, your cup must run over.

But when do we feel this? When do we see that our cup runs over? I think it is first *when we receive a great deal more than we ever prayed for.* Has not that been your happy case? Mercy has come to your house, and you have said, "Whence is this to me? I never dared to seek so great a boon." "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we ask or even think." You knelt down and prayed God to deliver you in trouble; He has done it, but instead of just barely carrying you through He has set your feet in a large room, and you have said, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God? Hadst Thou delivered me by the skin of my teeth I had been grateful, but now my cup runneth over." You asked the Lord to give you sufficient for the day, and, see, He has bestowed upon you a great many worldly comforts, and His blessing with them all. Must you not say, "My cup runneth over"? You asked him to save your eldest daughter; but in His infinite mercy He has been pleased to convert several of your children, perhaps all. You began to teach in the Sunday-school, and you prayed to the Lord to give you one soul. Why, He has given you a score. Will you not say, "My cup runneth over"? When I began to preach I am sure my little meeting-house seemed large enough, and my sphere sufficiently extensive; and if the Lord had said to me, "I will give thee a thousand souls as thy reward before thou shalt go to heaven," I should have been overjoyed, and cried my eyes out with weeping for delight; but now how many thousands has He given me to be the seals of my ministry! My cup runs over! My God has dealt with me beyond all my expectations or desires! It is the way of Him! He gives like a king! He has outstripped my poor prayers, and left my faith far in the rear. I am persuaded, beloved, that many of you know many things concerning God which you never asked to know, you possess covenant blessings which you never sought for, and you are in the enjoyment of attainments which you did not think it possible for you to gain; so that the cup of your prayer has been filled to the brim and it runs over. Glory be to the all-bounteous Lord.

So has it been with *the cup of our expectation*, for we ask many things and then from want of expecting them we fail to receive them. But have you not indulged large expectations, some of you?

Have you not had your day-dreams in which you pictured to yourself what a Christian might do? But the Lord has given you more than imagination pictured. You sat at mercy's gate and said, "Would God I might but enter to sit among the hired servants"; but He has made you to sit at the table, and killed for you the fatted calf. You were shivering in your rags, and you said, "Would God I might be washed from this filthiness, and my nakedness clothed a little!" but He has brought forth the best robe and put it on you. You said, "Oh, that I had a little joy and peace!" But, lo! He has made music and dancing for you, and your spirit rejoices abundantly in the God of your salvation. I will ask any Christian here if Christ is not a good Christ? You know when Henry the Eighth married Anne of Cleves, Holbein was sent to paint her picture, with which the king was charmed, but when he saw the original his judgment was very different, and he expressed disgust instead of affection. The painter had deceived him. Now, no such flatteries can ever be paid to our Lord Jesus Christ; the painters, I mean the preachers, all fall short, they have no faculty with which to set forth beauties so inexpressibly charming, so beyond all conception of mind and heart. The best things which have ever been sung by adoring poets, written by devout authors, or poured forth by seraphic preachers all fall below the surpassing excellence of our Redeemer. His living labours and His dying love have a value all their own; there are great surprises yet in store for those who know the Saviour best. Jesus has filled the cup of our expectation till it runneth over. And I may say the same of every mercy that He has brought in His hand; it has been a richer mercy, a rarer mercy, a more loving mercy, a more rapturous mercy, a fuller mercy, a more lasting mercy than ever we thought it possible for us to receive.

I speak to some who live by faith in their Lord's service. You have learned to expect great things, my brethren and sisters, and you will learn to expect greater things still. But has not God always kept pace with our expectation? Has He not outrun us? Has He not prevented us with His kindness? The path of a man who lives by faith is like a gigantic staircase; it winds up, up, up, in God's sight, into the clear crystal; but as far as we are concerned it seems to wind its way amongst dense clouds, full often dark as night. Every step we take we stand firmly on a slab of adamant, but we cannot see the next landing place for our foot; it looks as if we were about to plunge into an awful gulf, but we venture on, and the next step is firm beneath our feet. We have ascended higher and higher, and yet the mysterious staircase still pierces the clouds, and we cannot see a step of the way. We have found our Jacob's ladder hitherto to be firm as the everlasting hills: and so we climb on, and we mean to do so, with the finger of God as our guide, His smile as our light, and His power as our support. The blessed voice is calling us, and our feet are borne upward by the summons, climbing on and on in the firm belief that when our flesh shall fail, our soul shall find herself standing on the threshold of the new Jerusalem. Go on, beloved! God will do far more than you expect Him to do, and you shall sing, "My cup runs over."

Sometimes, too, the text is true of the Christian's *joy*, "My cup runneth over." The other night as I sat among our young men in the ministry, and we were all singing, "I am so glad that Jesus loves me," I did not wonder that the writer of that piece made them repeat that delightful truth over and over again. "I am so glad that Jesus loves me." You can excuse monotonies, repetitions, and tautologies when that dear word is ringing in the ear "Jesus loves me," "Jesus loves me," "Jesus loves me": ring that bell again and yet again. What need of change when you have reached a perfect joy? Why ask variety when you cannot conceive of anything more sweet? There is music, both in the sound and the sense, and there is enough of weight, and force, and power in the simple utterance of "Jesus loves me" to allow of its being repeated hundreds of times and yet never palling upon the ear. Now and then I hear of an interruption of a sermon by a person who has found the Saviour: how I wish we were often interrupted in that way! I wonder when men first learn that Jesus suffered in their stead that they do not shout and make the walls ring again. Surely it is enough to make them. What a blessing it would be if that old Methodist fire, which flamed so furiously in men's souls that they were forced to let the sparks fly up the chimney in hearty expressions, would but blaze away in our cold, formal assemblies. Come, let us pour out a libation of praise from our overflowing cups, while we say again "I am so glad that Jesus loves me." Have you not sat down when you have been alone and felt, "I am so happy because I am saved, forgiven, justified, a child of God, I am beloved of the Lord. This fills me with such joy that I can hardly contain myself"? Why, if anyone had come to you at such a time and said, "There is a legacy of ten thousand pounds left you," you would have snuffed at it; and felt "What is that? I have infinitely more than that, for I am a joint heir with Christ. My Beloved is mine and I am His. 'My cup runneth over.' I have too much joy. 'I am so glad that Jesus loves me.'"

At such times *our gratitude ought to run over too.* Our poet's gratitude ran over when he wrote that remarkable stanza—

> "Through all eternity, to Thee
> My grateful song I'll raise;
> But, oh, eternity's too short
> To utter half Thy praise."

I have heard cold critics condemn that verse, and therein prove their incompetence to enjoy poetry. Would they cramp the language of love by the rules of grammar? May not enthusiasm be allowed a language of its own? It is true it is incorrect to speak of eternity as "too short," but the inaccuracy is strictly accurate, when love interprets it. When a cup runs over it does not drip, drip, at so many drops per minute, it leaps down in its own disorderly fashion, and so does the grateful heart. Its utterances are as bold as it can make them, but they never satisfy itself. It labours to express itself in words, and sometimes it succeeds for a while, and cries, "My heart is inditing a good matter, I speak of the things which I have made touching," but ere long its rushing overflow stops up the channel of its utterance and silence becomes both needful and refreshing. Our souls are sometimes cast into a swoon of happiness, wherein we rather live and breathe gratitude than feel any power to set it forth. As the lily and the rose praise God by pouring forth their lives in perfume, so do we feel an almost involuntary outgush of our very selves in love which

could by no artistic means tell forth itself. We are filled and overfilled, saturated, satiated with the divine sweetnesses.

> " Thy fulness, Lord, is mine, for oh !
> That fulness is a fount as free
> As it is inexhaustible ;
> Jehovah's boundless gift to me.
> My Christ ! O sing it in the heavens,
> Let every angel lift his voice ;
> Sound with ten thousand harps His praise,
> With me, ye heavenly hosts, rejoice !

III. Now, thirdly, WHAT THEN ? The first thing is, *let us adore Him who has filled the cup.* If the cup runs over let it run over upon the altar. " What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me ? " Remember, dear Christian friends, that preaching is not a result, it is a means to an end, and that end is the worship of God. The design of our solemn assemblies is adoration ; that also is the aim and result of salvation, that the saved ones may fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb in His glory. Preaching and praying are like the stalks of the wheat, but hearty worship is the ear itself. If God has filled your cup, worship Him in the solemn silence of your soul. Let every power, passion, thought, emotion, ability, and capacity, in lowest reverence adore the Lord of all, the Fountain whence flow the streams which have filled us to the brim.

The next thing is, if your cup runs over *pray the Lord to make it larger.* Does not the apostle say, " Be ye also enlarged " ? Does not David speak of having his heart enlarged ? There is too much of narrowness in the largest-hearted man. We are all but shallow vessels towards God. If we believed more and trusted more, we should have more, for the stint is not with God. Pray like Jabez of old, " Oh, that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast."

The next thing is, if your cup is running over, *let it stop where it is.* Understand my meaning : the cup stands under the spring, and the spring keeps running into it, and so the cup runs over, but it will not run over long if you take it from where the spring pours into it. The grateful heart runs over because the fountain of grace runs over. Keep your cup where it is. It is our unwisdom that we forsake the fountain of living waters and apply to the world's broken cisterns. We say in the old proverb, " Let well alone," but we forget this practical maxim with regard to the highest good. If your cup runs over hear Christ say, " Abide in Me." David had a mind to keep his cup where it was, and he said, " I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." When I preach abroad I always like to go to the same house in the town, and I say to my host, " I shall always come to you, as long as you invite me, for I do not think there is a better house." If a man has a good friend, it is a pity to change him, the older the friend the better. The bird which has a good nest had better keep to it. Gad not abroad, I charge you, but let the Lord be your dwelling-place for ever. Many have been fascinated by new notions and new doctrines, and every now and then somebody tells us he has found a wonderful diamond of new truth, but which generally turns out to be a piece of an old bottle : as for me, I want nothing new, for the old is better, and my heart cries, " Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Until they find me a better fountain than the Lord has opened in Christ Jesus His Son my soul will abide in her old place, and plunge her pitcher into the living waters. Where my cup is filled there shall it stand, and run over still.

Once more, does your cup run over ? *Then call in your friends to get the overflow.* Let others participate in that which you do not wish to monopolize or intercept. Christian people ought to be like the cascades I have seen in brooks and rivers, always running over and so causing other falls, which again by their joyful excess cause fresh cascades, and beauty is joyfully multiplied. Are not those fountains fair to look upon where the overflow of an upper basin causes the next to fall in a silver shower, and that again produces another glassy sheet of water ? If God fills one of us, it is that we may bless others ; if He gives His ministering servants sweet fellowship with Him, it is that their words may encourage others to seek the same fellowship ; and if their hearers get a portion of meat, it is that they may carry a portion home. If you get the water for your own mill and dam it up, you will find that it is overgrown with rank weeds, and becomes a foul thing. Pull up the sluices, man, and let it run ! There is nothing in the world better than circulation either for grace or for money. Let it run : there is more a-coming, there is more a-coming. To withhold will impoverish you, to scatter is to increase. If you get the joy of God in your heart, go and tell it to poor weeping Mary, and doubting Thomas : it may be that God sent you the running over on purpose that those who were ready to perish might be refreshed.

Last of all, does your cup run over ? Then *think of the fulness which resides in Him from whom it all proceeds.* Does your cup run over ? Then think of the happiness that is in store for you when it always will run over in glory everlasting. Do you love the sunlight ? Does it warm and cheer you ? What must it be to live in the sun, like the angel Uriel that Milton speaks of ! Do you prize the love of Christ ? Is it sweet to you ? What will it be to bask in its unclouded light ? Oh, that He would draw up the blinds, that we might catch a glimpse of that face of His which is as the sun shining in His strength. What will it be to see His face, and to enjoy the kisses of His mouth for ever. The dew which distils from His hand makes the wilderness rejoice ; what must it be to drink of the rivers of His pleasure ? A crumb from His table has often made a banquet for His poor saints, but what will it be when the tree of life will yield them twelve manner of fruits, and they shall hunger no more ? Bright days ought to remind our souls of heaven, only let us recollect that the brightest days below are not like the days of heaven, any more than a day in a coal mine when the lamp burns most brightly can be compared to a summer's noon. Still, still, we are down below. The brightest joys of earth are only moonlight. We shall get higher before long, into the unclouded skies, into the land of which we read " there is no night there." How soon we shall be there none of us can tell ! The angel beckons some of us ; we hear the bells of heaven ringing in our ears even now. Very soon—so very soon—we cannot tell how very soon, we shall be with Jesus where He is, and shall behold His glory. Brethren, the thought of such amazing bliss makes our cups run over, and our happiness overflows as we remember that it will be for ever, and for ever, and for ever. Eyes never to weep again, hands never to be soiled again, bones

never to ache again, feet never to limp again, hearts never to be heavy again, but the whole man as full as it can be of delight ineffable, plunged into a sea of bliss, deluged with ecstatic joy, as full of heaven as heaven is full of Christ.

Dear hearer, the last word I have to say is this, do you know what it is to be filled with the love of God? Unconverted hearer, I know you are not happy. You say, "I wish my cup would run over!" What are you doing with it? "I am trying to empty it of my old sins." That will not make it run over. "I have been washing it with my tears." That will not make it run over. Do you know the only way of having joy and peace in your heart? What would you do with an empty cup if you were thirsty? Would you not hold it under a fountain until it was full? This is what you must do with your poor, dry, empty soul. Come and receive of Jesus, grace for grace. "For as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on His name." Hold your empty cup under the stream of divine fulness which flows to the guilty through Jesus Christ, and you also shall joyfully say, "My cup runneth over."

The Lord pour His mercy into you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

A TRIUMPHAL ENTRANCE

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."—Psalm xxiv. 9.

ON Monday evening we expounded this Psalm. We then enlarged upon the glorious ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His triumphal entrance within the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem, to which we believe this verse is to be referred. Having on that occasion endeavoured to set forth the literal and proper meaning of the words, amplifying at some length thereon, we trust we may be permitted to use them to-night rather by way of accommodation, while we speak on quite another subject, and give a different turn to the flow of our thoughts. Not that we wish to supersede the natural sense of the prophetic song, although we think that without violence, and even with profit, we may borrow a sentence from it to point a moral of practical godliness. It is worthy of observation, that the Scotch commentator, Dixon, gives what I am about to suggest to you as *the* true meaning of the text, as do also some one or two other authors, to say nothing of our hymn writers, who claim poetical license for the boldness of their paraphrases. I should myself very strongly demur to tamper with the literal sense. The allusion of the psalmist, no doubt, is primarily to the ascension of the ark of the covenant into Mount Zion, where it was permanently to be lodged; and that historical fact was a type of the ascension of Christ into the Jerusalem which is above, where He sits as the representative of His people. Let *the* meaning be fully understood and admitted, then we shall feel at liberty to use the words we here find for certain practical purposes. Give ear then, dear friends, to the doctrine which I am anxious to set before you. The Lord Jesus Christ, in order to our salvation, must not only enter into heaven, but He must enter into our hearts. He must not only sprinkle the blood within the veil, but He must sprinkle the blood within our conscience. All that Christ has done *for* us will be of no avail unless there shall be a great work done *in* us. It is not only Christ on the cross who is our hope, but "Christ in you," says the apostle, "the hope of glory." At the time of conversion Jesus Christ enters into the soul, and it is by such a triumphant entrance, when His Word comes into our hearts, that we get the personal knowledge of salvation.

I. First, then, THE GREAT THING TO BE DESIRED BY EACH OF US IS THE ENTRANCE OF THE KING OF GLORY INTO OUR SOULS.

Brethren, what if I should say that heaven would not be heaven without this? Certainly there would be no happiness here on earth, no heaven below to any one of us without we had Christ in our hearts. There is nothing but mischief in man's heart when Christ is not there, and another lord usurps dominion over him. In vain is the gospel preached to any one of the sons of men so long as they, like the strong man armed, keep the gates of the castle of their heart. The eyes of the understanding are blind to the way of peace. Until Christ shall come and take that castle by storm, there is no doing anything for that man; the spirit that worketh in him is the "spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience;" he is deceived by Satan, and made a willing slave to that tyrant of evil. What thou wantest, sinner, for thy salvation, is that Christ should come unto thee; for if He should come unto thee, then that dead soul of thine would live. His presence is life. He quickeneth whom He will. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. When He comes into a soul, spiritual life is there. The sinner wakes up to consciousness and rises from the grave over the mouth of which his reckless indifference, like a great stone, has been rolled, and he cries, "What must I do to be saved?" When Christ comes into the heart sin is seen to be sinful. In the light of the cross man begins to repent; he sees that his sin has slain the Saviour, and he loathes it; he now seeks to be delivered both from its guilt and from its power. The coming of Christ does that. It takes away the guilt of man. Christ in the heart, revealed to the soul, speaks peace to the troubled conscience. We look to Him and are lightened, and our faces are not ashamed. We see the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness in Christ; here we wash and are made clean; as for the reigning power of sin, nothing can ever conquer that but the incoming of Christ. If a man serves an evil master, the only way of getting rid of that hated despot is to bring in the rival sovereign. "No man can serve two masters." The introduction of the King of Glory, Christ Jesus, is the sure way of casting out that old master, Satan, the prince

of the power of the air. When the Lord Jesus comes, bringing life, and light, and pardon, He puts down the power of sin, and every blessing comes in His train. Oh! when Christ rides through the streets of our souls, they are strewn with flowers of hope and joy! Then we hang out the streamers of our sacred bliss; we sing of His praise, we are ready to dance before Him for holy mirth; then straightway we love purity and seek for perfection; then we adore the living God whom we had before forgotten, but of whom we can now say, "Our Father who art in heaven;" we receive the spirit of adoption to which we had been strangers before. Then, as soon as Christ has entered our heart, our course is heavenward; our way is towards our Father's face, whereas aforetime, with our backs to the Sun of Righteousness, we wandered into denser gloom, and should have found our way into outer darkness, where there are weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. O sinner! if thou couldst but get Christ into thy heart, thou wouldst say, "I have all things, and abound; I am full," but until then thou wilt be naked, and poor, and miserable. Or if thou be indeed a living soul thou wilt be uneasy and dissatisfied until Christ has entered into thee with all His glorious train, His Spirit and His Word. Thou wilt be like a house without a tenant, cold, cheerless, dilapidated, desolate. Thy heart wilt be as a nest without a bird—a poor, sad thing! Thou wilt be like a body without the soul that quickens it. But if Jesus comes, He will make a man of thee after another sort than that frail image which thy father Adam bequeathed thee; He will new-make thee in the image of Him who created thee. "Behold, I make all things new," saith He. Oh! thou canst not tell the influences of His sceptre when He sits upon the throne of the heart! Thou canst not tell what showers of mercy, what streams of benediction, what mountains of joy, and hills of happiness, shall be thine when Jesus comes and reigns in thy soul. This, then, is the great business that we ought to see to, that Jesus Christ should come unto us, not merely that we should hear of Him with the ear, and talk of Him with the tongue, but that we should have Him as a priest before the altar, as a King upon the throne of our heart, the chief and highest in the reverence and the affection of our inmost soul.

II. Secondly, THERE ARE IMPEDIMENTS TO CHRIST THUS COMING INTO OUR HEARTS.

The text speaks, you notice, about "doors" and "gates." Surely, if there were doors and gates that needed to be lifted up before Christ could enter into heaven, much more are there doors and gates that must be opened to receive Him into our hearts. Remember, that when Jesus Christ went up into heaven, the doors were lifted up, and the gates were opened, and they have never been shut since. There is no passage that says, "Down with your heads, ye gates, and be ye fast-closed, ye everlasting doors!" Not a word of that sort, Heaven's gates are open wide. What then is shut? Why, the gate of the human soul, the door of the human heart. There are many gates and doors, bars of iron, and bolts of triple steel that stand in the way of Christ. Sometimes it is our *wicked prejudice*. We do not want to know the gospel; we are confirmed in our own self-righteousness, or we hold the traditions of our fathers, who trusted in some outward forms and ceremonies. We do not want to know Christ. Perhaps the very name of the preacher of the gospel is hateful to us, and the name of the place where Christ is lifted up is detestable to us. What a blessing it is to us, when these gates of prejudice are taken away, and the hearing ear is given, and the soul pants to know what this gospel is!

Alas! though it too often happens, that when prejudice is removed, there then remains the gate of depravity: *our love of sin* is a strong barrier. We should soon have hailed Christ were it not that we had harboured an old foe of His. We do not care to give up our former love to lay hold of the true Bridegroom of men's souls. The great difficulty in the way of sinners getting to heaven is, that they love sin better than they love their souls. A little drink, a little merriment, a favourite lust, a Sunday holiday—any of these trifling joys, these grovelling husks that are only fit for swine, will keep souls from Christ, and prevent their laying hold of eternal life. Man loves his own ruin. The cup is so sweet, that though he knows it will poison him, yet he must drink it; and the harlot is so fair, that though he understandeth that her ways lead down to hell, yet like a bullock he follows to the slaughter, till the dart goes through his liver! Man is fascinated and bewitched by sin. He will *not* give up the insidious pleasures which are but for a season, but to gain them he will run the risk of the everlasting ruin of his undying soul. Oh! when God takes away the love of sin, then the gates are lifted up, and the doors are opened. What is there that could prevent our welcoming Christ, if we did but hate our sins?

Another great door is *our love of self-righteousness*. Though I have spoken of the love of sin as the strongest door, ought I not to correct myself, and to say, that perhaps the love of our own righteousness is a stronger door still? Men may give up their grosser sins, while they will hold fast to their fair, but carnal righteousnesses. Yet your own righteousness will as certainly destroy you as your iniquities. If you rest upon what you have done, however good in your own eyes, or however praiseworthy in the esteem of your fellowmen that doing may be, you rest on a foundation that will certainly fail you. Your merits or your demerits are alike unavailing for salvation. God grant that we may no longer boast of ourselves. Put away the Pharisee's pride, and never utter the Pharisee's prayer. The doors must be lifted up.

Then, again, there is that door which I may call the iron gate that entereth into the city, the innermost door of all, the key of which it is indeed hard to turn, the door of unbelief. Oh! that unbelief! It is the ruin of souls; and ah! what trouble, and labour, and anxiety it gives to us who are ministers of the gospel. When talking with anxious enquirers, we are often amazed at the ingenuity with which they resist the entrance of light and truth into their hearts. I do not think I have ever been so much astonished at the invention of locomotive engines, electric telegraphs, or any other feats of human mechanism, as I have been at the marvellous ingenuity of simple people in finding out reasons why they should not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. After we have proved to them to a demonstration that it is both the most reasonable and the fittest thing in the world to trust themselves with Christ, they ask, "How this? or how that?" or they argue, "But one thing, and but another." We may patiently go through the whole process again, and even when

that is done, there comes another "but." I have hunted these people till they have got to their holes, and I have tried to dig them out, and unearth them, but I find that they can always burrow faster than I can follow them. It is only the grace of God that can deliver us from this ruinous thing, unbelief. Ye would count it a strange thing, if, when a man condemned to be hanged had a pardon presented to him, he were so ingenious as to find out reasons why he should not escape the gallows; and when these reasons were all refuted, their fallacy exposed, and the good tidings confirmed, he should keep on finding out more reasons why the sentence of execution should be carried into effect. You would say, "Why, foolish man, let these sophistries alone; put your wits to better use; get your liberty first, and then enquire into the manner it was procured afterwards." Men will not take God at His word, and trust Christ at His call; that great doctrine of "Believe and live," they will reject. Still, still they will demur. Oh that these gates and doors were all removed!

Do not, I beseech you, my dear hearers, do not let me talk about this matter as though I were speaking to people in the moon. It is into your own hearts that admission is sought, and remember, that there are doors which keep Christ out. There are gates and doors which some of you wilfully close against Him. Though in His stead I have stood these many Sundays knocking as best I could at the door—nay, not I, but Christ knocking there through me—ye have resisted every appeal. You know that His head is wet with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night, yet you have kept these doors fastened still. They have shaken sometimes a good deal; they have almost seemed to me as if they were on the jar; I have hastened to see if I could not put my finger in at the hole of the door, but could not do so. I wish my Master would! How is it that with such a Friend outside, standing there in such a lovely attitude, laden with blessings, and ready to enter that He may bless you, how is it that still you will invent further bars, and make fresh locks to keep Him out?

III. Our third point is this: IN ORDER TO CHRIST'S ENTRANCE WE MUST BE WILLING TO REMOVE THESE BOLTS.

You will notice that the text says, "Lift up *your* heads, O ye gates," as if the gates were to lift their own heads up. It is addressed to them, as though they were to get out of the way. Continually, dear friends, I have to tell you that salvation is by grace, emphatically I shall have to impress this upon you presently; yet, at the same time, we never did say, and we hope we never shall say, that we see no necessity to make any appeals to your will. We never said that God would save you against your will. We never thought so. We never believed that a man was plunged into the blood of Jesus Christ if he was unwilling to be washed in it. We never believed that a man had the robe of righteousness put on him by main force, he meanwhile resisting with all his might. We never believed that there were pilgrims on the road to heaven who went there driven like convicts in the chain-gang, instead of marching willingly and cheerfully towards their desired rest. We never meant to say that you were mere machines whom God had deprived of free agency, or that in order to make you saints, He made you blocks of wood or pieces of marble. No; we have been in the habit of addressing you as reasonable beings, and of talking to you as those who had a will to choose or refuse. We have tried, with the motives of the gospel, to influence that will. Let us remind you that the gates are bidden to lift up their heads; therefore, in God's name, sinner, be willing! Be willing that Christ should enter into your heart; for, recollect, He never does enter against our will. He makes us willing in the day of His power; but willing we must be. True, willingness is His gift, but we are made willing; in the case of every soul that comes to Christ there is first given to him the willing mind. "Oh!" says one, "I am willing enough!" Thank God for that, dear hearer, for the most of men will not come unto Him that they may have life. "Oh!" says another, "I am sure my will is good to come to Christ?" I am glad to hear that, for there is a question we have often to ask, "*Wilt* thou be made whole?" But there are some men who do not want to be made whole, but would rather hobble still on their crutches, cripples as they are: they would rather indulge their inclination as sinners than be purified and brought into the obedience of faith.

Among those I address to-night, there may be individuals, perhaps, who would not like to have their conscience touched. Here is one man who is making money in a bad trade. "Oh!" he says, "I do not want that preacher to make me uneasy." There is another man here who has been getting so inured to his sinful pleasures that it would now be inconvenient for him to give them up. He has even made an appointment that he feels he must keep; and if he were apprehensive that the grace of God might come and overtake him to-night, he feels as if he would rather not. Do not be frightened; it will not occur to you, for the Lord will first give you this premonition of His intending to bless you; He will make you long to be blessed. Or ever He puts that cup of cooling water to your mouth, He will make you athirst; or ever He enriches you with His treasure, He will make you feel that you are naked, and poor, and miserable. Before Christ goes through the gate, the inhabitants of the city shall be willing to receive Him; nay, with outstretched hands they shall look over the battlements and say, "Come in, Thou King of Glory! I long to see Thee! Come, and welcome! I will throw the gates of my soul wide open to receive Thee; do but come! I long for Thee! I watch for Thy coming as they that watch for Thine appearing; yea, more than they that watch for the morning light."

IV. Fourthly, while you must thus be made willing, IT IS GRACE THAT MUST ENABLE YOU TO BE SO.

Notice, "*Be ye lift up*, ye everlasting doors." "Lift up your heads"—"Be ye lift up." We speak to a man as a man, and so we must speak to Him. Next to this we speak of what God can do, blessed be His name, as a God, when He comes to deal with us, making us willing; and then coming in, with that great arm of His power, entirely to remove those gates which creature-strength could not push an inch out of the way. I think I see the inhabitants of that city when the cry is heard, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates!" trying to lift them up; trying with all their might; but they cannot do it. The gates are too heavy; the bars seem to be rusted; the bolts are fast in their places. The people cry, "How shall we ever open the gates of this city, and how can we let in the King?"—when an invisible

spirit stands by the side of the wall, amidst all the struggling, and as He puts out His power, the gates go up, and the doors wide open fly. This is how it is with the sinner. God the Holy Ghost cometh in and helpeth our infirmities, and what we could not do because we are weak through the flesh, He helps us to do. The love of sin is given up to begin with, and then the Holy Ghost enables us to give up the sin which we no longer love. Unbelief becomes to us a burden, and we cry, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief!" and He does help that unbelief, and we do believe; that which we could not do, we do: He who made us willing, makes us able: where the will is present, the power is not withheld. When God has subdued the obstinacy of thy heart, He will speedily overcome the infirmity of thy hands. If thou art thirsty, thou shalt drink; if thou art hungry, thou shalt eat. If thou wouldst have Christ, thou shalt have Christ; for if thou canst not open the gates, He can. The difficulty with these gates is, that they are everlasting, though I cannot say that the gates which shut Christ out of our hearts are everlasting in one sense, yet they certainly are as old as our own nature, for the old inbred corruption of that, ever stood out against Christ; and they are such perpetual gates that they never would have been removed if it were not for the grace which came to remove them; and they are everlasting in such a sense, that they will be there in time and there in eternity. The man who will not have Christ now, will not have Him when he comes to die; and will not have Him in eternity; for even then the gates will still shut out the Saviour. The Saviour will be for ever a stranger and an alien to that man's heart! May God give to you who have been shutting Him out the will to open the door, and then may He come and say, "Be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors," and may Jesus Christ come in!

V. Not to linger, however, on any one point, let us proceed to notice the willingness of Christ to enter. We have shown you that it should be our great desire that Christ should come in; that there are obstacles; that we must be willing to remove them; and that grace will come to our assistance. What next?—JESUS WILL ENTER.

There is no difficulty put here after once the gates are lifted up. There is no suspicion nor surmise that He will not enter. It seems to follow as a matter of course. "And the King of Glory shall come in." Oh, yes! when the gates are opened, He *shall* come in! He was willing to come in before. He had sent His servants, and said to them, "Open the gates." He had finished the work which He came to do. He was waiting to be gracious. There was never any unwillingness in Him. The unwillingness was all in us; and as soon as ever that unwillingness is taken away, and the gates are opened, the King of Glory *shall* come in. May the Lord bless me in speaking for a moment to some here who are willing to have the Saviour, but who think that He will never come into their hearts. O beloved, do not suffer this infernal suggestion to depress your spirits! Are you poor? Believe me, it does not matter what dress you wear, nor in what humble cottage you live, nor how your face may be begrimed with your toil, if you are willing, the King of Glory *shall* come in. He loves to live in those men's hearts whose bodies, like His own, suffer fatigue, and wear the garments of the workman. Perhaps you say, "But my body has been defiled with sin." But where He comes He cleanses the house by His presence. You never hear it said, "The world is not fit for the sun, because it is so dark; for where the sun comes he makes light," and if after a long winter the world has grown cold and frostbitten; it is not said of the spring, "Thou must not come, for the world is not fit for thee!" No; but the genial influences of spring loosen the rivers, and clothe the earth with verdure, and bid the bonds of frost be removed; and so spring makes a palace fit for herself, and strews it with flowers from her own hands. My Master will come into your house and live, though you are not worthy that He should come under your roof. He was born in a manger, where the horned oxen fed; He will be born in your heart, where devils once dwelt. My Lord, when He does stoop, may well stoop as low as He can, for it is the greatest wonder that He should stoop at all—not that He stoops in any one particular direction; for, after all, though some of you may have been gross offenders, while others of us, from our youth up, have never uttered an oath, nor entered upon a lascivious action, yet there is not so much difference between you and us as that it should seem strange that He should come to you; for if you are black in one sense, we are black in another; and if you have been a drunkard, well, I have been an unbeliever; and if you have been a thief, well, I have played false to God; and if there be one sin into which I have not plunged, I have plunged into another. We are very much alike, after all; and it is not so wonderful a thing, if we once get our hearts filled with the true wonder that Christ should have saved sinners at all, that He should condescend to display that wonderful grace by saving those who, in the recklessness and daring of their crimes, are ostensibly such great sinners! Jesus Christ *will* come in. "Well, but suppose He should not?" says one. Ah! never suppose what cannot be! "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out." Why, the very angels must sometimes be astonished as they say, "Lord, here is such a one coming: shall we shut the gate?" "No," saith He, "for I have said that him that cometh, I will in nowise cast out." Surely, when the angel of mercy saw Saul of Tarsus coming, he said, "Lord, here is a man who has had his garments bespattered with the blood of Stephen; here is that fierce wolf who has whetted his fangs in the blood of many of the saints; here comes this blasphemer, this persecutor: must not he be excluded?" No; the gate stood open, and he found admittance; and as he entered he turned round, and said to the others who were timidly standing without, "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe." O soul, if thou desirest to have Christ, there is no reason why thou shouldst not have Him; nay, thou shalt have Him. If thou hast got so far, by His grace, as to have said, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors," then "the King of Glory *shall* come in," and you shall find a Saviour in your heart if you be but willing to receive Him there.

VI. And now, lastly, observe that our text says, "THE KING OF GLORY SHALL COME IN."

This title belongs to the Saviour. It proclaims Him in His highest authority. How shall I interpret this to you? The weight, the exceeding eternal weight of glory which belongs to the King of Glory,

I cannot explain. Oh that your thoughts may excel my words! Methinks I hear a cry, "Behold your King cometh! The King! The King! stand back, make way. The King cometh." There is a moment's bustle, and it is succeeded by a breathless pause. Everyone forgets the business on which he was engaged, and loses the thread of thought in which he was absorbed. All eyes turn, as if by instinct, to look from what direction that cry has broken on their ears: "THE KING OF GLORY!!" A thrill passes through your nerves, a shock goes to your heart, as you listen to the note which tells of His high prerogative. "Who is this King of Glory?" What peerless Prince is this, with a name above every name, and a royalty higher than the kings of the earth? "THE LORD OF HOSTS, HE IS THE KING OF GLORY." And while you look, He is near. You look, you gaze, you behold the pageantry of His high estate; and forthwith awe stifles your breath, admiration chains your senses. "Could I have one wish," said that eloquent preacher at the Hague, Mr. James Saurin, "Could I have one wish to answer my proposed end of preaching to-day with efficacy, it would be to show you God in this assembly." And I say to you, brethren, could I present at the door of your hearts the King of Glory, and constrain you to see Him, you would not hesitate, but open wide the gates to admit Him. Behold the King! resplendent with all the glory which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world; invested with all the offices of dignity which Jehovah has put upon Him; wearing all the brilliant trophies of His victorious achievements. Hark! hark! the trumpeters proclaim Him; patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, in loud and swelling notes announce His advent: the acclamations of the redeemed, a vast throng, greet Him. And He rides in triumph straight up to thy heart. One glance at Him, sinner, shows you plainly that He challenges your submission by all the grandeur of His title; by all the illustrious insignia of His solemn functions; by all the renown of His mighty acts. As the King of Glory, He must come in.

> "But know, nor of the terms complain,
> Where Jesus comes, He comes to reign;
> To reign, but not with partial sway,
> Thoughts must be slain that disobey."

As liege subjects, then, you must yield Him all your homage. Oh! you are willing that the priest should come in. "Aye," you say, "that is what I want; I want Christ to come in with His precious blood, like a priest, and sprinkle me with hyssop, and take away my sins." He will come as a priest, but not if you refuse Him as a King. "Yes," says another, "I am quite willing to receive Christ as a prophet; I want to understand the doctrines; they have puzzled me a great deal, and I want to comprehend them." Well, Christ will come as a prophet, but He will not come as a prophet unless you are willing to receive Him also as a king. O sinner, Jesus Christ must have the mastery in thy heart, or thou shalt not have Him at all. Come, now; thou hast followed thine own will; that must be given up. Do you not like that yoke? Do you say, "No, I never did wear one"? You must wear it, or you will be lost. Look at it, now—see how softly it lies! It will never gall thy shoulders. "My yoke is easy: my burden is light." Now, you know you have been your own master, and what incessant mutiny there has been in your members. Your own will has been too impotent a ruler to hold the reins of government or maintain peace. You know very well that your own passions have made a great slave of you. Why, the man who gives way to drunkenness, where is there a worse slave in the world than he? Or, take the man who has a passionate temper: why, he does and says a thousand things that he is disgusted with afterwards; but he seems to be driven by his caprice without the slightest self-control. A worse slavery than that of any galley-slave that was ever chained to the oar, is that slavery of a bad temper. Now, would it not be better to be a servant of Christ than to be the slave of your own hateful lusts, or your own capricious whims? I know what you will say—you cannot serve King Jesus, for your companions would laugh at you, and hold you up to ridicule. Oh! what a mean-spirited creature, then, you must be! And so you will let any jeering fool be your chieftain, and become the vassal of any man bolder in wickedness than you are. Why, sir, do you call yourself an Englishman? Are you a man at all, that you can yield yourself up to be chaffed after this fashion? What! would you let the gibes or taunts of a workmate restrain you from following what you believe to be good? Why, I am ashamed of you. Putting aside Christianity altogether, I blush for you as a coward. Surely, you might say to them, "What do I care for your laugh, I can always give you as good as you send, only I take care it shall not be in your spirit; I can hold my own, and if you choose to serve the devil, surely it is a free country. I have as much right to serve the King of Glory as you have to serve the prince of darkness. If you choose to go to hell, let me go to heaven; surely, you will not pass a law against that!" There are workmen, I believe, and men of business, and gentlemen, as they are called, of the upper circles, who are the most abominable tyrants in their intercourse with one another. If you choose to be a Christian, you are sure to get the cold shoulder among the upper classes. Nay, but the very working-men, who prate their democracy, will not let you be a Christian without meeting you at the shop door and saying, "Ah! here is 'a Presbyterian,' or 'a Methodist,'" or something of the sort. What is this but trampling upon liberty of conscience with arrogant tyranny? How can we boast of our love of freedom, while such a state of things prevails? Surely, a man has a right to his religion, and you have no right to interfere with him about it. But now, my dear friend, you are afraid of being laughed at; but let me ask you, which is it better, to be a servant of man or a servant of Christ? Whichever way you may judge, you can never enter heaven's door, to wear Christ's crown, unless you are here willing to be Christ's servant, and to bear Christ's cross. "Well, but I do not like this; I do not like that." Refer to the Bible: that is the Master's Book. As it is written there, so let your life and actions be ruled. You remember what the mother of Jesus said to the servants at the wedding in Cana of Galilee! "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." I do not see how you can serve Christ if there be anything in that Book which you see to be there, and yet wilfully neglect. Perhaps there are some of you whom that sentence will hit very hard. I know persons who say they are Baptists in principle,

but they have never been baptised. Baptists without any principle at all, I call them—persons who know their Master's will, but who will not obey it; I can make great excuses for brethren who do not see it; I think they might see it if they liked—but if they do not discern the precept, I can understand their not obeying it; but when people know their Lord's will, and do it not—though I am sure I would not wish to speak hastily on such a matter—I am not certain whether wilful disobedience to a known command of Christ may not be a token of their rejecting Christ altogether. *I* should not like to run the risk for myself at any rate. I should feel it unsafe to say that I believed I was saved, while there was some command of my Lord which I could obey, which I clearly saw to be my duty, and yet to which I solemnly declared I would withhold my obedience. Surely, in such a case, I have not let Christ come into my heart. If you would have Christ, He will be absolute Lord and Master—every humour and crochet of yours must be set aside, for where He comes He comes to reign. As He makes His entrance, He comes as the "King of *Glory*"—that is to say, He must be a glorious King, glorious to you—one whom you seek to glorify. You must not receive Him as though He were some paltry potentate that you did not care for, but He must be full of glory to you—the "Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace," you must receive Him into your heart; not as men receive a common guest, but as men receive their dearest and most honoured friend, one whom they love and reverence with all the powers of their nature. He must be the King of Glory to you; and henceforth it must be your desire to glorify Him. This is not a hard thing to ask; for oh! it is the pleasure, it is the antepast of heaven! It is unspeakable bliss to live to the glory of Christ. Even when one is suffering, suffering is sweet if it brings Him honour! If one is despised for Christ, it is delightful to be reproached if it to but make Him more glorious;

> "If on my face for Thy dear name,
> Shame and reproaches be,
> I'll hail reproach, and welcome shame,
> If Thou remember me."

Oh, to glorify Christ! Methinks heaven would lose half its charms for me if I could not glorify Christ there; and the waste howling wilderness were heaven on earth to me if I might but glorify His name here below. To glorify Christ is far more to the Christian's mind than harps of gold, streets of crystal, or gates of pearl. This is the true music of the soul; the true pæan of triumph; the true chorus of eternity—that He ever liveth; that the crown is on His head; that God also hath highly exalted Him. Oh! this is our exultation, this is our joy, our triumph, our blessedness. If we can but promote His glory, the place where we can best promote it shall be our heaven. The sick bed, the hospital, or the poor-house, shall be our heaven, if we can there best serve the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of Glory.

The year is fast drawing to a close. We call it "the year of grace, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-six." Oh! that it may indeed be "the year of grace" to some unconverted persons here. It may be that I am not casting my net to-night where there are many such to be found. Most of you, my hearers, are members of the Church of Christ: you are saved, I trust. Still there are sure to be here and there, like weeds growing in a garden of flowers, some who are still strangers to the Lord Jesus Christ. I would to God, that the Holy Spirit would move them to say, "Come in, Saviour! Let the King of Glory come in!" Oh! let this true saying of the faithful and true witness be your encouragement: "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." What a blessed thing! You breakfasted with the devil, and dined with the world; what a mercy if you should sup with Christ; and what a blessed supper you would have! Why, when you woke to-morrow it would be to breakfast with Christ; it would be to hear Him say, "Come and dine," and then to sup with Him again, and so on until you come to eat bread at the marriage supper of the Lamb. May the Lord bless you; and if He grant me my heart's desire, you will each of you say to your souls, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in."

A TROUBLED PRAYER

"Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins."—Psalm xxv. 18.

IF this Psalm were indeed written by David at the time when his son Absalom had raised the rebellion against him, we can readily understand the distinction which he draws between his "affliction" and his "pain." It is a great "affliction" to have a son become a rebel, and that subjects who owed so much to their monarch should become traitors against his gentle government. "Pain" was the acute sensation which David's own heart experienced as the result of such calamity. He knew

> "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child."

None of us can guess the "pain" which David must have felt from the "affliction" of having such a son as Absalom; and the "pain" of mind, again, which he felt in being betrayed by his familiar counsellor, Athithophel, and in being forsaken by his subjects who in former days had honoured him and rejoiced in him. He asked the Lord, therefore, to look, not only upon the trouble, but also upon the misery which the trouble caused him. "If needs be," says the apostle, "we are in heaviness through manifold temptations"—as if not only the temptations were to be observed, but also the heaviness consequent thereon. So here, we may bring before God's notice, not only our trial, but the inward anguish which the trial occasions us.

I can understand, also why David should add, "And forgive all my sins," because he knew that the revolt of Absalom was mysteriously connected with

the divine purpose as a chastisement, for his sin with Bathsheba. He recollected how Nathan had told him that he should have war all the days of his life, and now he remembered it all; the bitterness of gall sickened his soul as he revoked that sin which had once been so sweet to his taste. He went back to the fatal day, and the tears stood in his eyes as he thought of all the filthiness and guiltiness of his conduct—what a traitor he had been to Uriah—how he had dishonoured the name of God in the midst of the whole land. Well might he have said, "Lord, when Thou lookest upon this well-deserved affliction, and when Thou seest the pain with which it wrongs my soul, then, though it will bring my sin to Thy mind as it does to my mind, yet let forgiveness blot it out; yea, not for that sin only, but for all others that have preceded or followed it, grant me a gracious pardon—forgive, I pray Thee, all my sins."

I. It is well for us, dear friends, WHEN OUR PRAYERS ABOUT OUR SORROWS ARE LINKED WITH PRAYERS ABOUT OUR SINS—WHEN, BEING UNDER GOD'S HAND, OUR SOUL, IS NOT WHOLLY TAKEN UP WITH OUR PAIN, BUT WE ALSO REMEMBER OUR OFFENCES AGAINST GOD.

I do not think it would have been worth one's while to have preached from the text if it had only said, "Remember my affliction and my pain," but when it is "Look upon mine affliction and my pain and forgive all my sins," the two things put together are very instructive; let us seek to get some edifying counsel from them.

Our sorrows are profitable when they bring our sins to our minds. Some sorrows may do this by *giving us time for thought.* A sick-bed has often been a place of repentance. While the man was occupied with his daily work, and the active labour of his hands, or could be from morning till night at business, sin escaped his notice; he was too busy to care about his soul: he had too much to do with earth to remember heaven. But now he cannot think of business or if he does, he can get no profit or satisfaction from all his thoughts; now he cannot go to his work, but must lie upon his bed until his health be recovered; and oftentimes the quiet of the night, or the stillness of the day which once was given up to the toil and moil of drudgery, has been blessed of God to work a solemn stillness in the soul in which the voice of God has been heard saying, "Turn unto Me! turn unto Me! why wilt thou die?" Some of you do not often hear God's voice. You are in the midst of the clitter-clatter of this great city, and the roar and din of it are so perpetually ringing in your ears, that the still small voice of your heavenly Father you do not hear, and it may, perhaps, be a great mercy to you if, in your own house, or in the ward of an hospital, you may be compelled to hear Him say, "Turn unto Me! turn unto Me! for I will have mercy upon thee!"

Other afflictions remind us of our sins *because they are the direct result of transgression.* The profligate man, if God should bless those scourges of the body which have even sprung from his own vices, may find the disease to be a cure for the misdemeanours which produced it. We ought to thank God that He will not let us sin without chastisement. If any of you are sinning, and find pleasure without penalty in the self-indulgence, do not congratulate yourself upon the apparent immunity with which you violate the laws of virtue, for *that* is the badge of the reprobate. To sin and never smart, is the mark of those who will be damned; their smart, like their doom, being in reserve and stored up for sorer judgment. But if any man among you here is now smarting for the sin he has committed, I will not say, let him be hopeful, but I will say, let him be thankful; let him remember that evidently God has not quite given him up—He has touched him with the rod, but He has not thrown the reins upon his neck; He has put a curb in his mouth, and He is pulling him up sharply. God grant that it may be blessed to turn him from his wild career. The extravagant man who has spent his money, and finds himself in rags, ought to look upon his sins through his rags; his present poverty may well remind him of his previous prodigality. The man who has lost a friend, through ingratitude, and now needs a friend, but cannot find one, may thank himself for it, and be reminded of his baseness by his bankruptcy. There are many other sins, though we have not time to mention them, which are evidently the fathers of sorrows; and when you get the sorrowful offspring, you should think of the guilty parentage—and if you would be rid of the child, go to God and ask Him to deliver you from the sin, and divorce you from the transgression that produced it.

Other sorrows likewise remind us of our sins because they bear their likeness. It has been well remarked that oftentimes when God would punish us, He just leaves us to eat the fruit of our own ways. He has nothing more to do than to let the seed which we have sown ripen, and then allow us to eat of it. How often in reading the Holy Scriptures may you observe the quality of men's sins in the nature of their punishment! Jacob deceived his father, and what then? Why, he was always being deceived all his life long. He was a great bargain-maker, so everybody cheated him, of course. He would use his wily artifice. As he would be clever and supplant, he had to become a dupe and be supplanted; that was the misery of his life, because it was the besetting sin of his character. Now, when a man loses money, loses it continually, notwithstanding all the skill and efforts he can employ, I would have him ask himself whether there may not have been some sin in connexion with his money which has brought the punishment in him. He may have loved it too much; he may have obtained it in an ill way; he may not have used it when he had it in a proper spirit; it may have been dangerous for it to remain with him lest it should have corroded his heart by its own cankering. The losses a man suffers in business, I doubt not in many cases, and I am sure of it in some cases, ought to make him look earnestly at the way in which they came upon him. When we have heard of some who have gained wealth by one speculation, and have lost it again by another speculation, I think it ought to be made the subject of enquiry with them how far their dealings were lawful, if indeed it were lawful for them to have entered upon such traffic in any way or shape; and whether God may not have had a controversy with them in their counting-house. Is this an obligation with money? Surely it often is so with the rearing of your family. If your affliction should come through your children turning out ill in life, or through what is a far lighter affliction—though perhaps you may not think it so—through your children dying in infancy, you may say to yourselves, "How have I behaved towards those children?" Is my child wilful and disobedient? Then how about the training and the management

that I have observed? Is my child perverse, vicious, gay, worldly? How about my example as it was seen at the family hearth? May not my boy's sins be only a reproduction of my own?—the fledglings that I have hatched, roost in my family, disturb my peace, and bring me sorrow. May not my daughter's stubbornness of heart be only my own obduracy that breaks out in the girl? Might I not hear the voice of God saying to me, "See how you treated Me, and is it not meet you should eat the fruit of your own ways? You are a father and how do you like to be thus treated—to be slighted in your discipline, and your affections set at nought?" So I might continue, passing from our households to our respective positions in society. We sometimes find ourselves unable to maintain our station. With chagrin and mortification we have to take a lower place, and may we not then ask, Did we acquit ourselves before God in all that we might have done in our former standing? Did the rank we held elevate us, and puff us up with vanity? At any rate, we may bring ourselves to great searchings of heart. When sorrow takes any particular shape, it suggests its own particular questions. The problem must be studied to get at the solution. With regard to sickness, I am not certain whether the chastening hand of God for sin ought not to be more immediately recognized than is now for the most part common among us. In one sense God never punishes His people for sin. There is nothing vindictive in the rod He uses, and nothing expiatory in the sufferings they endure; for God's redeemed people were punished in Christ, and it cannot be therefore that the penalty of the law is exacted of them a second time. Yet there is a sense in which the Church of God under paternal discipline, is continually exercised with chastisement. Do you remember the apostle's words about the Corinthian church? They had fallen into a very lax method of receiving the Lord's Supper: they brought every one his own bread and wine, some of them were full, and others were hungry; beside which, other breaches of church order were rife among them; and the apostle says, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Hence I gather that sickness at any rate in the early church was wont to be sent by God upon the members for ecclesiastical offences. I am not sure whether in like manner sacred corrections, though in a way not so easily discoverable, may not still be in exercise among the members of the Christian Church. I see that in ordinary providence, God visits men; and as there is a special providence for His people, surely there is nothing harsh or unwarrantable in attributing a strong flood of adversity, as well as a refreshing stream of prosperity, to the hand of the Lord! When a Christian, therefore, finds himself chastened in his body, he should go to God with this question, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me? Why dost Thou lay Thy rod upon me, my Father? Thou dost not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is not from the heart, as though Thou hadst ceased to love; it must be from Thy unerring judgment whereby in measure Thou dost rebuke; tell me, therefore, my Father, what is the cause? If Thou seest a need-be, tell me what that need-be is.

"'The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.'"

Our sins, then, may sometimes be discovered by the very image of our sorrows.

What a great blessing it is to us when our sorrows remind us of our sins by *driving us out of an atmosphere of worldliness!* There is our nest, and a very pretty, round, snug nest it is; and we have been very busy picking up all the softest feathers that we could find, and all the prettiest bits of moss that earth could yield, and we have been engaged night and day making that nest soft and warm. There we intended to remain. We meant for ourselves a long indulgence, sheltered from inclement winds, never to put our feet among the cold dewdrops, nor to weary our pinions by mounting up into the clouds. But suddenly a thorn came into our breast: we tried to remove it, but the more we struggled the more it chafed, and the more deeply the thorn fixed itself into us. Then we just began to spread our wings, and as we mounted it would seem as though the atmosphere had changed, and our souls had changed too with the mounting, and we began to sing the old forgotten song—which in the nest we never should have sung—the song of those who mount from earth and have communion with the skies. Yes, when God is pleased to take away our health, our comfort, our children, our friends, it very frequently happens that then we think of Him. We turn from the creature with disgust; we leave the broken cisterns because they hold no water, and begin to look out for the overflowing fountain; and so our sorrows, driving us to God, make us, in the light of His countenance, to behold and to grieve over our sins. This is a great blessing to us.

Sometimes, again, our sorrows *remind us of our ingratitude.* You are unwell: now you recollect how ungrateful you were for your health. You are poor: "Ah!" you think to yourselves, "I used to grumble once over a good meal that I should be glad to have now." "Ah!" say you, "those garments that I used to think so shabby, how much I should prize their warmth now!" It is said that we never know the value of mercies till we lose them. It is a great shame that such a proverb should be true. We ought to be grateful to God without needing the bitter teaching of adversity. Our sorrow thus administers a rebuke, and kindles in us a remembrance of the goodness that we had never welcomed with our praise till the shadows fell upon us, and the night hid it from our view. No crime among men is accounted more base than ingratitude, but few sins we less bewail before God. Bunyan has well said, that he who forgets his friend is ungrateful to him, but he that forgets his Saviour is unmerciful to himself. And I remember some other author who says, that we are never surprised at the sunrise of our joys, as we always are at their sunset; on the contrary, when storms of sorrow burst upon us we are sore amazed, but when they pass away we take it as a matter of course. You all know how sad a blemish it was upon the character of Hezekiah that he rendered not again unto the Lord according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up. The provocation of a thankless heart to a merciful God is no light matter. As the guilt is heavy, let our repentance be sincere.

Sometimes again, sorrow reminds us of the sin of *want of sympathy with those in like sorrow.* "Ah!" says one, "I used to laugh at Mrs. So-and-So for being nervous; now that I feel the torture myself, I am sorry that I was ever hard upon her." "Ah!"

says another, "I used to think of such-and-such a person that he must be a fool to be always in so gloomy a state of mind; but now I cannot help sinking into the same desponding frames, and oh! I would to God that I had been more kind to him!" Yes, we should feel more for the prisoner if we knew more about the prison; we should feel more for the poor if we understood more of the pangs of want. Our sorrows may often help to remind us of our harshness towards some of the best of God's afflicted ones.

And I think also that affliction may be sent to admonish us *of our neglect of divine teaching.* "Why that rod?" "Why that whip and that bridle?" Because I have been like the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. Had I listened to the voice of God that I heard from the pulpit; or had I hearkened to the counsels given to me in the pages of Scripture; or if I had even noticed the dictates of my own conscience; yea, had I been more jealous of the motions of the Holy Spirit in my soul, I might never have entailed all this trouble upon me. You know the old fable we used to read in our school books about the boy in the apple-tree, who would not come down when the good man with soft words admonished him. Then the man took to throwing turfs at him, but still he would not heed, and at length the man betook himself to stones, and compelled him to come down. Oh! when God betakes Himself to stones, and we get cut with them, we might well say to ourselves, "Ah! light afflictions, ye would not do: we laughed at the kind words; and even the turfs, which struck our conscience without wounding our flesh, would not do, and now He has come to blows with us. God is always loath to use the rod. He is an unwise father who never chastens, but a much worse father he who chastens for nothing. God will chasten His people, but it takes Him a long time to bring Himself to use the rod. He does not wish to smite His children; He delights in their happiness, and not in their sorrow; and when at last He does come to it, it is—if I may use such an expression in reference to Him—because our ill manners force Him to it. O Christian, in these thy sorrows, be thou humble before the Lord thy God; but still use Job's enquiry. "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me?"

I wish that some here, who have not the fear of God before their eyes, would look at it in this light. If you are inclined to pray about your troubles, do take your sins into consideration too. If you do feel that you must go to God under the particular trial which is vexing you at present, do go to Him about your besetting sins as well. Make the two into one bundle, and go to Him, and say, "Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins." This, then, is our first remark. It is fit that our sorrows should bring our sins to remembrance.

II. Secondly, IT IS WELL WHEN WE ARE AS EARNEST ABOUT OUR SINS AS WE ARE ABOUT OUR SORROWS.

This is the mark of a genuine penitent. I think you will have noticed in the late "Report" of the chaplain of Newgate, the remark that many of the prisoners will pretend very great repentance when the chaplain is talking to them about spiritual things; but the chaplain can very readily discover those who are not truly penitent, by their constantly trying to bring him round to tell them something about their punishment; before the trial they frequently ask for information as to what term of imprisonment—how many months or years—they are likely to get. Then, when they are undergoing punishment, they frequently try to get some trifling favour through the means of the chaplain, showing that they think more of the punishment than of the theft; like the unhappy wretch in the condemned cell, who often repents of the gallows that is to end his career, but does not repent of the murder that cut short his victim's life. There are many such. So, if I go to God and only ask to have my sorrows taken off from me, what is that? I am no true penitent; I am like the child who cries bitterly because he smarts, but when the smart is over, he goes back to the offence again. If we were true children of God, and had a truly repentant spirit, we should feel the rod to be less than nothing compared with the sin. We should say, "Lord, strike me; if Thou hast but forgiven me I can bear the strokes; strike, Lord, strike as hard as Thou wilt, for my sin is forgiven." A good child will say, "My father, Thou hast forgiven me the offence; ah! well, if I must be chastened, I will cheerfully bear it, for my sorrow is, not that I smart, but that my sin should have caused Thee to be angry, and to make me smart." This, then, is the mark of a genuine penitent, that he is as earnest about his sins as he is about his sorrows. Your trials have never wrought in you what they were meant for until it is so. God sends thy trial to make thee see thyself—thy weakness, thy folly, thy sinfulness, thy distance from Him; and when those sins, those sweet sins of thine, become bitter, when thy soul nauseates and loathes them—then, probably, thine affliction will be taken from thee; but if thou still yieldest to thy sins with thy left hand, and wouldst fain lay hold of God's mercy with thy right, there is need that the rod be laid on thy back again, and again, and again, for thou hast not yet feared the rod nor Him that hath appointed it. Let any of you who are in trouble here, mend your prayer to-night. If you have been saying, "Lord, take away the sickness from my dear child," you should say, "Lord if it be Thy will, heal my child, but forgive my sin." Or, if any of you are very poor to-night, or, if you are not well, and you have a sense of sin, I pray you, I adjure you, as you kneel by your bedside—which I trust you all will—while you ask God to restore your health, or to remove your poverty, do be quite as earnest about the forgiveness of your sins, or else it will betoken two things: that you are not a genuine penitent, and that, therefore, the affliction has not wrought in you its great design.

III. But, thirdly, IT IS WELL TO TAKE BOTH SORROW AND SIN TO THE SAME PLACE.

It was to God that David took his sorrow: it was to God that David took his sin. Observe, then, *we must take our sorrows to God.* Ah! my dear sister over yonder, where do you take your sorrows? Why, to your next-door neighbour, to Mrs. This and Mrs. That! We are very, very fond of pouring out our tale of woe into the ear of some earthly friend. That may be a slight relief if discreetly done, but I think the verses of the hymn is not wrong which says—

> "Have you no words? Ah! think again;
> Words flow apace when you complain,
> And fill your fellow-creature's ear
> With the sad tale of all your care.

" Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To heaven in supplication sent,
Our cheerful song would oftener be—
' Hear what the Lord hath done for me.' "

Some children run and tell mother, or tell father; do you the same. Go and tell your Father; you can tell your brethren afterwards if you will, but you had better let your Father know first. I think we should often hesitate to mention our troubles lest we should depress our fellow-creatures. I am sure we should hesitate to mention them to men, if we made it a rule first to bring them before our God. Your little sorrows you may take to God, for He counteth the hairs of your head: your great sorrows you may take to God, for He holdeth the world in the hollow of His hand. Go to Him, whatever your present trouble may be, and you shall find Him able and willing to relieve you.

But *we must take our sins to God too.* Possibly this is a more difficult point. The sinner thinks that he must fight this battle for himself, wrestle with his own evil temper himself, and he himself must enter into conflict with his lusts and his besetting sins; but when he comes into the fight, he soon meets with a defeat, and then he is ready to give it all up. Take your sins to God, my brethren. Take them to the cross that the blood may fall upon them, to purge away their guilt, and to take away their power. Your sins must all be slain. There is only one place where they can be slaughtered—the altar where your Saviour died. If you would flog your sins, flog them with the whip that tore your Saviour's shoulder. If you would nail your sins fast, drive the same nails through them which fastened your Lord to the cross; I mean, let your faith in the great Surety, and your love to Him who suffered so much for you, be the power with which you do conflict with evil. It is said of the saints in heaven, "They overcame through the blood of the Lamb." That is how you must overcome. Go to Jesus with your sins; no one else can help you; you are powerless without Him. You may confess all your sins to Him, with a view of leaving them all with Him. He receiveth sinners, He receiveth their sins too when they are brought to Him in penitence; for God has made to meet upon Him the iniquity of all His people, and you may take your sins and leave them in the hands of Jesus, who will counter-plead them with His merits, and put them away in His mercy, so shall you come away rejoicing.

And, as we have remarked that we are not to take up the battle with our sorrows alone, nor with our sins alone, we may further say that *the most sorrowful and the most sinful are welcome to the Lord Jesus.* The most sorrowful may come; I mean those in despair, those who are at their wits' end, those poor souls who, through superabundant difficulty are ready to do the most unreasonable things—ready, it may even be, to give way to that wicked, Satanic temptation of rushing from this present life into a world unknown, by their own hand. Go, sorrowful one, go now to Jesus, whose tender heart will feel for you. Has your friend forsaken you? Have your lover and your acquaintance become your enemies? Seek no human sympathy just now, but first and foremost, in a flood of tears, reveal your case to the great invisible Helper. Kneel down and tell Him all that racks your spirit and fills your tortured mind, and plead the promise that He will be with you, and you shall find Him true though all else be false. And, as the most sorrowful, so the *most* sinful are welcome to Christ—the sinful certainly, but the *most* sinful especially. If your sin has become so outrageous that it were wrong for me to mention it here; if it has become so tremendous in its power, that, like the chain and ball at the convicts' foot, you cannot escape from it, yet still come with all your sins to Jesus. Thou blackest sinner out of hell; thou who art nearest to the gates of perdition; thou who hast had fellowship with devils till thou hast become almost a devil thyself; thou who hast lain steeped in the scarlet of sin till it has ingrained and entered into the very warp and woof of thy being; thou who art all over black within and without, go thou to the Saviour, and take these words in thy mouth:—"Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins." And suppose the two conditions should have met in your heart, that you are at once the most sorrowful and the most sinful, still go, for the gates of mercy are very wide. When Christ opened the holy of holies, He did not make a little slit therein, but the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, so that the hugest sinner that ever lived might come through it to the blood-besprinkled mercy-seat. Oh, the amazing mercy of God! "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His ways above our ways, and His thoughts above our thoughts." Sin is after all, a thing of the creature, but mercy is an attribute of the Creator, and the Creator's attribute swallows up the creature's fault. Thus saith the Lord, "I will take away their iniquities and cast them into the depths of the sea." The most sorrowful and the most sinful may go.

And let us add that *God can with equal ease remove our sorrows and our sins.* It is wonderful how difficulties fly when Omnipotence encounters them! The sick man who has been given up by the physician has often recovered; and it has been perhaps, His mercy that the physician gave him up, for where man has come to an ending, God has come to a beginning. The old proverb saith that, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and most certainly that is true. God has but to will it and fevers fly, and diseases disappear. As the soldier goes at the captain's bidding, so doth God say to Death, "Go," and he goeth, or "Come," and he cometh. Thus is it in our circumstances. How very often a day which opened as black as gathering clouds could make it, has ended with a bright sunset! How frequently the beggar has found himself lifted up from the dunghill, and made to sit among princes! I should not wonder but what some of you, in looking back, and remembering the circumstances you are now in, are quite surprised to find yourselves where you are. This very morning I was talking with a gentleman who said to me, "I cannot bear waste in my household, and one reason is this: if ever there was a poor wretch who could live on hard fare once, and envy the very dogs a piece of bread, I am just that one; but God has been pleased to prosper me, and I often look back upon that season of poverty and of want, and thank Him for having helped me through it." Well, you see, dear friends, that God can turn the wheel, and make the bottom spoke to be the uppermost one, and He can do it all in a few days. Come, then, though sin and sorrow rest like a double burden upon our body and soul, let us go to Him and say, "Look upon mine affliction, and my pain, and forgive all my sins."

IV. Perhaps our last observation is more strictly to the text than anything else. It is that WE ARE TO GO TO GOD WITH SORROWS AND WITH SINS IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

You notice that all that David asks about his sorrow is, "*Look upon* mine afflictions and my pain"; but the next petition is more express, definite, decided, plain—"*Forgive* all my sins." Some people would have put it, "Remove my affliction and my pain, and look at my sins." But David does not say so; he says, "Lord, as for my affliction and my pain, I do not say much about that —Lord look at it; I will leave that to Thee; I should be glad to have it removed; do as Thou wilt; look at it; consider it; but as for my sins, Lord, I know what I want there; I must have them forgiven; I cannot bear them." A Christian counts sorrow lighter in the scale than sin; he can bear that his troubles should continue, but he cannot endure the burden of his guilt, or the weight of his transgressions. Here are two guests come to my door, both of them ask to have a lodging with me. The one is called *Affliction*; he has a very grave voice, and a very heavy hand, and he looks at me with fierce eyes. The other is called *Sin*, and he is very well-spoken, and very fair, and his words are softer than butter. Let me scan their faces, let me examine them as to their character, I must not be deceived by appearances. I will ask my two friends who would lodge with me, to open their hands. When my friend Affliction, with some little difficulty, opens his hand, I find that, rough as it is, he carries a jewel inside it, and that he meant to leave that jewel at my house. But as for my soft-spoken friend Sin, when I force him to show me what that is which he hides in his sleeve, I find that it is a dagger with which he would have stabbed me. What shall I do, then, if I am wise? Why, I should be very glad if they would both be good enough to go and stop somewhere else, but if I must entertain one of the two, I would shut my door in the face of smooth-spoken Sin, and say to the rougher and uglier visitor, Affliction, "Come and stop with me, for may be God has sent you as a messenger of mercy to my soul." "*Look upon* mine affliction and my pain, and *forgive* all my sin." We must be more express and explicit about sin than we are about trouble. Take the two expressions together, use them, and whether you blend or contrast them, either or both will prove to be full of instruction.

Before I close my sermon and dismiss this assembly, it may be necessary to notice some among you who have no affliction or pain. In too many instances I am afraid you have sin, so the latter part of the test will suit your case. But oh! and if you have not any affliction or pain, nor yet any cause of fear because your sins are forgiven, let me then suggest to you that you should be exceedingly happy. Your cup should overflow with joy. I do not think, brethren, that you and I rejoice enough. When engaged this morning, seeing enquirers coming in one after another, I thought within myself, "I have known the time, when I first began to preach the gospel, that one soul God had given me as a fruit of my ministry, made me so happy that I was ready to leap out of the body. Truly it is a happy thing to be the means of bringing one soul to Christ." The poet says that—

> "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

But a thing of grace is much more truly so, for the things of beauty here on earth may be consumed, but a work of grace is everlasting. To be the means of saving one soul ought to set a silver bell ringing in your hearts that will never leave off. You will say, "I am very poor, and very sick, but I have not lived for nothing, there will be one gem in the Redeemer's crown that came there through my instrumentality; there will be one voice in the orchestra of the skies, which, humanly speaking, would not have been there if the Lord had not enabled me by His grace to be the means of bringing that soul to Christ." This ought to make us joyful. But then I thought, here have I been seeing thirty to-day, and most of them owed their conversion to the preaching of the gospel here, and I have seen, perhaps, in my little life-time, several thousands of souls, and know of many others whom I never saw, who have been brought to Christ through our instrumentality. What! and down-hearted, and sometimes wretched, and distracted with care after this? I thought to myself, what a fool I am! And I suspect that if you and I, or any of us, were to consider the goodness of God to us, the fact that our names are written in heaven, that Christ is ours, that heaven is ours, that we are the children of God, and that we are justified by faith—we should say, "Why, what am I at to be moaning and groaning about these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, and which will work our for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? Come, my soul, take down the harp, and let thy fingers roam among its strings. Say with old Herbert—

> "My God, my God,
> My music should find Thee
> And everything shall have its attribute to sing."

So, if we cannot go to God, asking Him to look on our affliction, let us ask Him to look upon our joy, and to help us to increase it, and to grow in it, and then to keep us from sin in the future, and to lead us in the paths of duty and of blessed service, to the honour of His name and the comfort of our own souls.

May the Lord give you, in parting, His own blessing.

THINK WELL AND DO WELL

" For Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes : and I have walked in Thy truth."—Psalm xxvi. 3.

THROUGHOUT this Psalm David is labouring under the fear that he should be judged and condemned with the ungodly world. He feels in his own heart that he is not one with the enemies of God, and he shudders lest having hated their society on earth he should be shut up in their company for ever. His agonising prayer is, " Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men." In urging reasons before the throne of grace why he should not be reckoned in the same condemnation as the ungodly, he urges not self-righteously, but truthfully and confidently, that there was a difference made by grace between himself and them. " I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers ; and will not sit with the wicked. . . . Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." There was a difference, he declares, between himself and the wicked, even in the current of his thoughts. While their thoughts ran upon the world, vanity, sin, rebellion, hypocrisy, and violence, his meditations were upon all the marvellous works of God, and especially upon His loving-kindness—" Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes." It is an encouraging fact, when we can honestly feel as before God that our thoughts are habitually exercised upon Himself and upon divine truth. " As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." We may form a better judgment of ourselves probably from the tenor of our thoughts than from any other evidence. If our thoughts all go downward, downward we ourselves are going ; but if there be some breathings towards the heavenly, some aspirations of our spirit towards the pure and perfect Father of Lights, then may we have hope that we also are ascending towards the heavenly places, and shall dwell in them hereafter. David could urge besides the secret evidence of his devout thoughts, the public proof of his holy acts—" I have walked in Thy truth." It would be vanity for a man to find evidence of a renewed heart in his private meditations, if those thoughts were not sufficiently deep to lead him to practical godliness. The thoughts become a valuable evidence because of their influence upon the life, but if they were so powerlessly superficial that our daily life was in no degree affected by them, they would be as salt that has lost its savour. If our actions are evil, it is vain to take comfort from our thoughts. If actions speak louder than words, they may well speak louder than thoughts. We must display outward holiness, or else our inward experience of grace exists only in pretence. Say thou thinkest of what thou wilt, but if thy whole conversation is according to the will of the flesh and not after the will of God, thy thoughts are nought, thou hast deceived thyself as to their tenor, they cannot be as thou sayest they are, thoughts truthful, holy, devout and divine. Put the two together, holy thoughts and holy living, and you have two sure evidences of a renewed nature ; and if God has given you both of these, though you will probably confess that you have them not in the measure in which you would desire to have them, yet bless the grace that has so worked upon you, and rejoice this morning, and go on in holy confidence to ask for a greater measure of the same divine working. Would to God our thoughts may become uniformly gracious, and our lives perfectly consistent with our thoughts, and with the divine word. I mean, this morning, to take the two parts of the text separately, and then to consider the link which unites them.

First, then, we shall have to consider *the mind occupied with a fruitful subject* ; secondly, *the life ordered by a right rule* ; and thirdly, *the link which connects the two.*

I. First then, may every Christian experimentally know to a yet fuller degree what it is to have A MIND OCCUPIED WITH A FRUITFUL SUBJECT.

" Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes." It is exceedingly profitable to the Christian to have always some subject of thought upon his mind, for the mind that is vacant, frivolous, unoccupied, will be sure to issue in a barren and unprofitable life. I fear to a very large extent in this age the minds even of good people are empty, and void, and waste. Years ago, when the influence of the Puritan age yet lingered among us, the female members of Christian churches were generally women of very considerable education, whose range of reading was very different from that of their sisters in these days, and whose theological knowledge was profound ; while the men who were members of our nonconformist churches, were, as a rule, persons of very clear doctrinal knowledge—perhaps rather too much given to controversy, and to pushing their own views without sufficient tolerance for the views of others—and on the whole, Nonconformist Christianity was highly intelligent, thoughtful, and meditative. Men and women then when they joined the church, knew what they believed, and believed what they knew ; they were prepared to be counted singular for their belief, but were equally prepared to justify themselves for taking up so separated a position. They were students of the Word of God and of such books as opened up to them the Word of God ; so that our armies of believers, if they were fewer than now, were nevertheless very strong, because the warriors handled their weapons well, were well drilled, and at home in the holy war. I fear a great many Christian people do not *think* much about their religion. They give their guinea subscription, they occupy their seat at the meeting-house, they attend the prayer meetings, but they are little given to thinking out a system of doctrines, or to ransacking the meaning of Scripture. Contemplative pursuits are not so general among Christian professors as I could wish. Not that I desire to see an increase of a certain dilettante class of people who are always expounding prophecy, or spelling out types, and leaving ragged people to perish in ignorance, and the masses of our city to remain unevangelised. The sooner we bury the last of our prophetic pretenders the better ; they expose truth to ridicule and rather hinder than promote the cause of religion. Louis Napoleon was to be the Antichrist, and to conquer all Europe : I wonder how they will play their cards now ! Of late they have grown so impu-

dent as to foretell the future with all the brass of a Sidrophel, a Lilly, or a Dr. Dee. I hope their failures will open the eyes of the public to their folly. I so reverence the inspired prophecies that I wish a race of students would succeed these charlatans. We need devoutly meditative people who will think about the precious things of God in a practical, gracious way, such as the Holy Ghost inspires; men who are not for ever occupying themselves with theories and speculations, but with the solidities and with the practical parts of theology. A band of such men, strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, would have a great influence for good; and if all professors were such, the church would be rich indeed.

Observe, that when the mind does not receive holy matters to feed upon, as a rule it preys upon itself; like certain of our bodily organs which, if not supplied with nutritive matter, will soon begin to devour their own tissues, and then all sorts of aches, pains, and ultimately diseases will set in. The mind when it eats into itself, forms doubts, fears, suspicions, complaints, and nine out of ten of the doubts and fears of God's people come from two things—walking at a distance from God, and want of spiritual nutriment for the soul. If you, believer, do not meditate upon some scriptural subject, your minds will probably turn to vanity or to some evil within yourselves, and you will not long think of the corruption within without becoming the subjects of a despondency which will turn you into Mistress Dispondencies or Mr. Feebleminds, whereas by musing on the promises of the Holy Spirit, you would grow into good soldiers and happy pilgrims. Of some who do not feed their souls constantly with spiritual nourishment Satan takes an advantage, and fills them with unholy thoughts. It is a very frequent complaint with persons who desire to be in the fear of God all the day long, that they are molested with horrible insinuations, dreadful suggestions, and revolting ideas, and they fly to the pastor sometimes to know whether they can be the children of God at all, or if the children of God, what remedy they can use by which they shall be able to escape from this horrible torment. I suggested yesterday to a friend labouring under this serious complaint, that he should take care never to go out in the morning without placing under his tongue a text of Scripture like a wafer made with honey; and I exhorted him at all times to occupy his mind with heavenly subjects, so that there should be the less likelihood of the thoughts running after that which is evil. The best way to prevent a bushel measure. from being filled with chaff is to fill it first with wheat, If the channel of the soul be filled with a strong stream of devout thought, there cannot be much mud and filth lying in the bottom. A powerful stream of holy contemplation will scour the thoughts and bear away the foul deposits of unholy thought. There is nothing like keeping the mind occupied, for Satan finds some evil still for idle brains to think upon. It is true that weeds and nettles choke the good seed, but it is equally true that when the good seed gets strong above ground it will choke the weeds. Where Jesus is, the buyers and sellers are driven out of the temple. Dagon falls where the ark comes. When Israel comes in the Canaanite must go out. Fill the cage of your heart with the birds of Paradise, and the foul birds will not have it all to themselves. If our soul shall become so full of thoughts of God and things divine, that vain thoughts shall be banished, it will be a fine growing time for the plants of the Lord's right hand planting. Learn from the text the usefulness of having some sacred topic before the mind's eye.

David in selecting the topic of divine loving-kindness did well, for let us remark upon that subject, that it is, first of all, *a rightful subject* of meditation. I mean, it is our bounden duty to think much upon it. Some things we may not think of, certain other topics we are barely allowed to think of, but other themes we *must* think of. Now the loving-kindness of God is one of the things which is not left to our choice; we are bound to meditate much upon that. As Dr. Watts says:—

> "Oh, bless the Lord, my soul,
> Nor let His mercies lie
> Forgotten in unthankfulness,
> And without praises die."

Shall God, day after day, send such store of mercy to such unworthy ones as we are, and shall we treat His continuous generosity as a matter of course, and not even think of it? Base ingratitude! Let us scorn such meanness. If we ought to think of our duty to God, and of our violation of that duty, yet much more should we think of the loving-kindness which makes our duty pleasure, and which covers over with a mantle of love the transgressions of our lives. Infinite goodness is a rightful subject of meditation, and it deserves a large share of our thoughts.

It is, besides, *a good subject.* It is good in itself, and it will do us good. The loving-kindness of God—by no possibility can any harm come to us from retaining that subject too long in our minds. A man who has but one idea will sometimes become an unbalanced inharmonious man; oftentimes he will fall into obstinacy, bigotry, or rashness, through the excessive indulgence of that one thought, just as one feature exaggerated out of proportion with the rest will make an ugly countenance. But you cannot think too much upon the divine loving-kindness. You may make this, if you will, the one sole topic of your thought, and yet escape narrow-mindedness or one-sidedness. It has so many links of union with all other subjects, that when you consider this it will bring up, as it were, compendiously a whole circle of profitable meditation. Think of the divine loving-kindness, and it shall be good, only good, and that continually. As you muse upon it your thoughts will humble you. "Why such goodness to me, to me who am less than the least of all Thy mercies?" The same theme will be equally sure to comfort you. "Is the Lord so good to me? then amid every adversity my spirit shall rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the God of my salvation." To think of this will stimulate you to be full of loving-kindness to others who may have acted unjustly or ungenerously towards you. As God hath loved you so bounteously you will be bound to pity and assist the poor and needy. This subject will benefit you in all respects, and harm you in none. Ring this silver bell again and again, it is good for the hearing.

Moreover, dear brethren, it is *a wide subject.* To set His loving-kindness before our eyes is not to select a narrow theme, which we can soon exhaust. It is a boundless topic. The loving-kindness of the Lord hath no beginning; you may fly backward to the ages past, in meditation deep and long—divine loving-kindness shall have no end; you may look into the ages yet to come with joyful musings. Loving-kindness is high as heaven, to which it shall lift you; it is deep as hell, from which it has redeemed you.

It is wide as the east is from the west, for so far hath He removed all your transgressions from you. Here is a subject in which you may expatiate without limit or fear of repetition: if hitherto you have bathed in this stream up to the ankles, proceed in meditation deeper still, for you shall find it a river to swim in; a very broad river that cannot be passed over. The width of the subject is one thing which leads me to commend it to you as a theme for the most expanded intellect in time and in eternity.

And it is *a pleasing subject.* "Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes." Nobody need grow weary of this. It is like traversing a country in which every single inch of the road opens up a new prospect. Here you see the loving-kindness of God in the land in which you were born, in the times in which your life is cast, in the mercies with which your life is surrounded. You may see the loving-kindness of God in your temporal mercies, you cannot go to your house or bed-chamber without seeing it there. You see that loving-kindness even more clearly in spirituals. What a blessing to be interested in the covenant of grace! How many a holy hymn awakens memories of the tender mercies past! How this very house, and the seat you sit on, refresh your recollections as to what God has done for you in days gone by! "The loving-kindness of the Lord." I never knew a man grow heavy in spirit from meditating upon this, never knew a man become weary of the cares and burdens of life through thinking of God's loving-kindness; nay, but he has grown stronger to bear his burden, or to fight his way through time's conflict, when the loving-kindness of the great Preserver of men has come visibly before his mind.

And you may add, it is *a very plain* and simple subject, and one that is suitable to us all. The loving-kindness of the Lord is a topic that can be reached by the babe in grace, and yet will not be superfluous to the most advanced. There are topics in Scripture so profound and surrounded with such metaphysical difficulties, and rendered so much more perplexing by the wisdom, or the unwisdom, of divines, that one might almost say to the Christian thinker, "You may pass those by, for you will never get much out of them; the quartz is too hard; there is too little gold to pay for breaking up." But when you come to this subject, the unskilled convert may sit down and meditate on the loving-kindness of God, and be edified; while at the same time the most proficient scholar in the school of Christ shall find something fresh and new every time he meditates thereon. Thou art little read, thou sayest; thou hast little access to the thoughts of great men; thy Bible is thine only book. Ah, well! but the providence of God will make thee a second, and the experience of thy heart, touching Christ and things divine, will make thee a third volume; and put the three together, the book of revelation, the book of providence, the book of thine inward experience, and with these three thou hast a wondrous library, and in them all thou mayst read the loving-kindness of the Lord towards thy soul.

I will finish this part of my subject by saying that this is always *a suitable and a seasonable topic.* The young Christian, in the early flush of his joy, may think of the loving-kindness of God; it will help to keep him joyful and yet to make him sober. The venerable Christian matron may, ere she departs, dwell still upon this topic, and tell to her children and her children's children of what God has done for her. In your health or in your sickness, in your wealth or in your poverty, in your joy or in your sorrow, still this theme of the loving-kindness of God will be congenial and healthful. This you may study on the top of Amana when you have passed by the leopards' dens; this you may rehearse in the Valley of Humiliation when you lie down with the shepherd boy among the flocks, and sing—

> "He that is down need fear no fall,
> He that is low, no pride."

This you may think of when you are fighting with Apollyon, and the darts fly thick as hail, yea, fiery darts that burn as well as wound; and this you may think of in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, when heart and flesh fail you; this may be your last song, and as you enter into glory it may be your first.

> "Soon shall I pass the gloomy vale,
> Soon all my mortal powers must fail;
> Oh may my last expiring breath
> His loving-kindness sing in death!
>
> "Then let me mount and soar away
> To the bright world of endless day;
> And sing, with rapture and surprise,
> His loving-kindness in the skies."

I have thus introduced to you the topic for mental contemplation; we will at once proceed to the second part of our subject.

II. The Psalmist sets before us A LIFE ORDERED BY A RIGHT RULE.

"I have walked in Thy truth." I wish we could say this as positively as he does, each of us; I am afraid we should have to alter it, and say, "I desire to have Thy loving-kindness before mine eyes, and to walk in Thy truth." I shall invite each of you to look over your diaries to see how you could make such a statement, and the following remarks I offer as reflections to help you.

He means, first, by the words, "Thy truth," "I have tried to order my religion according to the truth concerning God and the way in which He would be worshipped. I have worshipped the true God in the true way. I have searched to see what and who God is, how He would be served, and in what way and according to what I have learned from Himself I have walked in His truth." Can you all say that? Why, even all Christians cannot say as much? They worship God—yes, but how? as their fathers did or their grandmothers? Why have they worshipped God as they now do? Because the Word of God so teaches? No; but because their family has been so brought up. They never took the trouble to see whether it was right, and would not like to take the trouble now. Their family always did it, therefore they will always do it. Such people can say, "I have walked according to my ancestors"; but they cannot say, "I have walked in Thy truth." If their fathers had worshipped the devil, they would have done the same. If their family had worshipped Juggernaut, they would have worshipped him too. It makes no consequence to some people what it is, they go in for "follow my leader." They are of one mind with the old Saxon king, who, when he was about to be baptized, stood with one leg in the water, and enquired of the bishop, "Where do you say my ancestors are gone? they knew nothing about your Christianity." "All cast into hell," said the bishop. "Well, then," said this fine old conservative, "I will go with them; I should not like to be parted from

my kith and kin." Very much of this principle rules our country still. The mass of men do not walk in God's truth, nor care to know what God's truth is. I know they will say there are so many sects, and so on, as if there after all was such a difficulty about the Word of God that a simple-minded man could not find out what the truth is. The Bible is a plain enough book, and if a man wishes to understand it he can. Dear brethren, if you are Christians, do be able to say, "I have desired to know the truth about Thyself, O my God, and how Thou wouldst be worshipped, and so far as I have learned I have walked in Thy truth."

He means next that he had walked according to *God's law*. He believed God's law to be the essential right, the just rule of action, and he had tried to do right in all respects. There is a line of truth which you can clearly see, which need not be laid down in words; and it is a glorious thing when a man can say, "I may not have been always prosperous in business, I may not have succeeded as some have done, but what does that matter? I have kept a conscience void of offence; as a Christian man I have done the right and left the consequences with God." This is true evidence of grace reigning in the heart, when we can confidently say before God that, notwithstanding all our sins, transgressions, and infirmities, yet towards men we have walked in the truth as God would have us walk. This is to have the outward life ordered in truth.

And did not he mean this also, that as God had been truthful to him, so he had been enabled by grace to be truthful to God? "I have walked in Thy truth." My God, Thou hast never lied to me; I have also striven to be true to Thee. I have found Thy promise to be always certain. I have laboured to make my vows, which I have presented to Thee, as certain as the fulfilment of Thy promises. Have you all done this? Years ago some of you put on Christ, and avowed yourselves His followers; by your baptism you made a declaration of death to the world and of life in Christ: has it been so? have you walked in God's truth? He has never failed in anything towards us. Alas! what is there in which we have not failed towards Him? He has been true to us in the covenant of His grace; have we kept the pledge and bonds which bind us to His Church and to His cause? Can we say, "As Thou hast walked in Thy truth to me so have I walked in truth to Thee?" If we have failed here I should not wonder it is because we have failed in the first part of the text; our thoughts have not been enough with God, and therefore our lives have not been true to Him. May we be helped in both parts of the text, so that while our hearts feed upon His truth our feet may walk in His truth, and we may be faithful Christians before the Lord our God.

III. But time flies, and I need space for the third head, which is, THE LINK WHICH BINDS THE TWO PARTS OF THE TEXT TOGETHER.

"Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes; I have walked in Thy truth." The one has been the consequence of the other. Because I thought much of Thy love, therefore have I walked in Thy truth. Our thoughts very greatly influence our actions. It is questionable whether a man could long think on any subject, without the course of his life being coloured by it. Like certain silkworms which yield silk coloured according to the food they have fed on, so our life gradually takes the tinge and hue of the thoughts to which we most accustom ourselves. We have had in our police-courts of late frequent instances of this. Boys have been studying literature of the Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin order—and they have become thieves of necessity. Men who have been deeply read in French novels, Byronic poetry, and German metaphysics, have become dissolute and sceptical, and none could wonder. You cannot send the mind up the chimney, and expect it to come down white. Whatever road the thoughts traverse, all the faculties of manhood will go after them. So you see, brethren, David had thought upon God's loving-kindness, and very soon his whole spirit went after his thoughts, and he walked in God's truth.

Let me show you a little of this. I will suppose, this morning, that you and I are meditating upon the subject suggested. Let us set God's loving-kindness before our eyes, and one of its most striking points is its *eternity*. It is certain that God loved those whom He now loves before time began. Those who are the favoured sons of God have not lately come into the possession of His love, they were loved of Him before the foundation stone of creation was laid. It is a glorious doctrine; there is room for the soul to revel and riot with holy delight in it. Everlasting love, love without beginning towards unworthy worms! Well, now, what comes of it? Why, naturally, the moment the heart gets into the enjoyment of it, it cries, "I will walk in God's truth. This great doctrine leads me to receive other great doctrines. I am not afraid, now, of doctrinal knowledge; if it be so that God has loved me before the world began, and has blessed me with all spiritual blessings according as He chose me in Christ Jesus, then I am not afraid to consider the doctrine of the covenant of grace, the doctrine of His fore knowledge and of His predestination, and all the other doctrines that spring therefrom. The brightness of this one gem has attracted me to enter into the mines of divine thought, and I will seek henceforth to be conversant with the deep things of God." Many would be much more sound in doctrine if they meditated more upon the eternity of divine loving-kindness.

Now turn that loving-kindness round again, get another view of it, let another ray of light flash from this diamond. Think of *the freeness* of it! God's loving-kindness to us was utterly undeserved. He loved us, not because there was anything lovable about us, but because he chose to do so. He is an absolute Sovereign, and He doeth as He wills with His own. It is because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, that He has had mercy upon us. Unworthy, did I say? more unworthy was I than any, least likely as it seemed of any of the sons of men to be a partaker of divine love. If He so freely loved me, what shall I say? I must freely love Him in return. I cannot but reciprocate this love. If I cannot love Him as He loves me in degree, yet will I at any rate love Him as freely and willingly. Has he chosen me? I choose Him. Has He ordained me that I should be saved? My heart ordains that He shall be glorious; and if there be anything that I can do to serve Him, let me know what it is, for it must be, it shall be done.

Turn that loving-kindness round again, look at another side of it, namely, its *certainty*. It is no fiction that God loves His people. If you are believers in Christ Jesus, trusting alone to His merits, God as surely loves you as He is God. There is no question about the matter; His divine love is as certainly yours as His power is displayed in creation. Well, then, let your obedience be real in return. If He really loves me, then will I really love Him, and truly

serve Him; it shall not be talk, and resolution, and pretence. There shall be that gift given, even if I deny myself to give it; there shall be that deed done, whatever self-denial it may cost me. The cross I will take up; the singularity of being a Christian I will dare to encounter; the persecution it will bring I will rejoice in: the love of God to me shall produce obedience in my heart in return.

Then, again, another view of it. Set the loving-kindness of God before your eyes, and think of *the faithfulness* of it. God's loving-kindness never pauses a minute. It has been as constant as the flight of time; never a moment but there has been love for that moment; never an hour, but there has been the hour's portion of loving-kindness. You have often forgotten the Lord, but He has never forgotten you; you have turned aside from your fidelity ten thousand times, but He never once. If He had dealt with you justly, and not graciously, He had long ago divorced you from His heart; but you are as dear to Him now as ever, and you shall be dear to Him when heaven and earth shall pass away. Well, what then? Why, then, as constantly seek to serve Him. Let every day have its duty, and let each day's duty be your pleasure and privilege. Do not be receiving without also giving out, but as the sovereign goodness of God comes to you without a pause and there are no miscarriages in divine grace, so let there never be any forgetfulness, negligence, or delay in your gratitude, and the obedience which springs of it.

I would like you to think of *the minuteness* of God's loving-kindness, and how it goes into detail with us in little things. Much of our life's happiness depends upon little things happening rightly and if God ordained only the great events, and left the little things, to chance, we should be very unhappy; but the loving-kindness of God, while it gilds the whole landscape with the sunlight, also has a beam for the tiniest insect and a ray for the eye of the smallest bird. Let our love to God also go into the minutest details; let us be earnest to be right in matters essential; but let us not be indifferent to things non-essential, as men call them. God's loving-kindness goes into detail, so let my obedience do. Let gratitude to God permeate my entire life; let it flood the whole of my faculties; let it saturate my manhood through and through. Great God, Thy love surrounds me, I breathe it, I live upon it, I shall die in it, I shall live for ever in it, it shall make my eternal bliss; so would my soul in obedience give up herself, her thoughts her works, her desires, her judgment, her tastes, her everything, to Thy sweet love, which has so wondrously embraced and encompassed me. You see there is a logical consistency between thinking of the love of God, getting to see its details and attributes, and the ordering of our life in the way of truth; the one is the natural cause from which the other is sure to spring.

Once more, let me say when we are thinking upon God's loving-kindness, we must not forget what it is preparing for us. Within a short time you and I shall have faced the last article of death, or Christ Himself shall have come, and we shall be for ever with the Lord. We have been washed in the blood of Jesus, our souls have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, and for us there is prepared and reserved a crown of life that fadeth not away. Anticipate the triumphant hour when this head which often aches with weariness shall be encircled with the crown of glory, think of the time when the hands that are worn with toil shall grasp the palm branch, and the feet that are weary with this pilgrimage shall stand upon the sea of glass, when our constant occupation shall be to glorify Him who has uplifted us from the miry clay and set our feet upon a rock, and established our goings for ever. All this loving-kindness is prepared for us, entailed upon us, ordained for us, and we are ordained to it by a decree which neither death nor hell can change. What then? Why then the trials of this life shall be treated as "light afflictions which are but for a moment"; and if duty at any time involves these trials, we will not take them into consideration, but for the joy that is set before us will endure the cross, despising the shame. Men of God, God's loving-kindness has prepared for you this heritage inconceivable, which heart cannot imagine, and, therefore, tongue cannot express to you. Will you not, for the sake of this, be willing to be despised and be ready, if need be, to be spit upon and rejected from the society of men? Why, this methinks it was that glistened in the martyrs' eye. There they stood at the stake, all calm and confident, though every bone was soon to be burned to cinder, and the whole frame of their bodies to become a mass of agony. The light that shone in the martyr's eye was not the flame of the torch which kindled the fagot, but the light of the everlasting glory. The joy that made glad their hearts was not that of obstinacy which holdeth fast to its own way, but it was the firmness of a soul that is one with the immortal Christ, and anticipates being with God for ever and for ever. The loving-kindness of God before our eyes is that which can make us walk in God's truth though it be to prison and to death. God grant us more of the holy contemplation, and we shall be quite certain to have more of holy, consistent walking in the truth.

I have done when I have made two or three remarks. I have set these things before you as they ought to be, but things are not in this world as they should be. There are some men who have the first part of the text, at least they say they have, but they despise the second. They have set God's loving-kindness before their eyes, but do not walk in God's truth. They talk about being God's elect, God's beloved, God's dear people. Alas! some of them are dear at any price, their lives being in many cases utterly inconsistent with their profession. What do we say of men who make the doctrines of grace an excuse for licentiousness? They have the doctrine of grace, but not the grace of doctrine. What say we of them? Why, what Paul said—"Their damnation is just." All their pretences to soundness, all their talk about orthodoxy, is so much wind, nothing more. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The man who can cheat in business, the man who can lie, the man who is an unkind husband, a bad father, an unholy man, he may believe what he likes, or disbelieve what he likes, but he will be swept away from the presence of God and the glory of His power, when He whose fan is in His hand shall purge His floor and gather the wheat into His garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

There are also men who say, "I have walked in God's truth," but God's loving-kindness is never before their eyes. They boast about their admirable character, but they never think upon the grace of God; they indulge the Pharisaic spirit. Permit us to say to such that they know not what spirit they are of. That life of theirs which they think to be so blameless, seems to be correct because they are blind. If the

light shone in upon their actions they would discover their imperfections. Then would they find that they needed a Saviour, and finding that they needed a Saviour they might then be led to apply for one, and find one; but as long as they wrap themselves up in the notion that they are good, and that they keep the law and have done so from their youth up, we must remind them with all earnestness that they are shutting themselves out of heaven, they are denying to themselves all prospect of everlasting life, for, "by the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified"; we must be saved by grace and by grace alone.

My last word is this. Brethren, depend upon it that you shall find, each of you when you get dull and flagging in the practical part of your religion, that the proper way to revive it is to think more than you have done upon the loving-kindness of God. I do not know whether you ever feel stupid, I do, dreadfully; when one gets a bad cold the mind feels terribly dead and dull. Some people are dull enough even when they are well, but what they are when illness is added it were hard to say. Well then one says, "How can I consider myself to be a child of God? Why, I cannot pray. I kneel down and pour out what ought to be my desires, but I am afraid I do not desire them. I read the Bible, but it does not glow and glisten before my eyes as it once did. I try to love God, but do not seem to have any emotion left; I am like a dead log or stone." What is the best way to quicken oneself when you have got to be just a mere inanimate mass, and cannot awaken yourself into life? Of course the Holy Spirit is the Quickener, but what means shall we use? "Why," says one, "turn over your sins and begin to think of them." Well, I have known some become more dead than they were before through that, and the little life they had seemed to go out of them as they saw their transgressions. I believe there is no reflection that has so much under God the Holy Spirit of quickening power in it, as a remembrance of the loving-kindness of the Lord. I have said unto my soul, "Thou art dull and heavy to-day, my soul, but Jesus did not love thee because of thy brightness and liveliness. Thou hast at any rate a desire not to be so dull. Who gave thee that? Was not it His own grace that made thee hate thyself for being so dull and stupid? and He loves thee just the same." Why then or ever I am aware my soul makes me like the chariots of Amminadib; before I have hardly got through a little meditation upon my Lord's love my love is kindled. Dr. Watts hit the mark when he said—

> "Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
> With all Thy quickening powers,
> Come, shed abroad a Saviour's love,
> And that shall kindle ours."

If you doubt Christ's love to you, you will not love Him; but remember that He still loves you, believe it, hold on to it, and your love will revive.

> "And when Thine eye of faith is dim,
> Still hold on Jesus, sink or swim,
> Still at His footstool bow the knee,
> And Israel's God thy help shall be."

If I am a dead soul and a lost soul, and have not a grain of grace, and have everything that is bad about me, still I will cling to the cross, and say, "I will never depart from this place: if I perish, I will perish here." Light will come unto you again, and the joy of the Lord will return, and your heart will wonder to find its own hardness depart, and your dumb tongue shall sing, and you, though once so lame, shall leap as a hart. God the Holy Ghost cause these meditations to be the means of quickening our spirits, for Christ's sake. Amen.

A MIGHTY PLEA

"Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me."—Psalm xxvii. 9.

IN times of distress it is somewhat a difficulty to have a choice of helpers, because while we are making our selection, the danger may have overtaken us. While the fox was considering which way to run, the hounds had seized him; while the sick man was selecting the physician, and judging of the medicine, his disease carried him off. It is well to be shut up to one sole help, if that help is all we need; it is for our good, in such a case, to have no alternative, but to have, as the old proverb hath it, Hobson's choice—that or none. The believer is exactly in that condition; he must trust in his God, or remain without hope. He dares not look to others as he once did, for he has discovered their incompetence; he cannot rely upon himself as once he was foolish enough to do, for he has learned by bitter experience the folly of self-confidence. He is compelled to look to the Lord alone. Blessed is that wind which drives the ship into the harbour; blessed is that wave which washes the mariner upon the rock of safety; and blessed is that distress which forces a man to rest only in his God. Such was the condition of the Psalmist when he wrote the text, his spirit looked to God alone; in his past experience the goodness of the Lord shone forth as the pole star of his life's voyage, and, therefore, as to the future, he fixed his eye steadily on that one sure guiding light, and trusted in the God of his salvation.

In supplicating the Lord it is well to have a plea ready for use, a plea available under all circumstances and conditions, a plea of our own, not borrowed from the mouths of other men, and perhaps but half suitable to ourselves, but a plea which wells up from our own inner consciousness, and is our own personal plea, felt to be weighty in our own souls, and therefore confidently urged before the throne of grace. It is well to have a simple plea, and one which we can understand ourselves; for when we are in doubt we are like men in a mist, and must have plain directions, or we miss our way. If we have a chart in a fog we want it to be a very clear one, or else we shall not be able to see it; and when we plead with God in trouble we want the plea to be a very plain one, or else our minds are so confused we shall not be able to urge it.

A soul in sore distress is in no fit condition to puzzle itself over deep and dark reasonings, it wants a child's plea, just as Dr. Guthrie when near dying wanted "bairn's hymns." Blessed, then, is it if we have a plea like this of the text, "Thou hast been my help"; for this is a homely, personal, suitable, simple argument, not fetched from far by subtle wit, but grown at home in our own experience. He that runs may read it, and poor wayfaring men may comprehend it; the illiterate can use it as well as the learned. "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me." Withal, this plea is good, and full of real power, and I hope before we have done this morning we shall be able to show that there is much heavenly logic in it, and that it is eminently full of that kind of argument which is most sure to prevail with the Most High.

Perhaps it may be well here to confess that the plea before us is not one which would ordinarily be available with our fellow creatures; for if they have helped us before they generally conclude that the next time we ought to knock at some other door. Francis Quarles has well expressed the usual manner of men:—

> "Man's plea to man is, that he never more
> Will beg, and that he never begged before:
> Man's plea to God is, that he did obtain
> A former suit, and therefore sues again.
> How good a God we serve, that, when we sue,
> Makes His old gifts the examples of His new!"

Yet there are exceptions to the general custom of mankind, for I read the other day a case in point, in Mr. Moody Stuart's "Recollections of Dr. John Duncan, of Edinburgh," who was a beautiful character, and a famous Hebrew scholar, and has lately gone to heaven, much to the loss of the Free Church. In that book I met with the following passage:—"He was easily imposed upon, but the imposition never soured him, and he was willing to submit to it for the chance of doing good. He said, 'I find they know how to get round me; they say, "You helped me before," and I can never resist that; it teaches me how to pray.'" And now I think of it many of us like to help our old pensioners, and they come up very boldly to our door, remembering the many times in which they have succeeded. If you grant a man a favour several times, he becomes very free in seeking it again. So it seems that even among men it may be a plea, "Thou hast been my help," and most assuredly it is most prevalent argument with God. No man shall be repulsed from the gate of mercy who comes with this upon his lips,—

> "Thou hast helped in every need,
> This emboldens me to plead.
> After so much mercy past,
> Wilt Thou let me sink at last?"

I shall speak this morning thus: First, I shall try and depict *experience gratefully telling her tale*—"Thou hast been my help"; then *necessity urgently pleading experience*—"Leave me not, neither forsake me"; and then *experience soundly instructing faith*—teaching her how to pray and how to expect an answer—"Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me."

I. First then, dear friends, let us listen to EXPERIENCE GRATEFULLY TELLING HER TALE, "Thou hast been my help."

I, the preacher, can say, and must say, with all my heart, "O God, Thou hast been my help." Rest a minute, and let the testimony be repeated by all who can declare it. I know that many of you, if this were the fitting time, would rise up and say, "O God, Thou hast been my help." What should we have done without the help given us in time of need, given us from the Lord Himself? How grandly has our God displayed His power and His mercy on our behalf. Many of you whose heads are adorned with the silver locks of age will say, with trembling, tearful emphasis, "Thou hast been my help." Aye, and those of you in middle life, battling with its cares and trials, can do no otherwise than cheerfully confess, "The Lord is my helper, and has long been such." And the younger ones among us, who have lately put on the harness, would not like to be left out, for even in their short conflict they have received such aid that they gladly own, "Thou hast been our help." If hands had to be held up now, that we might see at a glance those who could say that God has been their help, what a forest of hands would go up in this Tabernacle this morning! Yes, Lord, we Thy servants, assembled here in thousands, do solemnly confess that Thou hast been our help.

Now, as I cannot describe the individual experiences of every one here present, I will just say a little concerning the man who penned these words, as we find them in this Psalm, and as his experience is singularly like that of every other saint, we may perhaps touch most of you in some point or other. David could very early say, "Thou hast been my help," for while he was yet a youth the son of Jesse sought the Lord, and struggled into spiritual life. I should think that his early experience was a very distinct and marked one, and one in which much saving help was displayed. He had deep convictions of sin, a clear view of the great substitutionary sacrifice that was to be offered, and in the end he obtained a very joyful sense of justification by faith. David could look back to the days of his boyish conversion, when he fought hard with doubt and fear, and sin committed and sin dwelling within him, and yet was able to put his trust in the great sacrifice, so that he said in the retrospect, "Thou hast been my help." I invite every converted person here to look back upon that trying time when he was seeking the Lord with a burden of sin upon his back, assailed by a thousand sins, and hindered by ten thousand temptations. You were then most wonderfully helped. You were helped to fall at the foot of the cross, and helped to look up and view the perfect atonement there presented by the Redeemer; you were helped to leave your burden in your Saviour's sepulchre, and helped to come away with a new song in your mouth, the sweet flavour of which is there to this hour. You were helped to repent, and helped to believe; helped out of self-righteousness, and helped out of despair. In memory of that matchless help you may well resolve to trust in the Lord all the days of your life. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

David, however, soon after his conversion, entered upon a scene of severe trial—at least, so I suspect. He appears to have been sent from home to serve as a shepherd boy in the wild places of Judea. I fancy that his condition with regard to his brethren was very like that of Joseph, they either envied or despised him. When Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint him, you will remember that all the rest of the family were at home, and the youthful David was not summoned until the prophet

specially required it, but, as though he were not worth noticing, he was allowed to be away, watching the flocks; and so also when he went, at his father's request, to the battle against the Philistines, his brethren treated him with great scorn, as though he had no business to come near them, or to associate with great men like themselves, in arms for their country. Poor David, therefore, was the marked one of the family, a speckled bird, the butt of household ridicule; but he could say, in looking back upon the times of his loneliness, "Thou hast been my help." Sweet were the songs which he sang amongst the sheep, such as "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Happy were the quiet hours which he spent amidst the hills and vales of his native land, and by the rivers and the brooks where he made his flock to lie down. Many a time that harp of his, upon which he had learned to play so skilfully, had borne up his devout spirit on wings of music to the throne of God, when his young heart sang in solitude the praises of the Most High. Perhaps some of you look back upon your early troubles as among the bitterest you ever knew. We are always hearing people say that our young days are the happiest we shall ever see; it may be true with many, but there are others whose young days were darkened with sorrow; they had to bear the yoke in their youth, and they can say in looking back that it was good for them it was so, for in those times the Lord was their helper. David's father and mother had in a measure forsaken him, but God took him up. The Lord had regard to him when others despised him. He was the Lord's anointed when he was an alien from his mother's children. What joy it is if our early sorrows have left this inscription upon the tablets of our hearts, "Thou hast been my help."

But David did not merely suffer when he was young, but he did work for God—yea, grand exploits did he for his God and for his country while yet a youth, of which he could say with great fervour, "Thou hast been my help." It was no little thing when the shepherd lad rushed against the lion and took him by his beard and slew him; and when the bear had taken the lamb, it was no slight matter for a raw youth to battle with the monster of the wood and slay it in the name of God, that he might deliver his sheep from destruction. The Lord was his helper that day, and grandly did he feel it, when he went with his sling and his stone to meet the gigantic Philistine; and openly did he confess his faith when he came back with the giant's head, all dripping with gouts of gore, to magnify the Most High, who had delivered him and delivered Israel out of the hand of this mighty adversary. "Thou hast been my help." The Lord delivered me out of the jaw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, and the Lord hath delivered me from the hand of this uncircumcised Philistine.

Now, my brethren, I do not ask you to look back upon what the Lord enabled you to do in your younger days by way of self-congratulation; I do not ask the old soldier to "shoulder his crutch and show how fields were won" that he may command admiration from younger warriors; but, that God may be glorified, I do ask you to remember how the Holy Spirit came upon you in those early days, and enabled you to be valiant for the truth. Perhaps you had more zeal than knowledge in those times, and possessed more confidence than prudence, but you did grand things for God, and God was with you; so that you might be content to go back to all the mistakes of youth if you might win back again its simple trust and burning love; at any rate, stand here to-day and own that whatsoever you may have accomplished which will bless your fellow-men and honour your God, the glory of it is all due to the help given you of the Lord.

David, after these first trying times, passed through another series of afflictions. He was called to court, but the king was jealous of him, and very soon he had to escape from Saul's murderous attacks. What continuous help did David receive from the God of his salvation! He was almost taken prisoner in the caverns of Engedi, but God delivered him. He was well nigh captured among the hills, but Jehovah called off his pursuers. Many a time did he hold his life in his hand, for he was hunted like a defenceless partridge upon the mountains, but always by some means or other the Lord delivered him as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, the snare was broken and he escaped. Look back upon the troubles through which God has brought you, my beloved brothers and sisters. Remember the times in which your feet had almost gone, and your steps had well nigh slipped, and say with grateful emotion, "Thou hast been my help."

God helped David by raising him up many true friends. When he was in the cave brave spirits came to him, valiant and faithful men, who loved David as they loved their own souls; and when he asked for a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, they went, their lives in their hands, to gratify his wish, and let him drink of the water which he was accustomed to taste in his boyish days, for they were devoted to him. Now, it is no small thing to have good, kind, faithful, earnest friends and adherents; and if you have had such, or have been favoured with parents, and brethren, and friends, who have been greatly attached to you, be sure to praise the Lord for them this morning, as I myself joyfully do in the midst of many tried and attached supporters, and say, "Thou hast been my help."

On one or two occasions David found the Lord to be his help when he was in positions where he might scarcely have expected the divine aid. When we plunge ourselves into trouble through our own fault, it is but natural to fear that we may be left to suffer for our folly, and it is peculiarly gracious on the part of our heavenly Friend to come to our rescue. David had unwisely sought refuge with the king of Gath, and there was placed in great jeopardy of his life, so that he had to play the madman in order to escape, but escape he did, through God's gracious help. Yet another time, in his unbelief, he went and joined the army of this heathen king; and if the lords of the Philistines had not spoken against his going down to the battle, he would have been placed in a very awkward position, in having been called to fight against his own countrymen, but God delivered him even then. With what regret may some of us look back upon our own follies, and with what thankfulness may we survey the mercy which plucked our feet out of the net. Where others would have left us in anger, because of our waywardness and ingratitude, Thou, O Lord, hast been our help.

David obtained help under very strong temptations. It was a very strong temptation when he saw his adversary in the cave all alone, and might with one stroke of his sword have taken off his head. He

was helped of God to spare his foe, and he only cut off the skirt of the king's robe to let him see how completely he was in his power. Help also did he need when, in the dead of night, he went with Abishai, his captain, through the sleeping hosts of Saul, and came to the place where lay his cruel enemy asleep. His spear stood temptingly near his pillow, and a deep sleep was on him, and Abishai said, "Let me smite him, let me smite him but once, one stroke shall end it all." Who among ordinary men of war must not have wished to let that one single blow be struck? In what surer manner could a bitter quarrel be ended? But no, "I will not lift up my hand against the Lord's anointed." David must have felt that God was superlatively His helper that night to keep back his hand from blood. You, too, dear friends, have been in such a position that you were strongly tempted to the wrong; impulses both of your own nature and of Satan were strong upon you, and you had almost put forth your hand unto iniquity; but you have been kept with an unblemished character to this day, and you are compelled to say this morning, "Thou hast been my help."

Aye, and David could recollect, again, when God helped him in times of direst distress. Perhaps the greatest sorrow of David's life, before he fell into sin with Bathsheba, was the destruction of Ziklag. He came back from the Philistines' country to his own town of Ziklag, and found the town totally sacked, everything taken away, and, what was worse, his own wives and children, and those of all his men, carried away captive. David might have borne up under this had his friends cheered him, but they were so exasperated that they fell upon him angrily, and spoke of stoning him. He was their leader, he was not to blame in any respect for their loss, but sheerly in the bitterness of their hearts they spoke in foolish anger and hot haste. Generally at such times men want a victim, and in this case they would have made their noble leader the object of their wrath. It is written, "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God," and sorely did he need to do so. God brought him out of it, for he never lost a farthing by the sack of Ziklag, nor any of his men; they recovered their wives and their children, and, beside that, not only all their own goods, but all the spoil the plundering band had taken from other places. David could have sung, and no doubt did sing, "Ebenezer, hitherto the Lord hath helped us!" or, in the words of the text, "Thou hast been my help." Have not you had your Ziklag, you business man, when things were going all to the bad, you could not help yourself, and bankruptcy stared you in the face? You did what you could, but it seemed as if you must be ruined; that was your Ziklag, and the Lord helped you. Or perhaps there was disease in your house; one child had gone, another was sickening, your wife was laid by, you were unable yourself to lift hand or foot to help, all things were against you—it was your Ziklag. Or perhaps you are a minister of the gospel, and there was in your church spreading disaffection and cruel ill-will, and no one was found to stand up for you; though you had been faithful before the Lord God of Hosts, you seemed quite left and deserted. It was your Ziklag, but you were helped through it, and therefore, I beg you, do not, for the glory of God and for the comfort of tried saints, keep back your testimony, but say, "I was brought low, and He helped me, and, therefore, blessed be His name." We do not talk enough about our deliverances. When you get home this afternoon, after dinner, if a friend or two should call in, you will go over your bad times and your troubles, but you will not recapitulate your mercies. Have we not had enough of complaining? Let us touch another string, and bless the Lord for all His loving-kindness. What a tale some of us could tell of His mercies! No novel that was ever composed could possibly equal in interest my own experience of God's goodness, and I think there are many here of whose lives the same could be said. Rich with incident, crowded with wonders, crammed full of miracles have our lives been, for God has dealt so well with us that we often stand astonished at what He has done. "Thou hast been my help." Oh, yes, I will sum up the whole of my life in the one sentence, and, as we have seen a portrait sketched in a few lines, so will I give you my whole career in miniature: "Thou hast been my help."

Listen, then, to the song of experience, and hasten to join in it. It is most charming and cheering: "Thou hast been my help."

II. Our second point is NECESSITY PLEADING EXPERIENCE. "Thou *hast* been my help; *leave me not, neither forsake me.*"

First, Thou hast been my help, therefore it is consistent with Thy *holiness* to help me. Lord, I am a poor sinner, unworthy to be noticed, and my doubts and fears sometimes tell me that it would not be fit for Thine infinitely holy Majesty to look upon such a rebellious worm as I am. But, Lord, Thou hast done it already, Thou hast been my help; and if it were not wrong for Thee to help me once, it will not be wrong for Thee to help me twice. If it did not stain Thy spotless robe to hold out Thy hand to a fallen and condemned soul in years gone by, it will not stain Thy purity to lend me Thine hand again. I therefore bless Thy condescending goodness, and ask Thee not to leave me!

Thou hast been my help, therefore, in the second place, it is within Thy *power* to help me; for, Lord, my case to-day is not worse than it was when Thou didst help me before, or, if it is, Thou art all-sufficient. Lord, help me out of this affliction, for Thou didst redeem me on a former occasion. I was weak and friendless then, and could not help myself, but Thine own arm of mercy was fully equal to the emergency. Lord, I know it is quite sufficient now. If Thou hadst never delivered my soul out of such a puzzling, perplexing, and intricate case as mine, I might have doubted, but as Thou hast already been my help in times of great strait, when no way of relief was visible, Thou art able to help me again; therefore I lay hold upon the hand of Thy power, and the arm of Thy strength. Thou hast been my help; therefore Thou canst help me again, O Jehovah! I know thou canst!

Again, my appeal is to Thy *wisdom.* Lord, Thou hast been my help, and if Thou dost not help me now, all that help will go for nothing. It is of no use to have helped me so far, if Thou dost not help me to the end. Now, Lord, I know Thou dost not begin to build, and then leave the work incomplete, so that they that go by may say, "He began to build, but was not able to finish." Thou hast made an investment in me, good Lord, Thou hast gone deep in expenditure of mercy and love with a poor worm like me, and if Thou stay Thine hand, Lord, Thou wilt lose all Thou hast invested. Thou must

go right through with it, Lord, or else Thou wilt have lost all the works of Thy love and Thy power and Thy goodness which Thou hast already so lavishly spent upon me. Is not that good pleading? "Thou hast been my help"—Lord, if it were wise to help me so far, it must be wise to go through with it. Would it have been wise to bring Israel into the wilderness, and feed them with manna for thirty years, and then to let them die of starvation? What would the Egyptians say? Would they not ask, "Wherefore did He bring them into the wilderness? Why did He conduct them so far, and afterwards suffer them to perish?" Well does our poet put it,—

> "The work which wisdom undertakes,
> Eternal mercy ne'er forsakes."

For, if it is wise to begin with it, it must be wise to carry it on. Lord Jesus, Thou hast loved my soul as Jacob loved Rachel, and he was bound to serve for seven years to win her, and if he had served six and a half years, and then left off, he would never have had his Rachel; and Thou hast in Thine infinite love served for me these years, but if Thou leave off now, I shall never be Thine at last; my poor soul must perish unless, till the last hour of life, Thou shalt wait upon me in mercy, and refresh me with Thy grace. To my own soul at this moment this plea, "Thou hast been my help," is a very powerful hold upon divine wisdom, and is an urgent reason why I may ask for grace still to be given me.

Perhaps the backbone of the argument lies in the attribute of *immutability*. "Thou hast been my help, if Thou canst change, then canst Thou leave me; but if Thou be indeed Jehovah, I am that I am, the same for ever and for ever, if Thou hast once blessed, Thou art bound by the force of Thy nature to bless right on, as long as Thou art God and I require Thy blessing." Hast Thou not said, "I am God, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." What blessed notes that text contains. He who has kept you to this day if He changed might leave you, but since He cannot change He will bear you right through. How wicked we are to doubt our faithful God! The sun rose yesterday, and nobody doubted but what it would be up this morning, and there is not a man living but what believes the sun will shine to-morrow. Do you trust the sun, and will you not trust the God who kindles its light? The tide comes up to the shore and then recedes according to the regular motion of the moon, and everybody trusts the tide and is prepared for its incoming and its outgoing, and can you trust the unstable sea, and its fickle wave, and not rest upon the immutable God? Ye say the thing that was shall be, and surely God was for ever and ever, and has kept His promises to His people, and therefore the thing shall be. If heaven above can be measured, or the earth searched out, if the ordinances of the sun and of the moon can be changed, then may God forsake His people, but it cannot, shall not be while He is still the same.

I think there is one more argument here, namely, a plea to God's *love*. "Thou hast been my help." Lord, surely if Thou didst love me enough to help me before, Thou dost love me enough to help me still. It is the plea of a child to a father. "Father thou hast always fed me, wilt thou let me starve? thou hast always clothed me, wilt thou let me be naked?" It is the argument of a spouse to her husband as she says to him, "My husband, thou hast never failed me yet; whatever I have needed thou hast supplied to me; leave me not, neither forsake me." You know how the plea hath power with a heart which is touched with true affection. It is with us and our God as though He had guided us halfway through a wilderness. We did not know one inch of the road, and had no provision for it, but He has helped hitherto. If, when He had brought us right into the centre of the waste, He should say to us, "Now I am going to leave you," if we were in such a plight that on an arid sand, where there was no pathway and no shelter, our guide should say, "Now I must leave you to yourselves," we would clutch him by the sleeve and say, "Leave me not; I pray thee do not leave me, else why hast thou brought me here at all? All the kindness of the past will be but cruelty, a studied tantalizing of me, if thou leave me. Why didst thou bring me here? All the way I have come I have depended upon thee for everything; I could not have found my way so far alone, and wilt thou leave me now?" Oh, methinks no man would be so brutal as to resist such an argument. He would say, "If in my kindness I have undertaken the conduct of this poor ignorant creature, and brought him so far, I cannot leave him till I have landed him safely at home." Shall the Lord be less kind than man? Imagine that a child has fallen into the sea, and you are a strong swimmer and have swam from the boat and clasped the child, and you are bearing him on your shoulders and swimming to land. Suppose you should suddenly say, "My child, I have done something for you, but will do no more; I must drop you into the sea." Would not the little one say, "Sir, you picked me up when I was sinking; I should have been dead long ago but for you. Do not throw me off, sir; strike out again, sir; let me still cling to you." We may reason in the same manner with God. "My God, my God, if Thou hadst meant to let me be lost, why didst Thou not do it years ago, and let me go down to hell without hope? But now Thou hast given me a hope of heaven, Thou hast let me know something of the joy of holiness; some love to Thee and some longings after Thee have stirred my soul. Wilt Thou leave me now, O my God? It cannot, must not be." The pleading is mighty, brethren, I know of none better: "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me."

III. Now, thirdly, and briefly, here is EXPERIENCE INSTRUCTING FAITH.

My venerable brethren and sisters, the first word of this instruction is to you; experience says to faith, "Trust God, for He has been your help *so long*." How long? Fifty years some of you. How old are you? Seventy, eighty? God has been your help, then, all that time. How long do you expect to live? To be eighty. You are seventy now. Ah, you have seen through seven-eighths of life that He is a faithful God, cannot you trust Him for the other eighth? Your sun is going down, its shadows are lengthening, but from early dawn all through the hot noontide He has been good to you, cannot you trust Him for the last few hours of eventide? Surely, surely God deserves that such long-continued kindness should not be received with ungrateful doubts. If He had meant to be a liar to you, you would have found Him out before this. If His promises were intended to be failures, they would have been failures to you

before you had gone so far. Oh, believe Him for the rest of life, and go singing into heaven, "Thou hast been my help." May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, enable you thus to put down all unbelief.

The Lord has been our help *so constantly* that the fact confirms our faith. If in looking back upon our lives we could find a point or two where God had failed us, we might then let our faith flag. I can only speak as I find; I cannot find one instance in all my life in which God was untrue or unkind to me. If we never doubt God till we have cause for it, we shall never entertain any doubts so long as we live. Yesterday, as I looked at some little birds in a cage, I thought to myself, "These poor little creatures are entirely dependent upon those who feed them. If seed and water be not supplied to them, they cannot help themselves, and must die, and yet there they sit and sing with all their might. Their state of dependence never distresses them; they have perfect confidence in their keepers." And, I thought, that is just my position. I am God's singing bird. Perhaps I wonder where I shall get my bread from, or my sermon for next Sabbath day, and a great many cares and troubles come to me; but why should I be troubled? Instead of mistrusting my keeper, who has fed me these many years, had I not better sit and sing as loudly as ever I can? Would not that be the best thing to do. The bird does it, and why should not a man do it, who is supposed to have more wit than a bird, but who sometimes does not seem to have half as much? Come, brethren, come! the Lord has constantly been true, let us not doubt.

And then He has helped us *so singularly*. Some here present have been in very remarkable tribulations, trials the like of which have not befallen other people—at least, so they think—have fallen to their lot, and yet they have had singular rescues and helps. Well, then, when you come into the singular predicament of dying, you shall have the singular grace of being able to rejoice when you die; or, if any other remarkable trial should waylay you between here and heaven, you shall find extraordinary deliverance from Him who has been your help.

And I might say, in closing, God hitherto has helped us in such a way that *He has glorified Himself*. We could not have believed that He could have so delightfully illustrated His divine attributes as He has done in our past biography. There have been such flashes of light out of His excellent glory that we have been astounded. So, it will be to the last. God will be glorified in our mortal bodies while we live and when we come to die. He has been our help, and He will be our help till like a scroll this world is rolled up, and time itself expires, and we have reached eternity.

I have two or three more thoughts to utter, and I have done. To self-righteous persons our text can have no sweetness. You have always done your best, and have been very religious, and believed that you deserved eternal life, and you have been on very good terms with yourselves. God has not been your help; you did not want it; you have done very well without it. You do not want washing in the blood of Jesus, you were never a very great sinner; you do not require help from the Holy Ghost; you have always been able to attend to the formalities of religion without assistance from supernatural power; this is your secret judgment of your condition. You cannot say, "Thou hast been my help"; and I dare say you do not pray, "Leave me not, neither forsake me." You do not see the need of it. Well, your fancied salvation is such an one that the sooner you are rid of it the better; it is such an one that if you can put a millstone about its neck and sink it in the sea, you will do well; for if you do not do that, it will sink you in hell for ever. That hope of salvation which is not grounded upon Christ and the power of God, but which rests in self, is nothing but counterfeit; it is damnation gilded, nothing better. Away with it! away with it! And oh, may you be made to go as guilty, as helpless, as dependent entirely upon mercy and divine strength, and then you will be in the way of salvation, but not till then. Oh, may the Spirit of God teach you this!

I have here some poor trembling soul who is seeking Christ, and he says, "O sir, I could not use the plea of the text this morning." Well, beloved friend, perhaps not in the strong sense in which the Christian can, but you may still use it in a measure. For instance, you want to be forgiven, you want to be saved. You can say to your heavenly Father, "O God, Thou hast preserved my forfeited life, Thou hast bidden the sun to shine upon the evil as well as the good, Thou hast sent the showers and the harvest for me as well as for the best of Thy servants; oh, if Thou hast done this, do more, and send me the gifts of Thy grace." Besides, poor heart, you can say, "Thou hast given me the Sabbath, Thou hast permitted me to go and sit with Thy servants; though the meanest of them all, Thou dost permit me to hear the voice of gospel invitation. Thou dost speak to me, and say, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved'; oh, crown these gifts by giving me faith, by granting me life, the life of Thy Holy Spirit. Save me, save me with a great salvation." I think that is good pleading; and especially if you can add, "O God, Thou hast set forth Thy son Jesus to be a propitiation for sin, and declared that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. I do trust in Him, and rest my soul alone upon Him. Do not reject me! let me know Thy great salvation, or I languish, faint, and die." You shall not be long in such a case as that. If thou believest, all things are thine; if thine only hope be in Him who bled on the tree, thy transgressions are already blotted out. Go, and sin no more! Peace be unto thee! Be of good courage! The Lord has looked upon thee already with an eye of love; thou art His, and He will never leave thee nor forsake thee, world without end.

God bless you all, dear friends, and He shall have the honour and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

BRAVE WAITING

"Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."—Psalm xxvii. 14.

THE Christian's life is no child's play. All who have gone on pilgrimage to the celestial city have found a rough road, sloughs of despond and hills of difficulty, giants to fight and tempters to shun. Hence there are two perils to which Christians are exposed; the one is that under heavy pressure they should start away from the path which they ought to pursue,—the other is lest they should grow fearful of failure, and so become faint-hearted in their holy course. Both these dangers had evidently occurred to David, and in the text he is led by the Holy Spirit to speak about them. "Do not," he seems to say, "do not think that you are mistaken in keeping to the way of faith; do not turn aside to crooked policy, do not begin to trust in an arm of flesh, but wait upon the Lord"; and, as if this were a duty in which we are doubly apt to fail, he repeats the exhortation, and makes it more emphatic the second time, "Wait, I say, on the Lord." Hold on with your faith in God, persevere in walking according to His will; let nothing seduce you from your integrity,—let it never be said of you, "Ye did run well, what did hinder you that you did not obey the truth?" And lest we should be faint in our minds, which was the second danger, the Psalmist says, "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart." There is really nothing to be depressed about, there is no real danger, you are safe while God lives, and while Christ pleads, and while the Spirit of God dwells in you; therefore be not dismayed, nor even dream of fear. Be not timorous and unbelieving, but play the man; "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart." The object of our discourse this morning will be the encouragement of those who feel in any degree whatever dispirited and depressed on account of the hard places of the way, or the opposition of the world. May the Divine Spirit, whose peculiar office it is to be the Comforter of His people, now give the oil of joy to all who mourn, and courage to all who tremble.

We shall look at our text under four heads. First, *God is to be waited on*; secondly, *courage is to be maintained*; thirdly, *waiting upon God will sustain courage*; and, fourthly, *experience has proved this*,—for David sets his own seal to the text when he says, "Wait, I *say*, on the Lord." As much as to say—I have tried and proved the power of communion with God, and therefore personally give my advice that you do continually wait upon the Lord, and you will be greatly strengthened.

I. First, then, dear friends, GOD IS TO BE WAITED ON. That word "wait" is so exceedingly comprehensive that I quite despair of bringing out every shade of its meaning. The word "walk" describes almost the whole of Christian life, and so does this word "wait"; for rightly understood, waiting is active as well as passive, energetic as well as patient, and to wait upon the Lord necessitates as much holy courage as warring and fighting with His enemies. We are to wait *on*, wait *upon*, and wait *for* the Lord; for it is written, "they that wait on the Lord shall inherit the earth," "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," and "blessed are all they that wait for Him."

What do we mean, then, by "wait on the Lord?" I say, first, let us wait on the Lord *as a beggar waits for alms* at the rich man's door. We are very poor and needy, labouring under such necessities that the whole world cannot supply what we require. Only in God is there a supply for the deep poverty of our souls. We have gone to His door, many of us, and knocked and waited, and in so doing we have obtained very gracious answers. If others of us have not seen the door of mercy open to us, let us still wait at the posts of the Lord's door, still knock, and still hope for His salvation. Are you seeking the Saviour, and are you trusting Him, and have you not yet obtained the peace which comes with believing? Then with great importunity continue in prayer and wait on, remembering that the blessing is worth waiting for; it is such a treasure that if you had to wait for a lifetime fully to obtain it you would be well repaid when it came. Wait, but knock as you wait, with fervent pleading and strong confidence for the Lord Himself waiteth to be gracious to you. Agonize in desire, and let not the knocker of heaven's gate ever rest: make the door of mercy to resound again and again with your resolute blows upon it. The Lord is good to them that wait for Him; He will in due time answer you: it shall never be said that any were sent away empty from His gate. He has not spoken in secret in a dark place of the earth, nor said unto the seed of Jacob, 'Seek ye My face in vain." Pray on, believe on, and as surely as God's promise is true He will in due time grant you conscious salvation, your head shall be lifted high above your enemies round about you, and you shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The devil bids you cease from prayer; he tells you that the little faith you have will never save you. Do not believe him, stand fast, pray on believe on, expect on; though the vision tarry, wait for it; it shall come, it shall not tarry. The Lord grant you grace to wait in all humility, for what are you but a beggar, and beggars must not be choosers; it is good that a man both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God, for they shall not be ashamed that wait for Him. To cling to the cross, to rest at the altar of our Lord's atonement is the safest course. Believingly to wait upon the Lord, pleading the all-prevailing name of Jesus, is the suppliant's best posture.

I trust many in the house of God this morning have passed from this stage to the next; they wait *as learners for instruction*. The disciple waits at His Master's feet and according as the Teacher chooses to speak, so the disciple's ears are opened. Mary sat at Jesus' feet. Some stand in the crowd and listen a little and anon they are gone, but the true disciple abides in the school and waits to hear what His Master will speak. We bow down at His feet with this humble resolve, that whatsoever He saith we will hear, and whatever His doctrine, precept, or promise may be we will drink it all in with intense delight. The pupils of the old philosophers were wont to walk in

the groves of Academia till the wise men were ready to come and speak with them; and when any one of the wise men began to speak, the young disciples quietly followed his steps, eagerly catching up every precious sentence which he might utter. Much more should it be so with us towards our Lord Jesus; let us follow Him in every page of inspiration, study every line of creation, and learn of Him in all the teachings of His providence. Let us catch the faintest whisper of His Spirit, and yield to each divine impulse. "Wait, I say, on the Lord." If you are to be instructed disciples it must be by a diligent, patient, persevering waiting upon Him who is the fountain of all knowledge and the sun of all light. May we never outrun our Master by conceited speculations, and vain imaginings, but may we wait till He speaks, and be content to remain in ignorance unless He chooses to withdraw the veil.

A third form of this waiting will come out under the figure of waiting *as a servant waits upon his Lord.* A true servant is anxious to know what his master wishes him to do, and when he once knows it he is happy to undertake it and carry it through. In great houses certain servants enquire of the master in the morning, "Sir, what are your orders for the day?" Imitate this, and when you rise in the morning, always wait upon your Lord to know what are His commands for the day. Say, "Show me what Thou wouldst have me to do. Teach me Thy way, O Lord: lead me in a plain path. Inform me as to what to seek and what to shun, for my will is to do Thy will in all things." Notice how maid-servants watch their mistresses when they are waiting at table or serving about the house; a word is enough, and sometimes a look or a nod of the head is all the direction needed; so should it be with us, we should eagerly desire to know the mind of the Lord, and carefully watch for indications of it. As the eyes of a maiden are unto the hand of her mistress so should our eyes wait upon the Lord our God. We, who are the ministers of the Lord Jesus, ought to be looking all around to see what we can do in God's house. Good servants do not need to be told of every little thing, they have their master's interest at heart and they themselves perceive what should be done, and they do it. Oh, to be always waiting to do yet more and more for Jesus. I would go up and down my master's house, seeing what I can do for His little children, whom I delight to cherish; what part of the house needs sweeping and cleaning, that I may quietly go about it; what part of the table needs to be furnished with food, that I may bring out as his steward things new and old; what there is to be done for my Master towards those who are without, and what is to be done for those already in His family. You will never be short of work if with your whole heart you wait upon the Lord. We do ill if we stand idly gazing up into heaven expecting His coming, and making it a pretence for doing little or nothing to win souls; our wisest course is, as men that expect their Lord, to stand with our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed. You know what the Orientals meant by having their loins girt, they gathered up their loose flowing garments when they meant work, even as a hardworking man among us takes off his coat and works in his shirt-sleeves. Stand like workmen with your sleeves up—that is the English of it, ready for any work which your Master may appoint. You put on the livery of the Lord Jesus years ago when you were baptized into His name; take care to keep it spotless, for it is known to be connected with a sinless Prince. Never by disobedience make the livery to be a lie, for if you be not His servants wherefore should you wear the garb of His household? Beloved, "he that waiteth upon his master shall be honoured." Let us not fail in waiting upon ours.

Sometimes the servant will have to wait in absolute inaction, and this is not always to the taste of energetic minds. I suppose that walking round Jericho six days and doing nothing must have been very distasteful to the men of war who wanted to be coming to blows. They might have said, "Why should we and all the multitude march round the walls and do nothing? The men of war chafed in their harness, and longed to be at the foe. It is said that Wellington kept back the Guards at Waterloo till far into the fight, and it must, I should think, have needed much courage on their part to remain calm and quiet while cannon were roaring, and the battle raging, and the shots flying about them. They must not stir till the commander-in-chief gives the order, "Up, Guards, and at them!" then will they clear the field and utterly annihilate the foe. They were as much serving their country by lying still till the time came as they were by dashing forward when at last the word was given. Wait then upon your Lord in all sorts of service and patience, for this is what He would have you to do.

Another form of waiting may be compared to *a traveller waiting the directions of his guide*, or a mariner waiting upon the pilot who takes charge of his ship. We are to wait upon God for direction in the entire voyage of life; He is at the helm, and His hand is to steer our course. I am fearful that some Christians very greatly fail in waiting upon the Lord for guidance, yet the types and examples of the Old Testament very strongly enforce this duty. I will give you one type and one example. The type shall be Israel in the wilderness. There was a straight way to Canaan, and I suppose it would not occupy many days to go from Goshen to Jerusalem. They must not, however, take that way, but follow their leader. When they had wandered even for a year in the wilderness, they might soon have reached the land, for in fact they were near its borders; but no, they must go where the famous pillar, which indicated the presence of God, should conduct them. If it remained stationary for a year the tents must not remove; if it was up early in the morning, again, and again, and again, for a whole succession of weary marching days, Israel must not dare to rest. Under the shade of the pillar of cloud must they abide by day, and its light must be their glory by night. Everywhere they were to wait for the heavenly signal, and never choose their own path. Do you watch the cloud, my brethren? Do you wait upon the Lord for guidance? Do you continually say, "I pray Thee show me Thy way?" Do you commit your own way unto the Lord? If not, how little you have learned the true position and privilege of the people of God. The example I take from David's own life. If you have noticed the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Chronicles, you will read that David, being threatened by the Philistines, enquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go up against them?" and he had an answer, "Go up, for I will deliver them into thine hands." Encouraged by the oracle he went forth to the attack, and carried all before him like the breaking forth of a flood. The Philistines rallied again and spread themselves abroad in the valley, and surely David might have felt quite safe in again falling upon them. What further directions could he need? Would not the former

oracle avail now that the same circumstances were occurring? But no, the man of God did not feel safe until he had laid the new case before the Lord, and it is recorded "therefore David enquired again of God." This time the response was very different; possibly in his own surprise David received orders not to go up after the Philistines, but to turn away from them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. When he should hear a sound of the going in the tops of the mulberry trees he was to bestir himself, but not just then. He followed the new directions and again smote the host of the Philistines. Brother, wait on the Lord often. Though you were wise in the last intricate business, you may be a fool over the next simple matter; in fact, it is over the simple matters that we make our great blunders in life, even as Israel did with the Gibeonites; when they came with old shoes and clouted, and bread that was mouldy, half an eye might have sufficed to see through their trick, but Israel acted hastily, ate bread with them, made a treaty with them, and inquired not at the hand of the Lord. Not so David, he was never slow to seek divine guidance. I admire that which comes out incidentally about him in the saying of Ahimelech, the priest at Nob. When Saul accused him of having enquired of the Lord for David, Ahimelech replied, "Did I then begin to enquire of God for him?" as much as to say, "He is an old frequenter of the Lord's courts, he has enquired of God many and many a time ere this. To accuse me of inquiring of the Lord for him, as though I was abetting rebellion, is unjust, for I only did for David what I had often done before." Hence it was that David behaved himself wisely in a perfect way, because he followed not his own judgment but waited on the Lord. There was an occasion when he marched against Nabal in the heat of his wrath, when he went in his own spirit, and not under heavenly influences, and had it not been that the Lord sent a wise woman to cross his path, he had shed blood that day and it would have been a grief of mind to him all his life. Oh that we did more sincerely wait upon the Lord in the sense of seeking instruction as to our path in life, then would he fulfil His promise unto us, "Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it."

I have not yet exhausted the word "wait"; for we ought to wait upon God *as a child waits upon its parent*. Our children can seldom be accused of having small expectations with reference to us. They have desires and wants almost countless, and they always expect their parents readily to supply them, in which reckoning I have no doubt they have been strongly confirmed by their past experience. No little child thinks of providing for himself, nor does he dream of directing his own course in life. You cannot get that little head to be thoughtful about to-morrow's food; you cannot force that little heart to be anxious about the next suit of clothes. To all suggested doubt the little lips reply, "My father knows what I have need of, and I am sure He will give it to me." Such is the happy, restful life of a loving child, and this is as it should be with us. It is my Father's business to provide for me: His name is Jehovah-Jireh. It is my Father's business to preserve me; He has given His angels charge to keep me in all my ways. It is my Father's business to mark out the future for me; I cannot see even into to-morrow, my eyes are dim, but my Father knows all about what shall be, and He will be ready for whatever shall happen, therefore would I wait upon Him, raise no questions, and expect great mercies. Blessed are they who are thus found waiting.

And then, perhaps, I may add one thing more, we should wait upon the Lord *as a courtier waits upon his prince*. He that is at court, and seeks to rise to favour, waits upon his prince with the desire to be employed in the royal service, that he may prove his loyal zeal. He counts any sort of employment at court to be a great honour; he tells his friends, and they accept it as a subject of congratulation, that he has obtained such-and-such work to do for the king. He delights to increase the honour and dignity of his prince's court, for he shares in it himself. Brethren, how carefully should you and I endeavour to show forth the honour of our Lord Jesus among the sons of men, for has He not made us kings and priests, and should we not exalt His glorious name for ever? We should seek to make our Lord Jesus famous to the world's end: our daily conversation, and our current character, our private and public behaviour should all tend to increase our Master's honour among the sons of men. We must be ready for anything for Jesus, and everything for Jesus, counting that we ourselves are honoured by disgrace if we bring honour to Him. Sir Walter Raleigh was wise in his generation when he took off his richly embroidered cloak to spread it over a miry place, that Queen Elizabeth's feet might not be damped; the courtier knew how to smooth his own road by caring for his queen; and thus, with unselfish motives, out of pure reverence for our Lord, let us be willing to be made as the street to be walked over if Jesus can thereby be honoured. Let us lay out for our Lord the best that we have, even to the character which is dear to us as life itself, if by so doing we may bring glory to the holy and blessed name of our Redeemer. Henceforth it is ours to live unto the Lord and die unto the Lord. We will wait on the Lord and keep His way, and may His grace enable us daily to say, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait and in His word do I hope."

II. Secondly, COURAGE IS TO BE MAINTAINED. "Be of good courage." Our good Lord and Master ought not to be followed by cowards. Be of good courage, you that wait on the Lord. Have *the courage of hope* concerning the faith which you are exercising upon Christ. You are just beginning, some of you, to believe in Jesus, and you are afraid that He will cast you away, or fearful that you will not obtain full salvation from sin. I have already told you to continue to knock at mercy's door; do so, but be of good courage, for that door will certainly open to you. He that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Take heart, poor fainting one, the Lord hath a tender eye towards mourning souls; He is very good to those who seek Him. Though thou be like poor trembling Mercy who fainted outside the door of the interpreter's house, yet thy Lord thinketh upon thee, and He says, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?" He will not suffer those to perish who humbly wait on Him; the light of His countenance shall yet be thine. Be of good courage, O seeker!

Be also, of good courage you who have newly found Him. Be bold *to avow your faith*. Remember that the trust which you repose in Jesus is a justifiable one, and can be vindicated against all comers, therefore do not hide it. I hate to see a Christian act like a rat behind a wainscot, who comes peeping

out when everything is still to see if anybody is about, so that he may get his crumbs, but if there is half a sound of a foot anywhere, away he slips and hides himself in his hole. Nay, if you belong to Christ, avow it. What is there to be ashamed of? To believe the truth—shall a man blush at that? To follow infinite purity and holiness incarnate in Christ Jesus, is there anything to be ashamed of in that? Nay, rather let us wear our colours before the face of all men, and lift our banner in all companies, for it is rather a cause for glorying than for blushing that we are on the Lord's side. It is the best thing about us, it is the greatest mercy we have ever received, why should we conceal it? Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and confess your faith before men, you that have newly been brought to Jesus.

Then go further. Be of good courage in *endeavouring to spread the faith* which you have received. When you go to speak to others about the great salvation, be not afraid. If it be new work to you, I dare say you will tremble, but still do it, and ask the Lord to give you greater confidence in proclaiming the tidings of His grace. If you speak with infidels, be of good courage, though for a while you cannot lead them to believe. If you speak to those who are incensed against the truth, be of good courage: what harm can they do to you that shall be equal to the harm you will suffer by becoming a coward? Be of good courage, and undertake great things for Christ; do not expect a defeat, but dare and venture all for Him. Do something more than you are able to do, expecting strength beyond your own to be afforded you, and it will certainly come. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart." Be of good courage, then, in the way of practical energy for the advancement of your Redeemer's cause.

Be of good courage *when you pray for others*. Wait on the Lord about your children, and be of good courage and expect to see them saved. Wait on the Lord about your servants, about your brothers and sisters, about your neighbours; be of good courage about them, believe that God hears prayer and that your intercessions will bless those for whom you pray. Intercession has great influence with God; it is no vain thing to wait upon the Lord for the souls of others. Thousands now in heaven owe their conversion to the prayers of the saints, and therefore plead with great courage. Never cease to pray, and when you pray, pray not as though you spoke to a tyrant reluctant to hear, or to a forgetful God, who would fail to answer, but wait on Him with quiet confidence and you shall not come empty away.

Be of good courage also *in making selfsacrifices* for the cause of Christ. If you lose a situation because you are honest, be of good courage, you will be no loser in the long run. Are there some who despise you because you are a Christian? Be of good courage, their opinion is of very little worth, and in the judgment of angels and good men you stand very high. Are you like Moses when he refused the treasures of Egypt, with all the honours of the court? Be of good courage, the Lord will give you, even in this life, a recompense, and in the world to come life everlasting. If it should come to losing all you have for Jesus' sake, be of good courage, for he that loseth his life for Christ's sake shall find it, and he that becometh poor for the cause of Christ shall be rich eternally. Be of good courage!

Once again, if you are called to *endure great affliction*, sharp pain, frequent sickness; if business goes amiss, if riches take to themselves wings and fly away, if friends forsake you and foes surround you, be of good courage, for the God upon whom you wait will not forsake you. Never let it be said that a soldier of the cross flinched in the day of battle. Bear your Father's will, glad to have such a Father's will to bear. If grace cannot enable us to endure all that nature can heap upon us, what is grace worth? Now is the time, my dear brother, in the floods of adversity, to see whether your faith is real faith or not. Mere sunshine faith is not worth the having: we want that which will outlive the most terrible storm that ever beclouded the heavens. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, though heart and flesh should fail you. Though eyes grow dim and the light of day should be quite shut out, though hearing should fail and the daughters of music be silent, though all the doors of the senses should be closed, though the bearers of the body should totter and the keepers of the house should tremble, yea, though death itself should remove this feeble body, yet there is no cause for fear, but we may exclaim with dying Jacob, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." Let not your hearts be troubled, wait on the Lord, and courage shall revive.

III. Our third point is, that WAITING UPON GOD SUSTAINS COURAGE. Beloved, if ever you begin to grow weary in the good ways of God, wait upon Him with double earnestness. You have heard of the famous giant whom Hercules could not kill, because the earth was his mother, and every time Hercules dashed him down he obtained fresh strength by touching his parent, and rose again to the fight. We are of like nature, and every time we are driven to our God, though we be dashed upon Him by defeat, we grow strong again, and our adversary's attempt is foiled. Our foe will never destroy us unless he can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, and that is impossible. Waiting upon God is the way to renew our strength until we mount up with eagle's wings and leave the world below.

In the first place, our heart is strengthened by waiting upon God, because *we thus receive a mysterious strength* through the incoming of the Eternal Spirit into our souls. No man can explain this, but many of us know what it is. We do not know how the Holy Ghost operates, but we are conscious that after a season of prayer we are often much refreshed, and feel as if we had been ground young again. We have gone in before the Lord haggard and worn, desponding, and (shame upon us, we must add) ready to give up, turn tail, and run away. We have not long drawn near to God before we have felt our spirit revive. Though our approach was mostly a groan, yet we did wait upon the Lord, and the eternal strength came into us. How wonderfully do the secret springs of omnipotence break into the feeble soul and fill it with might in the inner man. Through the sacred anointing of the Holy Ghost we have been made to shout for joy, we have been so glad in the Lord that we could not contain our joy. He that made us had put His hand a second time to the work, and restored unto us the joy of His salvation, filled our emptiness, removed our weakness, and triumphed in us gloriously. The poor harp which had been long played upon could not at length yield music to its owner's hand; in vain the bardic fingers roamed over the strings, the more heavily they were struck the more discordant were the sounds. The harp was taken from the hall

and laid aside in a quiet chamber, and there its maker came to deal with it. He knew its frame, and understood the art of tuning it. He put new strings in here and there, and set the rest aright, and the next time the harper laid his fingers among the strings pure music floated forth, and flooded the palace with melody. Where discord had peopled the air with evil sprites all was changed, and it seemed as though angels leaped forth with silver wings from every chord. Aye, go thou to thy God, poor soul, when thou art out of order; wait on the Lord, and He will strengthen thine heart by His mysterious power.

Besides this, waiting upon the Lord has an effect upon the mind, which in the natural course of things tends to strengthen our courage; for waiting upon God *makes men grow small*, and dwarfs the world and all its affairs, till we see their real littleness. Poor David sat fretting about the ungodly as he saw them prospering in their way, while as for himself he was plagued all the day and chastened every morning. Foolishly and ignorantly he complained of the Lord, and questioned His justice, "until," saith he, "I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end." Set your great troubles before the infinite God, and they will dwarf into such little things that you will never notice them again. He taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and the nations are as a drop in a bucket; and this great God will teach you to look at earthly things in the same light as He does, till though the whole world should be against you, you would smile at its rage, and though all the devils in hell should rise against you you, would defy their fury. Our worst ills are utterly despised when we learn to measure them by the line of the Eternal: thus you see that waiting upon God strengthens the heart by lessening the causes of fear.

And then *it inflames the heart with love.* Nothing can give us greater courage than a sincere affection for our Lord and His work. Courage is sure to abound where love is fervent. Look among the mild and gentle creatures of the brute creation and see how bold they are when once they become mothers and have to defend their offspring. A hen will fight for her chicks, though at another time she is one of the most timid of birds. Mr. White, in his book on Selborne, tells of a raven that was hatching her young in a tree. The woodman began to fell it, but there she sat; the blows of the axe shook the tree, but she never moved, and when it fell she was still upon her nest. Love will make the most timid creature strong; and, oh, beloved, if you love Christ you will defy all fear, and count all hazards undergone for Him to be your joy. In this sense, also, perfect love casteth out fear, it hopeth all things, endureth all things, and continues still to wait upon the Lord. To have more love we must more continually wait upon the Lord, and this will mightily renew the strength of our heart.

Again, waiting upon the Lord *breeds peace* within the soul, and when a man is perfectly at rest within he cares little for trials or foes. It is conscience that doth make cowards of us all, but let conscience be pacified through the atoning blood of Jesus, and you can smile when others spit their venom at you, and like your blessed Master you can bear their taunts without reply, for there is a heavenly calm within. A heart unsettled towards God is sure to be afraid of men, but when the soul waits on the Lord in glad serenity it stoops not to fear.

And, beloved, this waiting upon the Lord produces the effect of increasing our courage, because it *gives us often a sight of the eternal reward*, and if a man getteth a glimpse of the crown of glory, the crown of thorns will no more prick his temples. He that seeth what he shall be in the day when Christ shall be revealed, mourneth not because of what he now is while he beareth the reproach of Christ. In fact, waiting upon God makes us see that we are in fellowship with Christ and causes us to know that the load we carry is a cross of which He always bears the heaviest end: it lets us see that His heart is full of sensitive sympathy towards us, and so it makes us suffer without complaining. Is it not sweet to sing—

> "If on my face for Thy dear name,
> Shame and reproach shall be,
> I'll hail reproach and welcome shame
> For Thou'lt remember me"?

Thus waiting upon the Lord pours power into the central reservoir of our strength.

IV. Now I finish with the fourth point, which is, EXPERIENCE PROVES THIS. I want you to keep your Bibles open at the twenty-seventh Psalm, and see how my text is a summary of the entire psalm. All the rest of the verse may be compared to the figures of an account, and this closing verse is the casting up of the whole—waiting on the Lord is the path of wisdom.

For, first, in the opening verses David had been surrounded by enemies: he waited upon the Lord and the Lord made them stumble and fall. Afterwards when they fought against him he told his sorrow to his God, and God lifted his head high above his enemies round about him, till he could sing in the sanctuary songs of exultant joy unto the Lord. My brethren, do the same when you are assailed. You are not in a country subject to actual war, but you have many adversaries, spiritual and otherwise. You have the prince of darkness armed against you, and a host of spiritual wickednesses in high places. Wait on the Lord in this conflict, and He will give you victory. Your strength is to sit still. Fret not yourself. Quietly refer all the contest to Him who returns from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, travelling in the greatness of His strength, because His foes and yours are trodden beneath His feet. Wait on the Lord. Get you away to the shadow of His pavilion, hide in the secret of His tabernacle. Climb you up upon the rock, and keep you there, and all the adversaries of your soul shall be broken to pieces.

Next, read the seventh and eighth verses, and you will see David occupied in prayer, and there, too, he succeeded and prospered abundantly, because in prayer he waited on the Lord. The very essence of prayer is to get the ear of God. You might as well whistle as pray unless you pray in spirit and in truth; and the very spirit and truth of prayer must lie in communion with God Himself. If you have been praying after a fashion, and you have not gained that which you prayed for, surely you have not yet reached the ear of God. Get into the secret place, go close to your Lord, and wait upon Him in every deed; then shall you have great courage in prayer, renew your strength, and come back victorious.

Next, David had been enveloped in darkness. He was afraid that God was about to forsake him. He had lost the light of Jehovah's countenance. I think I hear one say, "What am I to do in such a case?" Wait on the Lord. If He does not smile, wait on Him still. The smile of His face is delightful, but

if you lose it, hide under the shadow of His wing. When He does not smile He still loves. "Though He slay me," said Job, "yet will I trust in Him." Even when He seems an angry God yet throw yourself at His feet. Let nothing drive you away from Him. If He lifts His sword to smite, the further off, the heavier the blow will fall. Run close in, dear child, if your Father is going to whip you; run close in, He cannot strike hard then. Draw very near to your Father's heart; lay hold on His strength, and put Him against Himself as it were, pleading His love against His wrath and saying, "Thou hast sworn that Thou wilt not be wroth with me, nor rebuke me: therefore deal tenderly with Thy child." If any walk in darkness and see no light, let Him still trust and wait on the Lord.

In the next sense we find David forsaken by everybody. Father and mother had left him, still he waits upon the Lord and the Lord takes him up. Now that you are quite alone, dear widow, and the husband of your love is gone, wait on the Lord. Now that the children one by one have been carried to the silent tomb, wait on the Lord, and He will be better to you than ten sons. Now, young man, you are drifting about London without a helper, wait on the Lord, and He will direct your way. Yea, all of you who, either from persecution or bereavement, have come to be solitary, remember the Lord setteth the solitary in families, and maketh them families like a flock. Wait upon Him and all will be well.

Next we find David in a difficult road, so that he prays, "Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies"; but waiting on the Lord exactly met the case. Whenever you cannot tell what to do, wait upon the Lord. When the road turns this way and that, and you know not which is right, kneel down and pray; you will know which way to go when you rise from your knees, or if you do not, kneel down again. The directing post is best seen when we are in prayer. The oracle shall answer to you out of the excellent majesty when you have resigned your will and believingly sought direction from the Most High.

To conclude, we find next that David had been slandered by his enemies—"False witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty." What then? Wait upon the Lord still. "Oh, but I must answer them." Yes, and then you will make bad worse; your slanderers will forge another lie when you have answered the first. "Oh, but," says one, "I could bear such a charge if it were true." Ah, but *then* you ought not to bear it, the truth of an ill report ought to grieve you, but if it is not true, never mind, let it alone. "Oh, but they say——." What do they say?—Let them say it. No hurt will come of it. Wait you upon the Lord. They rail at you, take care not to rail again. Make no reply to howling wolves. When dogs bark let them bark, for it is their nature; they will leave off when they have done; and so with all our adversaries, they will confute themselves if we will but let them alone. Our strength is to wait upon the Lord, tell Him about it and leave it with Him. Go to law? Yes, and get a suit which will not wear out in a hurry. Go to law, and bring upon yourself no end of troubles. In all other things except slander if you want a thing done do it yourself; but there, if you want to be well defended, let others defend you. Dirt will rub off when it is dry; be bravely patient. Wait upon the Lord, commit everything to Him, and He will see you through, even to the triumphant end. All that you can do in your own justification will only make more mischief. Hands off, there, and leave it with the Most High.

So we close by repeating our blessed text: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." May He keep you waiting courageously for Christ's sake.

A SACRED SOLO

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him."—Psalm xxviii. 7.

THIS passage has, to my mind, a peculiar charm. I do not know whether it breaks on your ear with like pathos and power. To me it seems charged with softness and sweetness, like some gentle strain of tender music. Let us read it again. "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him." Methinks I see a battle raging furiously, yet he whom it most concerns, after having displayed his prowess and fought valiantly, steps aside, and, sitting down in a quiet place, bomb-proof and almost out of sound of the cannons' roar, thus talks with his heart. He forgets the raging strife: he is expecting a joyful victory. He knows his weakness, but he has caught a glimpse of the divine strength which is guaranteed to him. He is trembling, perhaps, from the toil of the fight, and yet he rests as one insensibly subdued to settled calm and mild composure; he rests in God. In like manner, I want you, dear friends, to get out of the crowd a while this evening, and take shelter in a quiet place. Forget just now the various troubles of business, the domestic cares which often harass you, and the inward conflicts which vex your souls. Whatever there may be to disturb, distress, or distract you, let it alone. Now, for a while, revel in that sweet peace which God alone can give, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and say unto your soul, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him."

The sentence, you will notice, divides itself into three parts. The first tells us of *an assured possession*—"The Lord is my strength and my shield"; and the second speaks of *a definite experience*—"My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped." There are no "ifs," no "buts," no suspense of the soul midway between hope and fear; he speaks without a trace

of hesitancy, for he tells out his own actual experience. The third part of our text very properly closes with *an expressed emotion*; a very deep emotion it is—"My heart greatly rejoiceth." And then, you see, the inward emotion is interpreted in a most proper fashion by an audible utterance—"With my song will I praise Him."

I beg to call your studious attention to the remarkable form of this verse. There is a pair in the case of each of my divisions, and the pair in each case consists of inward and outward. Notice, "The Lord is my strength," that is inward: "My shield," that is outward. "My heart trusted in Him," that is inward: "and I am helped," that is outward. "Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth," that is inward: "and with my song will I praise Him," that is outward. It is by no means trifling to note these arrangements in the structure of sacred poetry, for there is a lesson to be learned therefrom: it teaches us that truth and beauty are to be linked together, and that to be holy we need not be uncouth. Full often we may observe a beautiful form and an admirable fashion in the language which embodied the thoughts of the inspired Psalmist. If we look at them long enough and meditate upon them fondly enough, we shall discern a symmetry in all his hallowed compositions which charms the taste, rivets the attention, and helps the memory. The sacred poet served the Lord with his best powers, reckoning nothing to be good enough for the Lord whom he loved so well. Slovenly preaching, doggerel verses, and discordant singing ought to be avoided, if possible, and our devotion should have the sweetest possible expression.

I. Let us begin with the first division of our text, and may the Spirit of God give us full faith to accept it in all its depth of meaning. We have here A SURE POSSESSION,—"The Lord is my strength and my shield."

With a double grip he takes hold of the divine covenant. "The Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield." He gets a two-handed grasp of the God of salvation. A touch of the hem of the Saviour's garment will heal; what divine virtue, then, must stream into a man who can hold with both hands—not merely the garment's hem, nor even the garment itself, but the Lord Himself, "The Lord is my strength and my shield." Perhaps some of you cannot give the double grip; then give the finger's touch, and it will save you. But do not be always content with that touch; ask to lay hold upon Jesus, and say, "I held Him, and I would not let Him go." Ask to grasp Him, like Jacob at the brook Jabbok with the brave resolve—"I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." Nay, get beyond that, and pray to have Paul's hold of Christ, which was so strong and firm that he said, "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" Both hands take hold, for the Psalmist sees a double blessing; he knows also that he has a double want; and so he takes a double grip. "The Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield." Were you to leave out the "my," repeated again and again in this verse, how the sense would be spoiled. Let us try it—"The Lord is a strength and a shield." Well, that is very true, but of what avail is that to me? My comfort must come from the fact that "the Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield." Faith matured by experience, faith strengthened by the promise, faith invigorated by the Holy Ghost, who is the Nourisher as well as the Author of it—such faith is fired with sacred energy when it dares to lay hold on God, and say, "The Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield." This is blessed work. God grant to each of us to know how to perform it, and to this end let us seek the help of the Holy Ghost, without whom we can do nothing.

Notice what it is that David lays hold upon with his two hands. "*The Lord* is my strength and my shield": it is not the Lord's promised grace, nor is it the bounties of providence, which He has bestowed on me, which I regard as my strength and my shield. It is not even the Lord's work in my soul, neither is it the assurance of my faith, nor yet the ardour of my love, that has become my strength and my shield. It is not the Lord's Book even, though its inspired oracles can enlighten the eyes, fortify the heart, and refresh the spirit. It is not the Lord's attributes of power and faithfulness and watchfulness; but it is JAH JEHOVAH Himself who is strength and shield to me. Now, he that layeth hold on God hath done a daring deed, at which even "the man greatly beloved" might stand aghast, were it not written, "Let him take hold of My strength." Oh to say, "My God!" There is more eloquence in those two words than in all the orations of Demosthenes or Cicero. All the genius, learning, and penetration of the heathen world could never teach us how to claim the Deity, and take possession of the God of the whole earth. What can we discover in the philosophy of Pythagoras, Aristotle, or Socrates that will compare with this? The man who can truly say, "The Lord is mine," hath an inheritance which death cannot wither, which space cannot compass, which time cannot limit, which eternity cannot explore. He may be poor in pocket-money, as I suppose the owners of large estates occasionally are; but he is infinitely rich, for he hath *real property*, and an absolutely indefeasible title to it. He may *feel* distressingly weak, but he *is* infinitely strong. He may account himself to be empty, but he hath all things and abounds, he, I mean, who can say, "The Lord is mine." Come, my brother, be bold enough to look into your privilege. Think of it? What if you could say, "The world is mine"? It will be consumed by fire. What if you could say, "Heaven is mine"? Yet if the God of heaven were not there, it would be a wilderness. O, beloved! if you can say, "God is mine—Father, Son, and Spirit are mine," what do you want more to gratify your eager quest for joy unspeakable? Come, can you conceive satisfaction more substantial than to know of a surety that God is your Father, your Redeemer, your Sustainer, your All,—your All in all? Do you wish for a better song than this—

> "So I my best Beloved's am,
> So He is mine?"

Can you imagine any sweeter music than the minstrelsy of a love so tuneful, touching as it doth the strings of that mysterious instrument, the soul? Is not this the climax of all wishes, all passions, all desires, all delights? We hail thee, son of Jesse, as the harmonious music of thy sublime psalms breaks on our ears; but oh, Thou Son of David! we adore Thee that Thou hast taught us to take up the strains as our own. We ourselves have felt *in fact* what the sweet psalmist sometimes spoke *in figure*. We, as Thy willing followers and Thine acknowledged disciples, do now, by right and rescript which Thou

hast given us, appropriate to ourselves the poems, parables, and prophecies which once vibrated in dark sayings from David's harp, as precious utterances concerning heavenly favours to which Thy sovereign grace has made us to be fairly and fully entitled.

Unhappy you who cannot call this God your God, whatever else you may have to glory in; but happy you who know that God is yours, however little of this world's store may fall to your portion. Thus have we considered the double grip, and what it lays hold upon. Let us not pass on till we have imitated the grasp of faith and appropriated the infinite treasure. May the Holy Ghost enable us.

Notice under what aspects God is thus laid hold of. *Inwardly*, first, as we have said, as our *strength* :—"The Lord is my strength." Brother, do you know how strong you are? If you have said, "The Lord is my strength," I challenge you to say how strong you are. "Ah, sir," say you, "I know how weak I am." That I will also take liberty to question; for albeit that you know yourself to be as weak as water, you are weaker yet—weaker than even your despondency has dreamed. "I know I am nothing," say you. Yes, but you would not even have had grace enough to know you were nothing if God had not given it to you. To be nothing is ours by nature; but to know that we are nothing and to confess that we are nothing is a gift of His grace. Brethren, we are emptier than emptiness, and more vain than vanity. We may tax language and use extravagant hyperboles, but we shall never be able fitly to estimate our own utter insignificance. We are weakness itself, hampered with the conceit of power; and yet if we can say in truth, "The Lord is my strength," we cannot estimate how strong we are, for there is no measuring omnipotence. Come, let us consider the matter, and let each believer speak personally. He who made the heavens and the earth is my strength. He who fixes the mountains firm so that they start not from their places n the day of tempest, when the cedars are breaking, is my strength. Although He will one day rock heaven and earth, and before His presence all creation shall flee away, yet He is my strength. These are but the hidings of power, but, truly, all the force reserved and lying latent in the Almighty bosom is engaged for His saints, and is my portion. Whatever omnipotence can do—(and that is a wrong expression to use, for omnipotence knows no frontier or confines to its sphere of possible action)—is ours. All that God has done is but little in comparison with what He can effect when His arm shall be bared to complete His mighty purposes; yet all the possibilities that pertain to God belong to His people. "The Lord is my strength."

With Jehovah for our strength we obtain a matchless capacity for endurance? It is marvellous how much a believer can bear when the Lord sustains him. "Out of weakness we are made strong." See you that bruised reed over yonder? It is fit emblem and fair picture of a man alone. You cannot trust the weight of an ounce to it, it bends under its own slender weight, even though there be no pressure to force it down. That is you, dear brother: that is you, dear sister. But see you that strong and potent column which bears upon it a huge roof or an iron way across which will thunder thousands of tons? That is yourself when God is with you; yea, you are stronger than that, for nothing shall be able to break the man to whom God is his strength. "I could not bear that," say you; "I know I should be crushed." What are you thinking about—the loss of that favourite child? Thinking about the death of your dear husband? God grant that you may not have to suffer it. The death of a wife?—the loss of all your goods, the cruel wounds of slander, or the desertion of friends? Are all those trials likely to befall you, and do you say, "Alas, I could not live if such afflictions should overtake me"? My dear friend, if you can say, "The Lord is my strength," you can bear anything and everything. You could bear a martyr's death if the Lord should be your strength. He could make a stalk of wheat to bear up the whole world if He strengthened it; and the faintest and most trembling child of His that ever whispered a prayer, He can make to bear the greatest griefs and the heaviest trials without the slightest repining, for His Spirit can infuse unconquerable patience into the believing heart. Of course, the power to endure depends upon the strength imparted, and not upon the inherent fortitude of the individual. It does not make much difference what the struggle or what the sorrow if we have strength sufficient. A little child with a small basket may be overloaded; while his father with ten times the load to carry will walk briskly, and whistle as he carries his burden along the street, thinking lightly of his lading. The increase of the burden is not the thing to groan about if there be a proportionate increase of strength. Emigrants have told us that they could labour with less fatigue in Australia than they could loiter in England. Whether that be so or not, assuredly it is easier to toil with divine aid than to rest without it. "As thy days thy strength shall be." Mark that. If the Lord shall heap the load upon your poor shoulders, He will impart courage to your mind, and vigour to your spirit, so that you shall suffer all His righteous will and find your soul thrice blessed in the endurance. "The Lord is my strength"; then we can, like Samson, slay the lion and find honey in it, or smite the Philistines and divide their spoil.

> "Let me but hear my Saviour say,
> 'Strength shall be equal to thy day!'
> Then I rejoice in deep distress,
> Leaning on all-sufficient grace."

If the Lord be our strength, our inward strength, we can *do* anything. At times we faintly reckon that we cannot get through our task; for the tale of bricks appears to be doubled, and straw is hard to find. Look up; for the Great Taskmaster always bestows upon us special ability when He demands of us peculiar service. Peradventure we are called to a high and solemn engagement of more than common responsibility. We shrink with timidity and put our mouths in the dust at the thought of it, and say, "Who am I, and what are my qualifications, that I should be summoned to speak for God, to act as His ambassador, or to fill a post of such vast importance? I am but a child: how shall I undertake an enterprise at which venerable sires might well be daunted?" But the Lord's answer is, "I will be with thy mouth. I will be thy strength." Well, then, we may cry with David, "I will speak of Thy statutes before kings, and will not be ashamed." If the Lord make us strong, there is no office upon which we may not venture, there is no duty we cannot perform, there is no sacrifice which we cannot cheerfully offer, there is no battle in which we cannot prevail.

Very likely I may be addressing someone who does not know or appreciate the faith which thus fortifies the feeble followers of Christ. Art thou a very strong man, and dost thou boast of thy strength? Friend, the strength of Samson served him a sorry turn when he was without his God; let his blindness warn thee. Another friend, conscious that he is a man of education and culture, doubts not that he can make his way in the world. O, sir, Solomon's wisdom was of poor account when he forgot the statutes of the Lord, pursued the fashions of his times, and suffered altars to be built to the strange gods of his wives whose sensual fascinations took away his heart. There is no strength of muscle or of mind but in God. "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." Blessed are they who look for strength to the Strong, for wisdom to the Wise, for safety to the Saviour. They shall say, in the words of our text, "The Lord is my strength."

David, in giving two grips, laid hold upon God as to *the outward manifestation*: "He is my strength and *my shield*." Looking back upon the past, I trust that many of you can say that God has been your shield. It is He who protects us from known adversaries; from the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil; from all the arrows that fly by day, and from all the terrors that haunt us by night. From adversaries of whom we know, and against whom we would be ever on our guard if we could, God is our shield. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." He who hath made the Lord his refuge, and the Most High his habitation, shall be safe; no real evil shall happen unto the just. "The Lord is my shield." Nor is He alone our shelter from open enemies; He is our guardian against those dangers which we wot not of. How many perils may have menaced your personal safety, your domestic happiness, or your fair reputation, of which you never knew! Thank God for unknown mercies, as well as for hair-breadth escapes. Often in travelling you may be within an inch of death and never be aware of it. Our gratitude to God may be stirred when we preceive a danger and escape it; but are we not even more beholden to Him when we do not even perceive the peril, and reach our journey's end, or awake in the morning, or live through a year, without sickness, without calamity, without alarm? Without violently imagining mischiefs or nervously inventing perils, we may soberly judge that dangers have frequently hovered around us even in the calmest hours, and from all these we have been preserved, because the Lord is our shield.

It is the greatest comfort to feel God's Spirit within you making you strong; but it is no small joy to know that God is round about you, making you safe. "He is my shield." Knowing as we do that our adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour, and that he may be perhaps trying to seize upon one of us at this very moment, our security from his hostile attacks is this—The Lord is our shield. Satan will only waste his arrows against the eternal buckler. There may be a plot formed against you by a cruel adversary whose hatred is unknown to you; but fret not yourself with fear of hidden dangers; let them lie where God permits them to conceal themselves; do not unearth the foxes nor stir up the young lions, for you are safe in your simplicity. Is it not written that "the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den"? "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." Though earth and hell should blend their malice, they are safe whom God protects. The close designs and crooked counsels of those who conspire against the saints shall all be foiled, for there is One who frustrateth every evil device and taketh the wise in their own craftiness. "Where would you hide yourself," said one to Luther, "if the elector of Saxony should withdraw his protection?" He smiled, and said, "I put no trust in the prince of Saxony. Beneath the broad shield of heaven I stand secure against Pope and Turk and devil." So he did: and so do we. If we have but faith in God, we can sing, in the language of the text, "The Lord is my strength and my shield. He strengthens me within and He protects me without. What more do I want?"

Before I leave those first two sentences, I want you to notice that this is a matter of fact, a fact which many here can attest: "The Lord is my strength and my shield." It is not a pretty speech that we have selected as an appropriate motto for a retrospect, nor is it a piece of sentimental religious poetry in which fancy counterfeits Christian experience; but it is a positive fact, to which full many of us who have been tried and tutored in the pilgrimage of life can bear our personal testimony. "The Lord has been *my* strength": at this moment I set my hand and seal to that statement before you all. I should have proved myself to be weakness itself in many an emergency had not Eternal power upheld me: I should have been far from calm resolution, and drifted near to madness; not firm and steady, but frail and faltering, had He not interposed on my behalf, and kept this heart in the hour of trouble. Is not the same confession due from each of you? You have waded through your trouble, dear sister: you have escaped from that dilemma, my brother; and do you not ascribe your deliverance to the Lord who strengthened you? Come, now, where else did you get your strength from? You cannot trace it to any other than a divine source. Has not the Lord been your shield? Have not some of you been in positions in which no one else could have guarded you? Perhaps your own fault has placed you in predicaments out of which you could never have extricated yourself had He not stretched out His hand and plucked your feet out of the net. Then you said to your soul, "This is no fiction. This is the finger of God." It is right-hearted sincerity, and not wrong-headed enthusiasm, which prompts us personally to avow—"The Lord is our strength and our shield." We can say it as deliberately as the miser might say, "The bank is my confidence, my money is my trust;" or as the merchant might say, "My wealth is on the sea, my ships bring me in my yearly income," or as the mother might say, "My children are my joy." We can boldly publish it, and challenge all gainsayers, for it is really so, "The Lord is our strength and our shield. Beyond doubt or question this is an assured possession.

II. Now, have patience with me while I endeavour, in the second place, to expound to you A DEFINITE EXPERIENCE. It is related in these words: "My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped." Here, too, we have both inward and outward, as I told you before—"My heart trusted in Him," that is

work done indoors, within the soul; "I am helped," that is mercy received outdoors, openly and actually.

Notice the scrupulous loyalty of the believer whose entire confidence is centred in God. "'My heart trusted.' I did not say '*I* trusted,' as one who makes a profession with his lips, but rather with strong conviction and profound emotion, 'my *heart* trusted.'" It is truly shocking to see people stand up, and recite a creed, to the truth of which they attach no importance. They say or sing, "I believe this, and I believe that," and as they repeat the words prescribed for them, they superstitiously turn in a certain direction. But happy is that man who, turning east, west, north, or south, does *in his heart* trust—does in his secret soul believe. There is no believing worthy of the name except heart believing. If your head believes a thing it is of small consequence; but in soul-saving faith the heart is so believing as to trust, and the mind is so assured as to be at peace. "My heart trusted *in Him*. My poor heart fluttered in the time of trouble, it was agitated, it was distressed, for all its visible refuge had fled away; but at last I said, "I must hang upon my God, and to Him I must cling.' In very despair of all things else I cast myself at the foot of His throne. My heart trusted *in Him*." Has it been so with you of late? Has your heart been trusting in God? That is a very strong expression of the prophet when he speaks of the heart going a whoring from God. The language is vehement even to coarseness; but it is none too forcible, for it involves the commission of a spiritual uncleanness when the heart trusts any other helper than God. "My heart trusted *in Him*." Oh, it is so easy for the heart to get trusting in itself! And he that trusteth his own heart is a fool. It is frightfully easy for the heart to rely upon man, as we know right well! Did you ever notice the middle verse of the whole Bible? It is the eighth verse of the hundred and eighteenth Psalm: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." The comparison will not bear a thought, the preference is infinite: for confidence in man will betray your hopes, but faith in God will enrich you beyond your expectations. May our heart always keep to that—trusting God; trusting in God alone. "My heart trusted in Him."

In the next clause of the sentence, which is *the outward manifestation* of the inward experience, we have the result: "I am helped." If I had been writing this psalm of my own head I think I should have written it thus: "My heart trusted in Him, and I *was* helped"; for it is a rule in composition that if you bracket two sentences together you should write them in the same tense. But, as old Master Trapp says, faith has no tenses, because faith deals with a God who has no tenses except the present, for His name is "I AM." Our faith does not say, "I trusted in Him, and I *was* helped." No: she has all former mercy present before her eyes, and she sings, "I am helped." Nor does faith say, "My heart trusted in Him, and I *shall* be helped." Perhaps the needed help has not yet arrived, but she is so sure that it will come that she cries, "I am helped. Am I as poor as I was before I prayed? No, I am not, for I have obtained the blessing I asked for. I appear to be as weak as I was before I trusted Him, but I am not, for the Lord is my strength; and, having trusted in Him, I *am* helped." I wish we lived more in that blessed present tense in which God dwells.

> "He fills His own eternal '*now*,'
> And sees our ages pass."

Now, brethren, let all the past of God's mercy come up to your memory, and let that be a part of the "*now*"; and then just take as it were, a spring, and bound forward into the future—aye, leap right across life, as though it were a narrow rivulet, into heaven, and put the eternal future into the present "*now*," and sing as our sweet poet does—

> "Lo! a 'new song' is in my mouth,
> To long-loved music set:
> Glory to Thee for all the grace
> I have not tasted yet."

"I am helped." I have now the good I crave. By faith I realise it as a present possession. I am helped: I *am* helped. The past lives in my gratitude, the future lies in my confidence, and both alike meet in the present, and my soul is glad. "My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped."

You must notice, reverting again to the words of the text, that this confidence was, from first to last, confidence in God, and therefore was it honoured with a gracious result. "*My heart trusted in Him*, and I am helped." Many and many a time we have been obliged to say, "My heart trusted in So-and-so, and I am *deceived*"; but here it is, "and I am *helped*." Sometimes it happens; "My heart trusted in such an one, and I am disappointed, though not deceived. He would have helped me, but he could not." But here it is, "My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped." All has happened according to promise; there has been no failure of faithfulness, no breach of covenant, no forgetfulness, no delay. I am helped sufficiently, punctually, continually, and so I ever shall be helped till toiling and travelling days are over. Glory be to God for this.

Dear friends, have all of you who are Christians attained to a Christian experience? Doctrine, you know, is very important; it is well that you should learn it, understand it, and adhere to it; but doctrine is only the truth in which you are instructed, and avails you little for growth in grace until you experience the power of it in your own souls. Do you know why so many people run away from the truth as it is in Jesus, and take up with strange conceits and new-fangled notions? It is because they have no inward experience of the old truths. Let a man once have a deep experience of the evil of sin, and I will warrant you he will feel his need of a Saviour and the necessity of an atonement made by blood. Let him have an experience of the power of the blood upon his conscience, the peace that comes out of substitution, and he will cling to the cross, he will be ready to die for the cross. He has such joy rising out of it as he never found elsewhere. I am obliged to cling to the gospel, for if it be not true I am a lost man: I must hold fast to it, for there all my hope is fixed, and if it be taken away, my sun is quenched, the well of my joy is dried up, and life becomes a lingering death. But, beloved, an experience of those blessed truths which God hath revealed to us by His Spirit writes them where they cannot be erased; not upon the tablet of the brain, from which they may be effaced, for men forget, but upon the tablet of the heart, from which they cannot

be obliterated, for men do not disclaim that which has become a part of their inward consciousness, and which God has made dear to them as their lives. May you all have such a definite experience as the text sets before us. The Holy Ghost will work it in all the saints.

III. Lastly, here we have A DECLARED EMOTION: "Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him." Here, again, is the inward phase, you see—"My heart greatly rejoiceth"; and then there is the outward embodiment of the internal feeling—"and with my song will I praise Him."

Behold a heart rejoicing with a sacred and intense delight! Some people's rejoicing is but skin deep. They laugh; their face is surfaced over with smiles, and their mouth bubbles up with silly glee. To my mind there is hardly anything more sad than the frequent laughter which exposes a vacant mind. The moment company has gone this volatile mirthfulness subsides, and the jolly companions resolve into solitary individuals, dull each one and dreary, far enough from being happy any of them. You may, perhaps, have heard of Carlini, one of the most celebrated clowns of the beginning of this century, a a man whose wit and humour kept all Paris in roar of laughter; but he himself had little share of the cheerfulness he simulated so well and stimulated so much. His comedies brought him no comfort. Though a professor of mirth, he was a victim of melancholy. He consulted a physician; and asked him for a prescription to relieve his lowness of spirits and habitual despondency. His physician gave him some medicine, but advised him by way of recreation to go to the theatre and hear Carlini, whose fun and frolic were of such repute. "If he does not fetch the blues out of you, nobody will." "Alas! sir," said he, "I am Carlini." And so, doubtless, it hath often happened that men make glee for others when they are full of gloom themselves. The face smiles like summer, but the heart is freezing with the cold of winter. Not so the man who has laid hold on God. "*My heart* rejoiceth," he says, "my heart rejoiceth." Nay, he puts in the word "greatly." "My heart *greatly* rejoiceth," as if it were as full of joy as ever it could be; as though it throbbed and danced joyously with a fulness of delight. "My heart greatly rejoiceth"; and Christian men can say this whenever they lay hold on God, even though they are surrounded with a world of trouble. We know sometimes what it is to wear a sad face with a glad heart, just as some others are wearing a glad face with a sad heart. Blessed is the man whom God hath taught greatly to rejoice: let him indulge the holy humour to the top of his bent.

What, now, is the outcome of this sacred, soul-satisfying joy? He says, "With my song will I praise Him." Whenever you feel exceedingly glad in the Lord, be sure to tell it out. This is one of the emotions which ought never to be concealed. When I have been preaching among the Primitive Methodists, at the very mention of joy in the Lord, I have heard them call out "Hallelujah." In Wales I have heard the "Gogoniant"—glory be to God. We do not commit such improprieties here. Do we? We are too quiet and proper to transgress the rules of enforced decorum; and yet, sometimes, it might be the most natural thing in the world for a Christian to feel that he could not hold his strong emotions in stiff restraint, but must shout aloud, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." Do you think, dear friends, we sing enough? I do not think we do. The world is very pleased with singing of a certain sort. Tuneful airs are tacked on to trashy words. What foolishness we hear in the popular songs of the day. I have been quite unable to understand the sense when the sound has jingled in my ears. When I have asked, "What does it mean?" nobody has been able to interpret, or at least to make me comprehend it. To them it may have appeared like a clever ballad; to me it seemed mere empty doggerel. Well, if they are not ashamed to sing their bacchanalian songs, and sometimes to make night hideous with their choruses, surely we need not be ashamed to sing the songs of Zion, and to sing them with spirit too. Good woman, why don't you sing? You would handle that box-iron just as well if you sang a psalm. You could mend those children's clothes quite as cleverly if you would sing a hymn. Good friend carter, you could crack your whip as you walked along by the side of your pair of horses in the dray and yet hum the while a favourite tune. To get alone and sing some sacred melody by yourselves is very refreshing. My father had, years ago, a servant who was always singing, and when he asked her why, she said that it helped to keep bad thoughts away. I knew a boy who was so fond of singing the praises of the Lord that his employers would let him go out on the Common sometimes to give vent to his vocal powers, for he sang rather too much and too loudly for a quiet house. I love to see young Christians full of joy. It is good, sometimes, to get away and have a stave to yourself, as much as if you said, "I am not singing for any one of you, but I am singing to God." I listened one night and heard the nightingale with its delicious "joog, joog, joog," pouring forth such sweet music that it seemed to make the moon stand still, charmed with the strain. I know that the nightingale did not sing *to me*. He did not know that I was listening, nor would he have cared if he had known. Perhaps if he had noticed that I had been so close he might have flown away; he was singing without regard to human ears. It is a sweet thing just to sing unto the Lord. Classical music is all very well, but heart music is the essence of sweetness. "My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped, therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise Him." When you walk through a wood in spring-time you come upon a stretch of blue hyacinth. You fancy that a piece has been rent away from the azure mantle of the sky and thrown down among the trees. Why are those hyacinths clothed in such cerulean splendour? For what purpose is their sweet perfume poured forth in such lavish profusion? Dost thou say, "They waste their sweetness on the desert air"? Nay, O man! know rather that God is abroad: those flowers are His, and this is His garden: He delights to gaze on their living sapphires. Did you ever light upon a clump of lovely flowers right away in a lone spot of forest, moor, or common, where the foot of man has seldom profaned the soil? Have you not paused to admire? There they stand with their golden cups, like chamberlains of a king! Why are they here in such gorgeous livery? Who is all this beautiful variety of form and colour intended to greet? "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." What King has come to dine

here and sip from those jewelled chalices? It is the eternal God who made them, and who takes delight in the work of His hands: it is He who walks among these solitary beauties in the cool of the day. Did you not see the flowerets bow their heads in worship as they felt His breath among their foliage?

Down deep at the bottom of the sea the coral grows in luxuriant abundance, and many-tinted shells that seem like unfinished rainbows are lying there unseen, never to be seized by human hands, and bartered in the market for gain. The Lord visits those cool grots, and takes pleasure in His own delicate handiwork. All things are not for greedy man; the Lord hath His reserved gardens, His springs shut up, His fountains sealed. So let it be with us. Do not let us wait to praise the Lord till we can get an audience of our fellow-creatures, though we may sometimes wish that our songs would charm their ears and win their love for Jesus; but let us, oftentimes, retire into holy solitude, and then all alone break the silence of our loneliness, saying, "My heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise the Lord. As long as I live and when I die, and when I rise again, and through eternity, with my song will I praise Him."

"In blessing Thee with grateful songs,
My happy life shall glide away;
The praise that to Thy name belongs
Hourly with lifted hands I'd pay.

"Abundant sweetness! While I sing
Thy love, my ravished heart o'erflows;
Secure in Thee, my God and King,
Of glory that no period knows."

How I wish that some would begin at this moment a life of praise—begin by taking God to be their strength—begin by trusting in Christ to be their shield—begin by an experience of the power of prayer to bring them help. If you do so, you shall rise from height to height in your flights of praise: you shall first join us with below to sing as best you can, and afterwards you shall mount into the upper orchestra where all the chosen singers meet, and sit and chant with them the endless anthem which ascends unto Jehovah, our strength and our song.

God bless you, beloved, give you to know and prove the sweetness of this blessed text, and make you to sing David's divine song to the stringed instruments of your renewed hearts all the days of your lives. Amen.

THE MAJESTIC VOICE

"The voice of the Lord is full of majesty."—Psalm xxix. 4.

ALL God's works praise Him, whether they be magnificent or minute, they all discover the wisdom, the power, and the benevolence of their Creator. "All thy works praise Thee, O God." But there are some of His more majestic works which sing the song of praise louder than others. There are some of His doings, upon which there seems to be graven in larger letters than usual the name of God. Such are the lofty mountains, which worship God with uncovered heads both night and day; such are the rolling seas, too mighty to be managed by man, but held in check by God, and such, especially, are the thunders and the lightnings. The lightnings are the glances of the eyes of God, and the thunders are the utterings of His voice. The thunder has been usually attributed to God more especially, though philosophers assure us that it is to be accounted for by natural causes. We believe them, but we prefer, ourselves, to look to the first great Cause, and we are content with that old and universal belief, that the thunder is the voice of God. It is marvellous what effect the thunder has had upon all kinds of men. In reading an ode of Horace the other day, I found him in the first two verses, singing like a true Ithurean, that he despised God, and intended to live merrily; but by-and-by he hears the thunder, and acknowledging that there is a Jehovah, who lives on high, he trembles before Him. The most wicked of men have been obliged to acknowledge that there must be a Creator, when they have heard that marvellous voice of His sounding through the sky. Men of the stoutest nerve and the boldest blasphemy have become the weakest of all creatures, when God has in some degree manifested Himself in the mighty whirlwind, or in the storm. "He breaketh the cedars of Lebanon"; He bringeth down the stout hearts; He layeth down the mighty, and He obliges those who never acknowledged him to reverence Him when they hear His voice. The Christian will acknowledge the thunder to be the voice of God, from the fact, that if he be in the right frame of mind, it always suggests to him holy thoughts. I do not know how it may be with you, but I scarce ever hear the rolling thunder, but I begin to forget earth and look upwards to my God. I am unconscious of any feeling of terror or pain; it is rather a feeling of delight that I experience, for I like to sing that verse—

"The God that rules on high,
And thunders when He please,
That rides upon the stormy sky
And manages the seas;
This awful God is ours,
Our Father and our love,
He shall send down His heavenly powers
To carry us above."

He is our God, and I like to sing that, and think of it: but there is something so terrible in the tone of that voice when God is speaking, something so terrific to other men, and humbling to the Christian, that he is obliged to sink very low in his own estimation; then he looks up to God, and cries, "Infinite Jehovah, spare a worm, crush not an unworthy wretch. I know it is Thy voice; I reverence Thee with solemn awe; I prostrate myself before Thy throne; Thou art my God, and beside Thee there is none else." It might well have occurred to a Jewish mind to have called the thunder the voice of God, when he considered the loudness of it, when all other voices are hushed; even

if they be the loudest voices mortals can utter, or the most mighty sounds; yet are they but indistinct whispers, compared with the voice of God in the thunder, and indeed, they are entirely lost when God speaks from His throne, and makes even the deaf hear, and those who are unwilling to acknowledge Him hear His voice.

But we need not stop to prove that the thunder is the voice of God from any natural feeling of man; we have Scripture to back us up, and therefore we shall do our best to appeal to that. In the first place, there is a passage in the book of Exodus where I would refer you; where, in the margin, we are told that the thunder is the voice of God. In the ninth chapter and the twenty-eighth verse, Pharaoh says, "Entreat the Lord (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail." The original Hebrew has it, and my margin has it, and the margin of all of you who are wise enough to have marginal Bibles—"Voices of God." "Let there be no more voices of God and hail." So that it is not a mere illusion, but we are really warranted by Scripture, in saying, that "the thunder is the voice of God lifted up in the sky." Now, for another proof; to what shall we refer you unless we send you to the book of Job? In his thirty-seventh chapter, third verse, he says, "He directeth it under the whole heaven, and His lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth: He thundereth with the voice of His excellency: and He will not stay them when His voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with His voice; great things doeth He which we cannot comprehend." And so he says in the fortieth chapter, at the ninth verse, "Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him?" I am glad, in this age, when men are seeking to forget God, and put Him entirely out of the creation, and trying to put laws in the place of God, as if laws could govern a universe without some one to execute those laws, and put power and force into them—I am glad, I say, to be able to bear testimony to something which men cannot deny to be caused immediately by God the mighty One Himself.

There is one striking proof I would offer to you, that the thunder is the voice of God; and that is the fact, that when God spake on Sinai, and gave forth His law, His voice is then described, if not in the first passage, yet in the reference to it, as being great thunders. "There were thunders and lightnings, exceedingly loud and long." God spoke then, and He spoke so terribly in thunder, that the people requested that they might hear that voice no more. And I must refer you to one passage in the New Testament, which will bear me out thoroughly in describing the thunder to be, indeed, the voice of God; and that is in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, where Jesus lifted up His voice to heaven at the tomb of Lazarus, and asked His Father to answer Him; and then a voice came from heaven, and they that stood by said "that it thundered"; it was the voice of God which was then heard, and they ascribed it to the thunder. Here is a remarkable proof that the thunder has usually been ascribed to God as being His voice; and when God's voice has been heard on any remarkable occasion, it has always been accompanied by the sound of thunder, or, rather, has been the sound of thunder itself.

Well, now, leaving these considerations altogether, we come to make some remarks, not upon the voice of God in the thunder, but upon the voice of God as elsewhere heard; for it is not only heard there naturally, but there are spiritual voices and other voices of the Most High. "The voice of the Lord is full of majesty." God has spoken in various ways to man, in order that man might not think Him a God so engrossed with Himself that He does not observe His creatures. It has graciously pleased the Divine Being, sometimes to look upon man, at other times to stretch out His hand to man, sometimes to reveal Himself in mortal appearance to man, and frequently to speak to man. At sundry times He has spoken absolutely without the use of means—by His own voice; as for instance, when He spoke from Sinai's blazing mountain-top, or when He spoke to Samuel in his bed, and said unto him several times, "Samuel, Samuel"; or when He spoke to Elijah, and Elijah said, "he heard the whirlwind, and he saw the fire"; and after that there was "a still small voice." He has spoken immediately from heaven by His own lips on one or two occasions in the life of Christ. He spoke to Him at the waters of Jordan, when He said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." He spoke to Him on another occasion, to which we have already referred. He spoke—it was God that spoke, though it was Jesus Christ—He spoke to Saul, when on his way to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" He has spoken several times immediately by His own voice, without the intervention of means at all; at other seasons, God has been pleased to speak to men by angels. He has, as it were, written the message and sent it down by His messenger from on high: He hath told to man many wonders and secrets by the lips of those glorious beings, who are flaming spirits of His, that do His pleasure. As frequently, perhaps, God has spoken to men in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon them. Then, when the natural ear hath been closed, He hath opened the ear of the spirit, and He hath taught truths which, otherwise, men could never have known. More frequently still, God hath spoken to men by men. From the days of Noah even until now, God has raised up His prophets, by whose lips He hath spoken. It was not Jeremiah who uttered that lament which we read, but it was Jehovah, the God in Jeremiah, speaking through the natural organs of his voice. It was not Isaiah who foresaw the future, and foretold the doom of nations, it was God in Isaiah thus speaking. And so with every prophet of the Lord now living, and every minister whom God hath raised up to speak: when we speak with power and efficacy, and unction, it is not we that speak, but it is the Spirit of our Father who dwelleth in us. God speaks through men; and now also, we know that God speaks through His own written Word of inspiration. When we turn to the page of Scripture, we must not look upon these words as being in any degree the words of men, but as being the words of God. And though they be silent, yet do they speak; and though they cause no noise, yet, verily, "their sound hath gone forth throughout all the world, and their noise unto the ends of the earth." And yet, again, God even now speaks Himself by the use of means; He does not make man speak, He does not make the Bible speak merely of itself, but He speaks through the Bible, and through the man, as really as if He had used no books or employed no man to speak for Him. Aye, and there be times when the Spirit of God speaks in the heart of man without the use of means. I believe there be many secret impulses, many solemn thoughts, many mysterious directions

given to us without a single word having been uttered, but by the simple motions of God's Spirit in the heart. This thing I know, that when I have neither heard nor read, I have yet felt the voice of God within me, and the Spirit hath, Himself, revealed some dark mystery, opened some secret, guided me into some truth, given me some direction, led me in some path, or in some other way hath immediately spoken to me Himself; and I believe it is so with every man at conversion; with every Christian, as he is carried on through his daily life, and especially as he nears the shores of the grave—that God, the Everlasting One, speaks Himself to his soul, with a voice that he cannot resist, although he may have resisted the mere voice of man. The voice of the Lord is still heard, even as it was heard aforetime. Glory be to His name!

And now, my beloved, I come to the doctrine, "The voice of the Lord is full of majesty." First of all, *essentially*, "The voice of the Lord" *must* be "full of majesty"; secondly, *constantly*, "The voice of the Lord is full of majesty"; thirdly, *efficaciously*, in all it does, "The voice of the Lord is full of majesty."

I. First, then, "THE VOICE OF THE LORD IS FULL OF MAJESTY." Aye, and so it should be. Should not that voice be full of majesty which comes from Majesty? Is not God the King of kings, and the Ruler of the whole earth? Should He, then, speak with a voice below His own dignity? Should not the King speak with the voice of a king? Should not a mighty Monarch speak with a Monarch's tongue? And surely, if God be God, and if He be the Master of all worlds, and the Emperor of the universe, He must, when He speaks, speak with the monarch's tongue and with a majestic voice. The very nature of God requires that all He does should be Godlike. His looks are looks divine; His thoughts are thoughts divine; and should not His words be words divine, since they come from Him? Verily, from the very essence of God, we might infer that His voice would be full of majesty.

But what do we mean by a voice having majesty? I take it that no man's voice can have majesty in it unless it is true; a lie, if it should be spoken in the noblest language, would never be majestic; a falsehood, if it be uttered by the most eloquent lips, would be a mean and paltry thing, however it might be spoken; and an untruth, wherever uttered, and by whomsoever, is not majestic; it never can be truth, and truth only can ever have majesty about it; and because God's words are pure truth, unalloyed with the least degree of error, therefore does it come to pass that His words are full of majesty. Whatever I hear my Father say in Scripture, whatever He speaks to me by the ministry, or by His Spirit, if He speaks it, there is not the slightest alloy of untruth about it. I may receive it just as it is.

> "My faith may on His promise live,
> May on His promise die."

I need not reason about it; it is enough for me to take it and believe it, because He has said it. I need not try to prove it to the worldling: if I were to prove it, he would believe it none the better; if the voice of God's majesty doth not convince him, sure the voice of my reasoning never can. I need not stand and cut and divide between this voice of God and the other; I know it must be true, if He has said it; and therefore I will believe all that I believe God has said, believing that His voice is full of majesty.

Then, again, when we speak of a majestical voice, we mean by it, that it is *a commanding voice*. A man may speak truth, and yet there may be but little majesty in what he says, because he speaks it in a tone that never can command attention and catch the ear of his fellow creatures. In fact, there are some men expounders of truth, who had better hold their tongues, for they do truth an injury. We know full many who affect to preach God's truth, who go out to battle, who take the lance in their hands to defend the honour of Christ, but who wield the lance so ill, and who have so little of God's Spirit, that they do but disgrace His holy name, and it would have been better had they remained at home. O! beloved, God's voice, when He speaks, is always a commanding voice. Let the monarch arise in the midst of his creatures; they may have been conversing with each other before; but hush! his majesty is about to speak. It is so with the Majesty of God; if He should speak in heaven the angels would hush their hallelujahs, and suspend the notes of their golden harps, to hear Him; and when He speaks on earth, it is at all times becoming in all His creatures to hush their rebellious passions, and make the voice of their reason be silent. When God speaks, either from the pulpit or from His Word, I hold it to be my duty to keep silence. Even while we sing the glories of our God, our soul stands trembling; but when He speaks forth His own glories, who is he that dares to reply? Who is he that shall lift up his voice against the Majesty of heaven? There is something so majestic in the voice of God, that when He speaks, it commands silence everywhere, and bids men hear.

But there is something *very powerful* in the voice of God, and that is the reason why it has majesty in it. When God speaks, He speaks not weakly, but with a voice full of power. We poor creatures, at times, are clothed by God with that might, and when we speak grace comes pouring from our lips; but there are oftentimes seasons when we meet with small success; we talk and talk, and have not our Master's feet behind us, nor our Master's spirit within us, and therefore but little is done. It is not so with God: He never wasted a word yet; never spoke a solitary word in vain. Whatever He intended He had but to speak and it was accomplished. Once He said, "Let there be light," and instantly light was. So He said in past eternity that Christ should be His first elect, and Christ was His first elect. He decreed our salvation; He spake the word and it was done. He sent His Son to redeem, and proclaimed to His elect justification in Him. And His voice was a powerful voice, for it did justify us. Any other voice could not pardon sin; none but the voice of the monarch can speak pardon to the subject; and God's is a majestic voice, for He has only to speak, and our pardon is at once signed, sealed, and ratified. God is not magniloquent in His words; He does not speak big sounding words without meaning. The simplest word He utters may have little meaning to man, but it has a power and meaning in it equal to the omnipotence of God. There is a majesty about the voice of God which might suffice to nerve my soul to fight the dragon; to say, "Where is thy boasted victory, death? Where is the monster's sting?" That one promise hath majesty enough in it to make the dwarf a giant, and the weakling one of the mighties of the Most High. It has might enough in it to feed a whole host in the wilderness; to guide a whole company through the mazes of

mortal life ; majesty enough to divide the Jordan, to open the gates of heaven, and admit the ransomed in. Beloved, I cannot tell you how it is that God's voice is so majestic, except from the fact, that He is so mighty Himself, and that His words are like Him.

But just one thought more concerning the voice of God being essentially majestic ; and I must trouble you to remember that, if you forget everything else that I have said. In some sense Jesus Christ may be called the voice of God, for you know He is called the Word of God frequently in Scripture ; and I am sure this Word of God " is full of majesty." The voice and the word are very much the same thing. God speaks: it is His Son. His Son is the Word ; the Word is His Son, and the voice is His Son. Ah ! truly the voice, the Word of God, " is full of majesty." Angels ! ye can tell what majesty sublime invested His blest person when He reigned at His Father's right hand ; ye can tell what were the brightnesses which He laid aside to become incarnate ; ye can tell how sparkling was that crown, how mighty was that sceptre, how glorious were those robes bedecked with stars. Spirits ! ye who saw Him when He stripped Himself of all His glories, ye can tell what was His majesty. And O ! ye glorified, ye who saw Him ascend up on high, leading captivity captive—ye beloved songsters, who bow before Him, and unceasingly sing His love ! ye can tell how full of majesty He is. High above all principalities and powers ye see Him sit ; angels are but servants at His feet ; and the mightiest monarchs like creeping worms beneath His throne. High there where God alone reigns, beyond the ken of angels or the gaze of immortal spirits—there He sits, not majestic merely, but full of majesty. Christian ! adore your Saviour ; adore the Son of God ; reverence Him, and remember at all seasons and times, how little so ever you may be, your Saviour, with whom you are allied, the Word of God, is essentially full of majesty.

II. Now the second point. IT IS CONSTANTLY FULL OF MAJESTY. God's voice, like man's voice, has its various tones and degrees of loudness ; but it is full of majesty, constantly so—whatever *tone* He uses, it is always full of majesty. Sometimes God speaks to man with a harsh voice, threatening him for sin ; and then there is majesty in that harshness. When man is angry with his fellows, and he speaks harshly and severely, there is little majesty in that ; but when the just God is angry with sinful mortals, and He says, " I will by no means spare the guilty " ; " I, the Lord, am a jealous God " ; when He declares Himself to be exceedingly wroth, and asks who can stand before the fury of His countenance—when the rocks are cast down by Him—there is a majesty in that terrific voice of His. Then He adopts another voice. Sometimes it is a gentle didactic voice, teaching us what He would have us learn. And then how full of majesty it is ! He explains, He expounds, He declares: He tells us what we are to believe ; and what a majesty there is in His voice then ! Men may explain God's Word, and have no majesty in what they say ; but when God teaches what His people are to hold to be truth, what majesty there is in it ! So much majesty, that if any man take away from the words that are written in this Book, God shall take away his name out of the book of life and out of the holy city—so much majesty, that to seek to mend the Bible is a proof of a blasphemous heart, that to seek to alter one word of Scripture is a proof of alienation from the God of Israel. At another time God uses another voice—a sweet consoling voice. And O ! ye mourners that have ever heard God's comforting voice, is not that full of majesty ! There is nothing of the mere trifling that sometimes we employ to comfort poor sick souls. Mothers will often talk to those who are sick in some gentle strain ; but somehow it appears to be affected, and is, therefore, not full of majesty ; but when God speaks to comfort, He uses His majestic words. " The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Oh ! is there not majesty in this sweet voice " ? " Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea, they may forget, yet will I never forget thee." How sweet, but yet how majestic ! We cannot avoid being comforted by it if God speaks it to our souls. Sometimes God's voice is a reproving voice ; and then it is full of majesty. " The ox knoweth his owner," he says, " and the ass his master's crib ; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider " ; and He speaks reprovingly, as if He had a controversy with them, and calls the mountains and the hills to hear His reproof of them on account of sin ; " I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against Me." But God's reproving voice is always full of majesty. At other times it is a voice of command to His children, when He appears to them and says, " Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." And how majestic are God's commands, how mighty is His voice, when He tells us what to do ! Some of you have a very poor estimation of what God's voice is. God tells you to be baptized in honour of your Lord and Master ; He speaks to you, and He tells you to come round His table, and to remember His dying sufferings ; but you do not think much of it ; it seems to be lost upon you. But let me tell you, that God's voice of command is as full of majesty, and ought to be as much regarded by His people as His word of promise or His word of doctrine. Whenever He speaks there is a majesty about His voice, whatever tone He may adopt. Ah ! beloved, and there are times coming when God will speak words which will be evidently full of majesty—when He will speak and say, " Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment." There will be majesty in that voice ; for Hades shall then be unlocked, and the gates of the grave sawn in twain ; the spirits of the dead shall again be clothed with flesh, and the dry bones shall be made alive once more. And He will speak by-and-by, and summon all men to stand before His bar ; and there will be majesty in His voice then, when He shall say, " Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you " ; and oh ! dread thought, there will be tremendous majesty in His voice, when He shall exclaim, " Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Again : God's voice is full of majesty *in all the different degrees of its loudness*. Even in calling there is a difference in the loudness of God's voice ; many of you were called gently to Christ, and you did not seem to hear the thunders of Sinai, like many of God's people ; but whether the voice be loud or soft, it is always full of majesty.

And *in all its mediums* it is full of majesty. God has sometimes chosen the poor to speak His wisdom by. If I go and hear a countryman or an untaught man preach, who makes many mistakes in grammar,

yet if it is God's word that he preaches, it "is full of majesty." And sometimes, when a little child has repeated a text, we have not noticed the child, by reason of the majesty of the voice. In fact, the meaner the instrument employed, the greater the majesty in the voice itself. I have noticed a tendency in many to despise their poorer brethren, members of smaller churches, where there is a more humble minister than one they are in the habit of hearing; but this is all wrong, for God's voice is full of majesty, and He can as well speak by one as the other.

III. In the last place, I must briefly refer to the majesty of God's voice WHEN IT IS REVEALED IN ITS EFFECTS—when it is spoken home to the heart of man. Just look at the Psalm, and let me briefly refer to the facts here mentioned. I shall not understand them naturally, though doubtless, they were so intended by David, but I shall understand them spiritually. As Dr. Hawker remarks, "Doubtless they were intended to set out gracious operations, as well as natural ones."

First, the voice of the Lord is *a breaking* voice. "The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars." The proudest and most stubborn sinner is broken before Him when He speaks. I believe that even the spirit of Voltaire, stubborn as that spirit was, and hard as a millstone, would have been broken in a single instant, if God had but spoken to him; the hardest heart I have here needs only one syllable from God to break it in a moment. I might hammer away to all eternity, but I could not do it; but "the voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon."

In the next place it is a *moving* voice, an overcoming voice. "He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn." Who would ever think of a mountain moving? It stands so fast and firm. But God's voice like His voice in Zerubbabel, speaks to the mountain, and says, "Who art thou, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." There is not a mountain standing in this world that God cannot move away by His voice, whether it be the mountains of Rome, or the mountains of the false prophet, or the mountains of colossal systems of heresy, or infidelity, or idolatry. God has only to speak the word, and the idols shall fall from their thrones, and the firm mountains of priestcraft shall skip like a calf.

In the next place, the voice of God is a *dividing* voice. "The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire"; or, as it should be, "The voice of the Lord cutteth out with flames of fire." You saw the lightning on Friday, and you remarked then, when God's voice was heard, that the flash seemed to part the cloud and divide the sky. Just so with God's word. Where God's word is faithfully preached, and His voice is spiritually heard, it is always a dividing voice. You bring all kinds of different characters into a chapel, and God's word splits them all in twain. It is in this place God divides you. The Son of God holds His throne, and sits in judgment here. It divides men from men; it divides sinners from their sins; it divides sinners from their righteousness; it splits through clouds and darkness; it divides our troubles, breaks a way for us to heaven. In fact, there is nothing that the voice of God cannot divide. It is a dividing voice.

And then, again, the voice of the Lord is such a loud voice, that it is said to shake the wilderness. "The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh." Stand in the middle of a wilderness or a desert, and conceive if you would make anything hear; but when God speaks, His voice ringeth through the wilderness, and startleth the desert itself. Minister of God! you have only to speak God's voice, and you will be heard; if you have only half-a-dozen to hear you, you will be heard further than you know of. None of us can preach a gospel sermon, but it is heard and talked of more than we imagine. Yea, there is not a pious conversation with a poor woman but may be carried all over the world, and produce the most wonderful effects. Nobody can tell how loud is God's voice, and how far it may be heard. "Lift up thy voice; lift it up; be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah Behold your God." And your voice may be ever so weak, and your ability ever so little: only lift it up, and God Almighty, by His grace, may make the very wilderness to shake, yea, He may make the very wilderness of Kadesh to tremble.

And then in the ninth verse there is another idea, which I must not pass over, although I might have preferred to do so, possibly. "The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve." By this I understand what the ancients believed—that so affrighted were the hinds by the noise of the thunder, that the period of calving was often hastened on, and frequently prematurely. It is just so with God's voice. If a man has in him a desire towards Christ, the voice of God makes him bring forth that desire, to the joy and rejoicing of his soul. And very frequently, when a man has a bad design towards God, God has only to speak, and his design becomes abortive. It is brought forth, as it were, before its time, and falls like an untimely fruit to the ground. Whatever man has within him, God can make it come out of him in a single moment: if he has a desire towards God, God can bring forth that desire, and He can bring forth the soul, and make it alive; and if it be a desire against God, God can frustrate that desire, kill it, overwhelm it, and overthrow it; for "the voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve."

And in the next place, the voice of God is *a discovering voice.* It "discovereth the forests." The trees were your former hiding-place; but in the forest, however thick it may be, there doth the lightning gleam; and under the mighty trees, however thick their covering, the voice of the Lord is heard. God's voice is a discovering voice. You hypocrites! you get hiding yourselves under the trees of the forest; but God's voice thundereth after you when it speaks. Some of you get hiding under ceremonies, good lives, resolutions, and hopes; but God's voice will discover the forests; and recollect, there will be a day with some of you, when you will hide yourselves, or seek to do it, under rocks and mountains, or in the deepest parts of the forests; but when He sits upon His throne, the voice of the Lord will discover the forests. Ye may stand under the old oak, or creep within its trunk, and feel that there you are hidden; but His eyes like balls of fire, shall see you through and through, and His voice, like a voice of thunder, shall say, "Come forth, culprit; come forth, man; I can see thee;

> 'Mine eye can pierce the shades, and find thy soul as soon
> In midnight's darkness as in blazing noon.'

Come forth, come forth!" And vain then will be thy disguises, vain thy subterfuges. "The voice of the Lord discovereth the forests." Oh! I would to God that He would speak to some of you this morning, and discover your souls! I wish He would discover

to you your lost and hopeless condition; that you are damned without Christ, every one of you! Oh that He would discover to you how horrible is your position, considered apart from the Saviour; discover to you the fallacy of all your legal hope, and all your experiences, if they are not experiences allied to Christ! I pray that He would discover to you that all your good works will come tumbling on your head at last, if you build them for a house, and that you must stand surrounded by no covering, but unveiled before the God who discovers the forests.

I would have preached to you this morning; but I cannot. Yet, perhaps, amidst the multitude of my words there may be some still small voice of God, which shall reach your hearts. And if the rest of you should despise it, what of that? The voice of God will be as full of majesty in the reprobate as in the elect; and if ye be cast away into hell, God shall get as much glory from the voice which ye heard and which ye despised, as He does from His voice which the elect heard, and at which they trembled and fled to God. Do not think that your damnation will rob God of any of His honour. Why, sirs, He can be as much glorified in your destruction as in your salvation. You are but little creatures in the account of His glory. He can magnify Himself anyhow. Oh! humble yourselves, therefore, before God; bow down yourselves before His love and His mercy; and hear now what the plan of salvation is, whereby God brings out His elect. It is this: "He that believeth," in that voice, that Word, that Son of His; "He that believeth,"—not he that heareth; "He that believeth,"—not he that talketh; "He that believeth,"—not merely he that hopeth; "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." Ah! hearers, if I could leap out of my body, and could lay aside the infirmities of my spirit, methinks that then I might preach to you; but I know right well that even then it must be God that speaks; and therefore I leave the words: My God! My God! Save these my people; for Jesus' precious name's sake. Amen and Amen.

SINGING SAINTS

"Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."—Psalm xxx. 4.

DAVID had been very seriously ill, and the Lord had graciously restored him to health. He says, "O Lord my God, I cried unto Thee, and Thou hast healed me. O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit." As soon as he has recovered his health and strength the holy instincts of the man lead him to praise the Lord. The first thing to do, when the throat is clear after an illness, is to sing praises to God; the first thing to do, when the eyes are brightened again, is to look up to the Lord with thankfulness and gratitude. Some people need to be told this, but the Psalmist did not, it came to him as a matter of course. Now that he was restored, he would take his place amongst the heavenly choristers, and sing unto Jehovah; he was not satisfied to sing alone, what child of God is? Among the birds in the springtime, when the first one wakes in the morning, and begins to sing, does he not call up his fellows? Is not his song an invitation to all the feathered songsters of the grove to join with him, and pour out their united harmony? In like manner, it is characteristic of a praiseful heart that it naturally desires society in praise. We do not like to praise God alone; we can do it, and we will do it if we must; but our heart often cries aloud to our brethren and sisters in Christ, "Praise *ye* the Lord." Our very "Hallelujah" is intended to stir up others to this holy exercise, for it means, "Praise ye the Lord."

My one desire, just now, is that those of us who have received special mercy from God should praise His name, and then that all the rest, if there be any who have not received such remarkable mercies as others of us have, should also feel exhorted to join in the sacred song of thankfulness unto our God.

This is a duty which is pleasant; there is nothing more delightful than to sing praises unto the Lord. It is also a duty that is profitable; it will be as blessed to yourself as it will be pleasing to God. Singing has a curative effect upon many of the maladies of the soul; I am sure that it lightens the burdens of life, and I was about to say that it shortens the weary way of duty if we can but sing as we travel along it. This holy employment is pleasant and profitable, and it is preparatory for another world and a higher state. I like to sing with Dr. Watts,—

> "I would begin the music here,
> And so my soul should rise:
> Oh for some heavenly notes to bear
> My passions to the skies!"

We are on the way to glory, so let us sing as we journey thither; and as the lark, ascending up to heaven's gate, sings as she soars, her wings keeping time with her music, and mounting in her song as she rises through the air, so let it be with us,—every day a psalm, every night a day's march nearer home, a little nearer to heaven's music, and a little better imitation of it. Let us sing now, in our hearts if not with our lips; and when the time comes, let us join our lips with our hearts, and sing unto the Lord. That is our text, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."

It strikes me that our text is very suitable for a communion Sabbath evening. We are about to gather at this table whereon are spread the memorials of our Saviour's death, and there are three things about the text which make me think it a very proper one for such an occasion. They are, first, *the peculiar fitness of the exhortation to our present engagement:* "Sing unto the Lord." Secondly, *the special suitability of the subject for our meditation:* "The remembrance of His holiness." Then, thirdly, *the admirable suitability of the company invited to join in the song,* for they are the same people who are invited to sit down at the table: "Sing unto the

Lord, O ye *saints* of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."

I. So, first, let us consider THE PECULIAR FITNESS OF THE EXHORTATION TO OUR PRESENT ENGAGEMENT: "Sing unto the Lord."

You are to come to the table where you remember your Saviour's death, where you are to feed upon the memorials of His passion. Come thither with a heart prepared for song. "Oh!" says one, "I thought I had better come with tears." Yes, come with tears; they will be very sweet to Christ if you let them fall upon His feet to wash them with your penitential streams. "Oh, sir!" says another, "I thought that surely I must come with deep solemnity." So you must, woe be unto you if you come in any other way; but do you know of any divorce between solemnity and joy? I do not. Levity is akin to sorrow, and soon curdles into it; the laugh is but superficial, and just below the surface lies the sigh. But he who is calmly, quietly, soberly thoughtful, is the man in whom there may be deeps of joy which can never be fathomed. There is a little shallow joy that goes prattling over the pebbles of the brook, and is soon gone. I invite you not to that sort of mirth, but to that deep solemn joy which godly men feel, and which can be fittingly expressed in holy song. "Sing unto the Lord." That is no froivlous music. "Sing unto the Lord." That is no ballad or ditty; it is a psalm, deep, solemn, and profound, and the joy of it is great. "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His."

"Still," you say to me, "we do not quite see the suitability of singing at this communion-table." Well, then, if you do not, I think you soon will, for I remind you that, at this table, we celebrate *a work accomplished*. Solomon said, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." The joy is not in the sowing, but in the reaping. Our Lord bids us put bread and wine upon the table to show that His work is finished by His death. There is the bread, and there is the wine; they are distinct and separate. They indicate the flesh and the blood, but the blood separate from the flesh,—a sure mark that death has taken place. It is Christ's death that we celebrate by this communion, and that death has written across it these words, "It is finished." He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do, and therefore He gave up the ghost. I do rejoice that Christ's death is an accomplished fact. We have sung, in plaintive tones, with an almost bleeding heart, the sad story of the cross, and nails, and spear, and thorn-crown, and it has been a sweet relief to us when the poet has led us to sing,—

> "No more the bloody spear,
> The cross and nails no more,
> For hell itself shakes at His name,
> And all the heavens adore."

It is an infinite satisfaction to us that—

> "The head that once was crown'd with thorns,
> Is crown'd with glory now."

All the shame and sorrow are done with, all that is over; and we come to this table to eat this bread, and to drink of this cup, in memory of a glorious work, an unrivalled work, a work which cost the Saviour His life, but a work that is complete and perfect, and accepted of God. Talk of the labours of Hercules? What are these compared with the toil of the Christ of God? Talk of the conquests of Cæsar? What are these beside the victories of Christ, who hath led captivity captive, and received gifts for men? Beloved, I think that no music can be too loud, too pleasant, too joyous, as we gather about this table, and say one to another, "We are celebrating the full accomplishment of that which Jesus undertook to do when He was born at Bethlehem, when He lived at Nazareth, when He sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane, and died on the cross at Calvary." Therefore, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His."

I think I see another reason also why we should come to this table with holy song, and that is, not only because of a work accomplished, but because of *a result realised*, at least in a measure. Look ye, sirs. Instead of flesh, I see bread; instead of blood, I see wine. I know that the bread and the wine are symbols of the flesh and the blood, but I know also that they are something more; they are not only symbols of the things themselves, but also of that which comes out of those things. This is what I mean. This day, because Christ has died, a table is spread for the starving souls of men. God keeps open house; like a great King, He sets His table in the street, and sends out His servants, and bids them invite the hungry, the poor, the needy, the thirsty, to come and eat and drink and be satisfied; and inasmuch as, maddened and besotted by their sin, they will not come, He adds this command, "Compel them to come in, that My house may be filled." And, brothers and sisters, when you and I gather round this table, if we have indeed come to Christ spiritually, He sees in us a part of the reward of His sufferings. The festival has been going on these eighteen hundred years, relays of guests have been continually feasting at the table of the great King, who says, "My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed," and His guests are still coming, myriads of them, who must all have died if they had not lived by feeding upon Christ, who must all have been lost if they had not been saved by the precious blood of Jesus. They are coming still, and our prophetic eye sees, in the companies that are gathering together this Sabbath all over the world, the vanguard of a mightier host that no man can number, out of every nation, and kindred, and tribe, and people, and tongue. Wherefore, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His." The very setting up of the communion-table, and the gathering of men and women to it that they may spiritually feast upon their dying Lord, is a reason for thankfulness.

There is, in the third place this reason why some of us should sing unto the Lord, for here is *a blessing enjoyed*. Not only are many coming in various parts of the world, and feeding spiritually upon the flesh and blood of the Crucified, but it is a special joy that you and I also are here. I am glad, dear brother, that you are here; it is a great joy to me that my brother in the flesh should be here, and it is a great delight that many of you with whom I have lived so long in happy fellowship should be here; but I could not afford not to be here myself. If I had to go away at the close of the service, and leave you to commune with the Lord, and I had no part nor lot in the matter, I should have to miss an exceeding great joy. You who love the Lord, will you look back to the days when you did not know Him, but when you longed to know Him? There was a time when you sighed and cried for Him, and if anybody had said to you, "You will sit with the great company

at the communion in the Tabernacle on such a night, and the Lord Jesus will be very precious to you, and your heart will be brimming over with delight," you would have said, " I am afraid that is too good to be true, I cannot expect it ever to be my case." There was a time with me when, if I might but have been the least dog under Christ's table, and have picked up the crumbs, and the stale crusts, and the bones that others despised, I would have licked His feet for very joy. Yet now, lo! here I sit among His children, and am one of them, and have the pleasure of passing to you, my brothers and sisters, the sweet dainties which He puts on the table, and if you do not sing, I must; if none of you will sing, I shall have to sing alone, I cannot help it. But I believe that each one of you feels the same wonder, delight, and gratitude to think that you also are here.

There is yet another matter to sing about in coming to this table, for this communion reminds us of *a hope revived.* What said the apostle Paul concerning this ordinance? " As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." This is one of the tokens which our Lord has given us that He will come again; in effect, He says, " Eat that bread, drink of that cup, and I will be coming nearer and nearer every time that you thus assemble around My table." Well now, if you did not sing last time, you ought to sing at the thought that Jesus is coming again. He has not gone away for ever; according to the Scripture, He has not gone for long. Every hour brings Him nearer, and it cannot now be very long before He will be back again. Remember what the two men in white apparel said to the disciples, " This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come "—literally and personally,— " in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." As surely as Jesus lives, His feet will stand in the latter day upon Mount Olivet, and He will come to reign among His ancients gloriously. This second coming of our Lord, not as a sin-offering, not in shame and humiliation, but in all the glory of His Father and of His holy angels, makes us smite together with a joyous clash the high-sounding cymbals. We already anticipate the final triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ, when all His enemies shall bow before Him. It will be, it shall be, and this supper is the memorial that it certainly shall so be; therefore, " Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His."

I think I have given good proof that this exhortation well befits our present engagement.

II. Now, secondly, dear friends, notice THE SPECIAL SUITABILITY OF THE SUBJECT FOR OUR MEDITATION: " Give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."

It needs a holy man to give thanks at the remembrance of a holy God. Sinners hate holiness because they dread holiness; but the saints love holiness because they have no cause to dread it, and because, on the other hand, it has become a fountain of comfort and joy to them.

I want you, at this table, to think, first, of *divine holiness vindicated.* God loved us, brothers, and He wished to save us; but even to save us He would not be unjust. His great heart was full of love, but even to indulge that heart of love He would not suffer His righteous law to be dishonoured, nor His moral government to be impaired. Men talk sometimes of God's punishing sin as if it were a freak with Him. It is a necessity: it is imprinted upon the very existence of moral beings that holiness must bring happiness, and unholiness must bring sorrow, and God will not reverse what He has so properly ordained to be the everlasting order of things. God must be just, and He could not therefore wink at human guilt, and pass it by. What, then, must be done? He Himself, in the person of His dear Son,—for never forget that God the Father gave His only-begotten and well-beloved Son,—He Himself, in the person of His dear Son, came into this world, assumed our nature, and in that nature became the Representative of His people, and as their Representative He took upon Himself their sins; and being found with their sins imputed to Him, God dealt with our sin as laid upon Him. He found it there, and He smote it there, and because of our sin Jesus bled, and Jesus died; and now, when we come into a state of peace with God, it is not over the ruins of a broken law, it is not over the shivered tables which Moses broke at the foot of the mount, but we come to the holy God in a holy way. Sinners are forgiven in a righteous way, the unjust are reckoned as just in a just fashion; there is not, in the salvation of a sinner, any keeping back or veiling of the justice of God. He is just, yet He is the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. I love this glorious truth; it seems to me to be the charm of mercy in Christ that it is righteous mercy. This is the quintessence of delight that, when the saint gets to heaven, he will be as rightly there as the sinner in hell will be rightly there. There will be as much of the divine holiness seen in the salvation of the dying thief as in the damnation of that other thief who perished in his sin. So let us, as we come to the Lord's table, " give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." We are going to commune with a God who, even that He might commune with us, and indulge His love to His chosen, would not break His own law, or do that which, on the strictest judgment, could be regarded as unjust. I do rejoice in that unquestionable fact, and my heart is glad as I remind you of it.

And, next, let us give thanks at the remembrance of *Christ's holiness declared.* It is a happy occupation to look upon the perfect character of our dear Redeemer. If there could have been found a fault or flaw in Him, He would not have been a suitable Substitute for us. If He had committed a single sin, He could not have taken our sins upon Him, nor could He have put them away. Think, then, as you sit at this table, what a pure Christ He was, what a perfect man as well as perfect God, what a spotless character He possessed, and then, inasmuch as this was absolutely necessary to the completeness of the atonement which you celebrate at this table, " give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." I think I see Him coming in before us, in His snow-white garments, girt with the golden girdle, with a face that for purity and brightness looks like the sun when it shineth in its strength; and I fall down, and admire and adore, not only His mercy, and His meekness, and His charity, but the perfect holiness of my Redeemer and Lord. As you come to the table, beloved, give thanks at the remembrance of the holiness of Him who sits at the head of the feast,—the Lord Jesus Himself, who passes you the cup, and says to you, " Drink ye all of it," and who breaks the bread, and says, " Take, eat: this is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance

of Me." "Give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."

I think also that it will be quite congruous with our present engagement if we think of *God's holiness as the guarantee of our salvation.* This may seem a striking thing to say, but it is assuredly true. Blessed be the righteous God! It is upon the righteousness of God that we rest our hope, after all. If God can lie, then not one promise of His is to be trusted. If God can do an unrighteous thing, then His covenant may be flung to the winds. But God is not unrighteous to forget the work of His dear Son, and "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." He who has pledged His word to you saying, "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels," will keep that pledge inviolate, and you shall be there. He who hath said, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me," will keep His promise, and you shall never be ashamed. You, poor sinners, when you first come to Christ, look to God's mercy, and trust to it, and you do quite rightly; but after you have been a little while with Christ, and begin to know the Father through knowing the Son, you come to "give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." You see that, at the back of His mercy, as the very foundation and pillar of His grace, there stands His righteousness. Beloved, as we come to the table of communion, we give thanks at the remembrance of a hope that is grounded upon the righteousness of God, and we therefore sing praises unto His holy name.

Once more. I think that, at this table, we may give thanks that *the holiness of God is our mark*, the object for us to aim at, aye, and that to which we shall one day attain. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." I sometimes ask our young friends, when they come to join the church, whether they are perfect; and they open their eyes, and look at me and say, "Oh, no; far from it!" Then, when I ask, "Would you like to be perfect?" their eyes sparkle with delight, as much as to say, "Why, that is the heaven we are looking for, to be absolutely free from sin! We would not mind sorrow, sickness, pain, persecution, or anything of that sort, so long as we could but get rid of sin."

"If sin be pardon'd, I'm secure;" and if sin be conquered, I am perfectly happy. This will be the case with all believers one of these days, but not here. Of all the people whom I have ever met with, who have told me that they were perfect, I can say that I was morally certain they were not; they had only to talk for about five minutes, and they proved their own imperfection. But, beloved, we shall be perfect one day. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." He has you now like an unfinished vessel on the potter's wheel; you are in the clay state, and the great Potter is putting His finger on you, and moulding you. You are not half-finished yet, but He will never throw you away; He does not begin to make a vessel unto honour, and then cease His work, but He perfects that which He begins; and, one of these days, you and I shall stand together as a part of the perfected work of God of which even He shall say, "It is very good." Wherefore, when we come to this table, though we come sighing over our own imperfections, let us come singing because of the holiness of God, that holiness which we shall yet share.

"O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God."

The children shall yet bear the image of their Father, the brethren shall yet be conformed unto the glories of the First-born; wherefore, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."

III. Lastly, the text is very appropriate for the communion because of THE SUITABILITY OF THE PEOPLE of whom it speaks, for they are the same people who ought to come to this table: "Sing unto the Lord, O ye *saints* of His."

First, then, those who come to this table should be "*saints*." "Ah!" says one, "that is what I called a person this afternoon,—'one of your saints.'" I suppose you thought it was an ugly name, did you not? Well, you are perfectly welcome to call me by that name if you like, only I wish that you would prove the title to be true. "There," said one to a Christian man, as he shoved him in the gutter, "take that, John Bunyan!" What did the other man say? Why, he picked up his hat, and said, "You may fling me into the gutter again if you call me by that name, I am so perfectly satisfied to take the compliment." You call a man a "saint," and then think you have done him an ill turn? Why do you not call him a nobleman? Why do you not call him a peer of the realm? For many of your noblemen, your peers of the realm, are poor stuff compared with the "saints." I would sooner be a saint than be an emperor, or all the emperors rolled into one. A "saint"—why, it is a glorious title! "Oh!" says one, "I mean Cromwell's saints." Do you? Well, they were not a bad sort of saints, after all, whether you try them by the strength of their arms in the day of battle, or by the strength of their lungs when they sang, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered," and shouted in Jehovah's name in the midst of battle, or when they went back to their tents, and knelt in prayer, and communed with the Most High. But I do not mean Cromwell's saints, and I am not going to talk more about them; but I do say that this is what every Christian man ought to be, a "saint." It means a holy person, one who aims at being holy, one who is set apart for the service and glory of God. These are the people who are to give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness, because God has made them holy, too. They are partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust, and so they are saints, and they are the people who ought to come to the table of the Lord.

But notice that they are not only saints, but they are "saints *of His*." That is to say, they are *God's saints;* not Rome's saints, but God's saints; they might be Cromwell's saints, but, better than that, they are God's saints. "O ye saints of *His*." That is to say, they are saints of His making, for they were great sinners till He made saints of them; and they are saints of His keeping, for they would soon be sinners again if He did not keep them. They are saints enlisted in His service, sworn to serve under His banner, to be faithful to Him unto death. They are "saints of *His*," that is, they are saints whom He purchased with His precious blood, and whom He means to have as His for ever because He has bought them with so great a price. They are saints who shall be with Him in that day when He shall appear with all His holy ones. Then,

" Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His." If God has made you holy if you belong to Christ, and so are holy, let your hearts sing; fling away your doubts, cast away your fears, forget your sorrows: " Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His."

Further, those people who are spoken of in the text, the kind of people who ought to come to the communion-table, are *God's thankful saints.* They " give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." The man who has not thanks to give ought not to be at the table of the Lord, for it is called the Eucharist which signifies the giving of thanks. It is intended to be a giving of thanks from beginning to end. Jesus took the bread, and gave thanks; after the same manner also, He took the cup, and gave thanks. So, " Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks." If ye would come aright to the table of the Lord, we must be thankful saints.

Then, lastly, those who come to the Lord's table should be *singing saints.* " May not mourning saints come? " Oh, yes! come and welcome, but learn to sing. " May not weak and feeble saints come? " Oh, yes! but let them not remain weak and feeble. " May not groaning saints come? " Yes, they may come if they like; but groaning is out of place when you have your head on Christ's bosom, and have His flesh and His blood to feed upon; it should stop all your groans and moans when you once begin to feast on Him. I wish that more of God's people would take to singing; I have known some few who were truly singing saints. I recollect quite an old gentleman in my very young days. The first thing he did, when he rose in the morning, was to sing a hymn while he was washing and dressing. When he came downstairs, the family knew by his singing that he was about. When he went into the street, he used to hum some little bit of a ditty, and the people laughed, and said that old Father So-and-so was always singing. You could never put the good old man out, for as soon as he finished one hymn he began another, and if anybody stopped him so that he could not sing, he only waited till he could start again, and all the while he kept going over it silently in his heart.

We have not enough singing saints. The other Sunday morning, I noticed that there was a lifeboat crew over at the farther end of the Tabernacle, and one brother began saying " Amen! " as soon as ever I commenced to pray. Somebody stopped him, and I cannot say that I felt very sorry for my own sake and the congregation generally; but after the service was over, he and his mates said that they enjoyed the preaching, but what a dead lot of people we were here! He was a red-hot Methodist, accustomed to cry out " Glory! " and " Hallelujah! " so he could not make you people out. One of my friends said to me, " If I had not said, ' Hallelujah! ' the other Sunday morning, I must have burst altogether." I like people to get into that condition; and if sometimes they should burst the silence, and cry, " Glory! " why, it is better than that they should burst, at any rate! It is a great mercy that they do feel their hearts so full that they are ready to burst. People express their praise and delight spontaneously concerning far less things than the joys of God, and the privileges of His people; therefore, " Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." Now you must finish my sermon for me by standing up and singing,—

" All hail the power of Jesus' name!
Let angels prostrate fall:
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all."

DAVID'S HOLY WONDER AT THE LORD'S GREAT GOODNESS

" Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men! "—Psalm xxxi. 19.

YOU will observe in reading this Psalm, that David was in deep distress; these are the words of his lamentation: " My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel." In this forlorn condition he found consolation by turning his contemplations away from his present trouble to the goodness of his God, even as a mariner turns the helm, and so escapes the rock. Herein he was wise, and instructed us to be wise also. To ruminate upon our sorrows is but to increase them; to turn them over, and over, and over again, is but to express from them the bitterest drops which they contain. The more the turbid pool is stirred, the blacker will it become. Relieve your thoughts, then! Trade in another market! Let your minds exchange the pressing dolour for sustaining consolation; and what can be better, what nobler as a theme for inspiring hope, what mightier as a lever for uplifting the mind, than reflection upon the amazing goodness of God?

It has been said by a great physician, that when persons find much difficulty in sleeping, they have sometimes been able to win the embrace of " tired nature's sweet restorer," by fixing their minds upon a single sublime subject, a grand absorbing topic, a master-theme for thought. As soon as the mind has been thoroughly absorbed in contemplation, it has been at rest, and the body has rested too. I know not how that may be, but certainly, when God would give " His beloved sleep " in times of distraction, and would lull their souls into a calm repose, there is no better sleeping-draught which His hand can administer to the troubled spirit than a meditation upon the amazing goodness of the

Lord our God. Or, to change the metaphor, we know that when young lads first go to sea, if they have before been unaccustomed to climb to elevated places, they are apt to grow dizzy when called to perform their duties on the mast; then the experienced captain instructs them to "*look up*," for, if they look down, and measure timidly the height of the mast, and count the waves as they roll against the sides of the vessel, and terrify their minds with thoughts upon the heaving of the ship, and the terrors of falling from their hold, they are most likely to fall; but, looking to the motionless stars, and the calm, blue sky, the brain grows calm, and the foot maintains its standing. We would say, then, to any who are tossed upon the sea of trouble to-night, imitate the example of David, and "look up." Turn away your minds from the slanderer and the persecutor; forget awhile the fever and the want, and remember the loving-kindness of Jehovah. You may find it almost impossible to keep your minds always tending upwards, but at any rate, while you are here, "look up" with eyes uplifted to the hills whence cometh your help. Happy will it be for you, if by the good Spirit of God you can but get the eye so fixed upon the goodness of God now, that you shall become so fascinated, that your attention cannot be taken off that glorious object; it will be a blessing to you, a great blessing which will bear you through all your trials, and make you suck honey from the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.

Now, note the text carefully, David thought of the goodness of God till he was lost in wonder, and being quite unable to express his feelings, he uttered an exclamation, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness!" We will consider, first, *the subject of holy wonder mentioned in the text;* secondly, *the partakers of this divine goodness;* then, thirdly, *we shall note some general matters which tend to enhance our admiration of the goodness of God;* and, fourthly, *notice sundry teachings which flow from the whole subject.*

I. In the first place, observe in the text THE SUBJECT OF HOLY WONDER—"Thy goodness."

We here perceive God's goodness in a twofold aspect, as laid up in store and already displayed in a measure, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast *laid up!*" and secondly, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast *wrought* before the sons of men!"

I. We shall devoutly take the first of these. David is astonished at *the great goodness of God which is laid up;* the goodness of God which David had not as yet tasted, had not actually received, but which his faith realised, and looked upon as its fixed and settled heritage. The spirit of our text is that of Miss Waring's delightful hymn, in which she exclaims—

> "And a 'new song' is in my mouth,
> To long-loved music set;
> Glory to Thee for all the grace
> I have not tasted yet."

We magnify the Lord for the grace which is yet to come; the laid up goodness; the corn that is in the granary, which the good Joseph is keeping till the time of famine comes; the water which is but just bubbling from the spring, and has not yet come streaming down to the plain, where our thirst will by-and-by require it. Now think, Christian, of what God has laid up for them that fear Him! First, how much He laid up *in His eternal purpose*, when He chose His people, and laid up for them the grand intention, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I make up My jewels." Think of electing love, and of all the consequences which well up from that eternal fountain head. Here you have a subject for a life-long wonder—

> "Father, 'twas Thy love that knew us
> Earth's foundation long before.
> That same love to Jesus drew us
> By its sweet constraining power,
> And will keep us
> Safely now, and evermore.
>
> God of love, our souls adore Thee!
> We would still Thy grace proclaim,
> Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
> And in glory praise Thy name
> Hallelujah!
> Be to God and to the Lamb!

Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thine eternal purpose ordained and settled upon Thy saints by an everlasting entail that it should be theirs, for so Thou hadst decreed it, according to the counsel of Thine own most wise and sovereign will. How great is Thy goodness that Thou shouldst choose us, and predestinate us to be conformed into the image of Thy Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren, and we the happy brethren who should be transformed into His likeness.

How great is the goodness of God, *which He laid up in the covenant of grace!* He determined to bless us in a way of covenant relationship, into which He entered on our behalf with our federal Head, the Lord Jesus. To attempt, my dear brethren, to read to you the treasures which God has made over to us in the covenant of grace, were to attempt an impossibility. The catalogue is far too comprehensive. Behold, He has given all things to you in the covenant of His eternal love, for all things are yours, whether things present or things to come—life and death, time and eternity; nay, more, God Himself is yours! "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." The Father is *your* Father; the Son of God is *your* Brother; the Spirit of God is *your* Comforter, who abides with you for ever. In that golden casket of the covenant of grace, all the wealth of the Eternal is stored up for the chosen. David laid up in store for the temple, but Jesus has treasured up far more for His Church; Jacob gave to Joseph one portion above his brethren, but our heavenly Father has given to all the family an inheritance surpassing all conception. Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, can fully estimate the infinite wealth of blessedness laid up in the everlasting covenant.

Think, too, of what God has laid up *in the person of His Son*—the same treasure, only now more clearly revealed to us, and brought forth in the person of the well-beloved, so that we may the more readily partake of it. In the ark of old, there were laid up the golden pot of manna and sundry other marvellous things, but what is there laid up in the ark of our covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ? Beloved, there is laid up in Him all things that are necessary for you. Pardon for all your sins; justification through faith in His sacrifice; life through His death; sanctifying power is in the blood of Jesus; your preservation is in Christ's hands; your acceptance

depends upon Him; a daily intercession goes up from the heart of your Lord Jesus on your behalf, and He constantly represents you before the golden throne. All that you can want, for the whole journey from the place where you now are right up to the right hand of the Most High—all this is laid up for you. "Ye are complete in Him." "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell," If you fear Him and trust Him, though meanest of all His people, yet all needful grace and promised glory is laid up for you in the person, and work, and offices, and relationships of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And think, beloved, of what is laid up for you *in the work, and office, and mission of the Holy Spirit.* You have not yet realised what the Holy Spirit can do. You have been regenerated by Him; you have been made to pass from death unto life; you have been taught somewhat of the truth—He has revealed some of the things of God unto you; you have been somewhat illuminated, somewhat strengthened, somewhat comforted, somewhat assisted in prayer, but none of you are aware of all that the Holy Spirit can do. When we see some men who have become eminent in grace, when we read their heavenly biographies, and observe how they walked with God, and seemed to live a life above the common lot of earth-born mortals, we should remember that they enjoyed no monopoly of grace; the bread on which they fed is common to all the household: whatever grace the best of men have had, you may have as much and more. When we measure the abundance of divine power in the Holy Spirit by what we see in eminent martyrs, confessors, apostles, and saints, we may cry with the Psalmist, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee!" How happy, how blessed, how holy, might believers be if they would but come and receive out of the fulness of the Spirit's power. Do not imagine, my beloved friends, that the standard of your attainment is the maximum of a Christian. Do not consider that you have obtained all that God is willing to bestow. "Ye are not straitened in Him, but ye are straitened in your own bowels." There are loftier degrees of sanctification, there is a more eminent nearness of communion than the most of us are aware of. The laid-up treasures in the Holy Spirit are probably vastly greater than any of us have ever been enabled to conceive.

I shall pause but a moment, to observe, that the greatest goodness of all, we sometimes think, but perhaps improperly, is *that goodness which is to be revealed when this life is over, which God has laid up for them that fear Him.* I am not sure that this is the greatest, since eternal love itself, as a cause already given, is greater than the effect which is to follow. Courage, my brethren! The night lasts not for ever: the morning cometh. See you not the day star? Do you not see the hind of the morning leaping over the hills of darkness? The Lord Jesus Christ has said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Now, whatever may be the splendours of the millennial reign, we shall share in them; and I confess that the Word of God seems to me to reveal much of coming glory, but to reveal it in such a manner that it is not possible for any of us to cast it into a mould, and to say, with decisive certainty, "That is just what the prophecy means." The glory that cometh is too excessive for us to point to details. It is a blaze that might well blind those who seek to look upon it, and count the flashing beams. But there is a glory coming, such as the world never saw, and a kingdom which will swallow up all other kingdoms as Aaron's rod swallowed up the rods of the pretenders. There is a glory to come that shall be brighter than the glory of the sun, though that sun should flash forth with the light of seven days. A glory cometh which excelleth and endureth, and in this believers shall all of them have their share. I am inclined to think that they do err from the truth, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows, who teach that some of God's people will be shut out from this glory. There is nothing which God will give to some of His people which He will not give to all His people. They shall all be with Christ where He is, that they may behold His glory. They shall all have a share, and I think an equal share too, in all the excellent things which God has laid up for them that fear Him. Whatever those things may be, and surely the most glowing language fails to picture them, they are all too rich and rare for words, we can say of them, without fear, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness!"

Then ponder well the glories of *the eternal state.* Think of

> "Jerusalem the golden,
> With milk and honey blest."

Let your faith bear you on its wings to the bejewelled city where

> "They stand, those halls of Zion,
> Conjubilant with song,
> And bright with many an angel,
> And all the martyr throng."

Those many mansions, the haven of rest, the shrine of holiness, the home of happiness, the summit of perfection, the abode of love, the royal palace, the throne of the great King. Long ye not to soar? Pant ye not for the better country? Do not heart and voice feel the sweet oppression of too much anticipated joy? Is it not a relief to cry, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, *which Thou* hast *laid up* for them that fear Thee"?

Let us, dear friends, before we leave this subject, *rejoice in what God has laid up.* It is a pity that we should rejoice in nothing but our own experience, for this will sadly narrow the sphere of our praise. Our experience may be very slender as yet, but we should rejoice in what is laid up. If I cannot rejoice in what I am, I will rejoice in what I shall be; remembering the precious thought, that "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." If I cannot rejoice in what I have in the hand of experience, yet will I glory in that which I can grasp with the hand of faith; for even now it is mine, though it is laid up till I reach my majority, and have come to years when I shall be fit to receive it.

2. Now we must note that it is not all laid up. It is not all light that is sown for the righteous. We have some wheat that has grown up and yielded sheaves. There are some treasures which we enjoy now, and therefore we find David saying, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, *which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!*" The last few words look in our translation as if they belonged to the words, "Them that trust Thee," but this is not the correct reading. There are certain

reasons which render it necessary to read the sentence thus—"Which Thou hast wrought before the sons of men for them that trust Thee."

Now, God has wrought out many marvellous things for us before the sons of men. I will not stay long, for your thoughts are often there, upon *that which Christ wrought out before the sons of men in Gethsemane's sweat and blood, in Gabbatha's scourging, in Golgotha's death.* Wrought out! Ah! indeed, He wrought out and brought in an everlasting righteousness. He hath perfected for ever them that are set apart. That one sacrifice of His secured the perfect salvation of all for whom He died as a surety. What did He not work out then! "It is finished!" said He, and He knew what He said. He knew that He had wrought out, there and then, the perfect redemption of every one of His people.

But we may remind you to-night of *what God has wrought out for you in your experience in the work of the Holy Spirit upon your soul.* Do not forget, doubting Christian, that there was a time when you had not grace enough to doubt. Do not forget, poor trembling one, that there was a time when you had not life enough to tremble. Be thankful, then for the little grace which you can perceive in yourself. Do not hide from your eyes what God has done. Be grateful for what you have. Remember what I have often said to you—be thankful for the starlight, and you will get moonlight; be thankful for the moonlight, and your God will send you sunlight. We must prize the smallest degree of grace. We often neglect what we have, and bemoan ourselves much because we are not perfect—though there is a measure in which we are to do that; but it were well not to do this too much or too exclusively. We must think of what God has done and be grateful and bless His name, and then be encouraged in faith to ask for more. Blessed be God, with a thousand imperfections and faults, still I find in my soul some kindlings of love towards His name. I feel some desire for the promotion of His glory—one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see—I see my sinfulness, see my weakness, see that Christ is just such a Saviour as I want, and I do with my whole heart rely upon Him—shall I not be thankful for this? Is not this far more than nature could have given me? If you can honestly use such language, as I have just uttered in your hearing, be thankful, and in deepest humility rejoice. Be grateful for grace within, and say, "Oh! how great a thing is this, for a dead soul to be made to live; for a filthy soul to be washed in the blood; for a naked soul to be clothed with heavenly righteousness; for a lost sheep to be brought into the fold; for a prodigal to be made to sit at his father's table; oh! how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast wrought out for me, which has taken me away from my evil companions—turned me away from haunts of vice and iniquity, and made me to love what once I hated, and to delight in that which was once dreary and dull to my soul."

But, brethren, we have also another instance of what God has wrought out for us in *the shape of providential mercies.* How great is the goodness of God as shown in what He has wrought out for us in providence! We have all some providences to remember which seem very special *to us*; but all providences are special if we look at them from the right point of view. A certain father had agreed to meet his son at a spot halfway between their residences, which were far removed from each other. When the son reached the half-way house, he said, "Father, I have great reason to bless God, for I have met with a very special providence; my horse stumbled and threw me three times, and yet I was not injured." "Thanks be to God," said the father, "and I have met with a very special providence too, for which I thank God and that is, that my horse never stumbled once, but brought me safely all the way." If you happen to meet with an accident, and are almost killed, you say it is a special providence if you are preserved, but is it not a providence that you go many and many a journey, and no accident befalls you whatever? Let us bless God for the mercies we do not see—the innumerable dangers from which we are preserved; the great needs which are supplied before we know them to be needs; the wants which the Lord our God is pleased to keep from us that we never know them. From childhood up to youth, and on to manhood, what flowers of mercy have bloomed in our pathway; what tender hands have led us; what mighty arms have upheld us; what a watchful eye has been fixed upon us! "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand."

Perhaps you do not perceive any great goodness of God in your particular position, at this present crisis. You are very poor and very lonely. Well, there will be a day, if you are the Lord's child, when you will see superlative love in the lot marked out for you. For the present believe it, and believing it, you have an opportunity of honouring God in your distress which would not be yours if you were in another condition. When you shall know the end as well as the beginning, you will see that it was better for you to have been poor and needy than to have been rich and increased in goods. Meanwhile, count it enough reason for perpetual song that you possess—

> "What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy,
> The soul's calm sunshine, and the heartfelt joy."

There are other respects in which I might have brought out the text, but I prefer to leave each one among you to tune his own harp, and give to his Lord the sweet spontaneous music of a soul aglow with gratitude.

II. I shall now, very briefly, take you to the second point, and that is, THE FAVOURED PERSONS WHO ENJOY THE LORD'S GREAT GOODNESS.

"Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up *for them that fear Thee;* which Thou hast wrought *for them that trust in Thee.*" As you know, the phrase "the fear of God," is used, especially in the Old Testament, for the whole of piety. It does not signify merely the one virtue of fear—it does not signify that feeling at all in the sense of slavish fear—but it takes a wide sweep. The man who had the fear of God before his eyes, was one who believed in God, worshipped God, loved God, was kept back from evil by the thought of God, and moved to good by the desire to please God. The ungodly were the wicked ones, those who had no God. Those who had a godly fear, were found diligently walking in holiness. The fear of God, I say, was the expression used for the whole of religion. Still, fear itself is a very important element in the Christian's character, if it be the right kind of fear. We have nothing to do

with the terror of the bond-slave, for we are free, and "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." Blessed be God, we have no fear of hell. It is not possible for a believer to be there. Talk of casting a believer into hell! As well talk of casting the Redeemer Himself there! It is impossible. We have no fear, even, of losing our standing before God, for we do not stand before Him in ourselves, but in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot fall, finally and fatally, unless Jesus can fall. "Because I live," says He, "ye shall live also." But this is our fear—the fear which a dear child has of a tender father. It is not afraid that its father will kill it, or cease to love it, or banish it, and turn it out of his house. It knows better; it trusts its father too well to indulge in such mischievous suspicions; but because it loves him, it fears to offend him. This is the very atmosphere in which a Christian breathes. He fears God, and consequently desires to keep His commandments.

But you notice the synonym used in the text is "*trust*," and hence it is plain that trust in God is the sum-total of religion. Why is it put so—"Laid up for them that fear Thee; wrought by them that trust in Thee"; unless it be true that he who trusts God, fears God? The whole compass of the fear of God is gathered up into a centre in that point of trust. Why so? Why, my brother, *because trust is the root of true fear.* To trust God is the root of all genuine religion. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Faith is the foundation of all the other graces. Faith unites us vitally to the Lord Jesus Christ, and then from Him, as from the trunk, the sap of grace flows into the branch, and the fruit is produced; but take away faith, and we are separated from Christ, and then there can be no fruit. Hence, because faith is the root, the seed containing the whole of the substance and essence of piety, it is put for the entire fear of God.

Then again, faith, or trust, is the *test of the genuineness of religion.* He whose religion is everything else but trust in God, has no true religion. He may be very precise in ceremonials; he may be exceedingly exact in morality, but if he be relying upon these things, then he has no true trust, and he has no right fear of God. But he who observeth the Lord's will, and at the same time resteth upon God, and upon Him alone, depending upon the precious blood of Jesus as his only confidence, he is the man whose fear of God is such as God can accept; because trust is thus the touchstone of true religion, therefore it is put for the whole thing.

Moreover, *trust is the flower of the fear of God.* After all, the grandest thing that a man can do is to trust God. I should be prepared to prove, if there were time to-night, that there is in trust in God the whole compass of all the other virtues; or, that, to put it in other words, if you will put trust under the conditions necessary, it will educe out of its own loins all the other attributes of the perfect man. Only let a man trust in Christ, and he has done the grandest thing that can be done. The highest morality is to trust Christ. What did the Master Himself say? The Jews asked Him, "What is the work of God?" They wanted to know what was that highest work which man could do that was worthy to be called God's work, the work of God, the highest work and the best; and He said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Jesus Christ, whom He has sent." When you have trusted God, you have done more than they who have kept the ceremonies of the law to the letter. When you have trusted God, you have done more than they who cringe at Moses' feet, and shake and quake before the mountain that was altogether on a smoke. They crawl like slaves, abjectly, at their Master's feet, but you stand up like freeborn sons. You do the Lord far higher homage when you trust His love, His power, His truth, than legalists do with all their toilings and their moilings, their strivings and their workings. The grandest virtue, the very highest point of all excellence, is to trust in God as He reveals Himself in His word.

Now, it appears that the goodness of God is laid up for them that fear Him, and wrought for them that trust Him. Dear hearer, will you ask yourself anxiously whether you do fear God, and further, whether you fear Him in such a way as to have trust in Him? Have you these two indispensable spiritual gifts? Are you believers in Jesus Christ, dear hearers? Some of you are, I know. I rejoice with you that God has brought you into the ark of salvation by the door of faith. But are you all such as shall be saved? There is no salvation except by faith, remember, all other methods are delusions. It is faith in Jesus Christ which brings eternal salvation to you; without this, despair is your portion. If you have not this precious grace, may the Lord bestow upon you the faith which works by love and purifies the soul, that you, believing in Him, may have the power given you to become the sons of God, which power He gives to as many as believe on His name.

III. And now, only two or three words upon the third point, and that is coming back to the first reflection—the greatness of God's goodness to the people who have been described. There are ONE OR TWO THINGS WHICH MAKE US SEE THAT GREATNESS.

First, *observe the multitude of these people.* God's people have been ten thousand times ten thousand in number. They are a "little flock" in comparison with the outside world, but no doubt they shall be at the end "a multitude that no man can number." Now, the goodness of God to any one of them is quite unsearchable, and not to be estimated; but what must be the great goodness which He has laid up for all His people, for all them that fear and trust Him!

> "Great God, the treasures of Thy love
> Are everlasting mines!"

It is no small task to water one garden, in the heat of the summer time, so that every flower shall be refreshed, and no plant overlooked. How great is the might of Him who, from the salt sea, extracts the precious clouds of sweet rain, to fall not only on gardens, but the pastures of the wilderness, and the wild forest trees, till all nature laughs for joy, the mountains and the hills break forth into singing, and the trees of the field clap their hands. Brethren, it is a great thing to put a cup of cold water to the lips of a disciple; it shall not lose its reward. To refresh the bowels of one of God's saints is no mean thing; but how great is God's goodness, which puts a cup of salvation to every Christian's lips, which waters every plant of His right-hand planting, so that every one can have his leaf continually green, and his fruit ever brought forth in due season.

Think again, dear friends, of *the undeservingness of each one of these.* There is not one of those who

feared and trusted Him that was worthy of the least grain of His mercy. They were many of them the chief of sinners—some of them peculiarly so—and yet this goodness, this great goodness, came to them, exemplifying its greatness because of the greatness of their transgressions. Was there aught of worthiness about the prodigal who had devoured his substance with harlots in his riotous living? Was not his prodigality a fire to set off the brightness of the father's love, who said, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found"? When God saved Jonah by the whale which was prepared for him, did He do it because Jonah was deserving of it? Very far from it. He was fleeing from God's presence and the path of duty, and God's goodness to him is thrown out in bold relief by the dark unworthiness of that unfaithful and timid prophet. Well may we say, as we notice our own waywardness and folly, and contrast it with the divine mercy, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness!"

Remember, too, *the need they were in.* You can measure the greatness of the goodness of God by the distance from the place where Adam left his fallen posterity, broken by the fall, to the position at the right hand of Christ, where God's eternal mercy shall place them for ever. Picture to yourself a lazar-house, full of all manner of vile and loathsome diseases, where the deadly fever, and the living-death called leprosy are found. See yon man who enters, braving all the dangers of infection, that he may heal the sick and restore the wretched ones to health and life! How great his goodness! but is that to be compared to the goodness of God's Son, who not only ran the risk, with some chance of escape, but deliberately "was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree" willingly, deliberately, and came of set purpose to die for us.

> "This was compassion like a God,
> That when the Saviour knew
> The price of pardon was His blood,
> His pity ne'er withdrew."

Think, brethren, of the great goodness of God to His saints—and this will help to make it greater—*in contrast to the great evil of man to them.* Some of these saints have died cruel deaths. The most of them have had to pass through obloquy and scorn; but oh! how great is *Thy* goodness which Thou hast wrought in them, sustaining them all, and making them more than conquerors through Him that loved them! David speaks in one of his Psalms of his enemies as besetting him "like bees"; and in another place he says of his God, "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me." Now, how great the divine goodness must have appeared to him in contrast with the stinging malice of his foes. Or, when the Master said to Peter, "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." The love of his Lord must have appeared to him, if not at that time, yet afterwards, in brighter colours, because of Satan's dark designs against him. If Daniel mused in the lion's den, or the three holy children in the fiery furnace, they must have thought, all of them, as we should amidst all our trials and conflicts, "How great is the goodness of God in opposition to the cruelty of man!"

There was a great purpose; there was a great covenant; there was a great sacrifice; there is a great providence; there is a great heaven; and there is a great Spirit to bring them there. Oh, how great is Thy goodness to Thy people!

I shall not further preach on that topic; I put you at the river's edge and bid you wade in, hoping that you may proceed as far as the apostle, when he said, "Oh, the depths!"

IV. And now, lastly, WHAT SHOULD THIS TEACH US?

Should not this make us grateful to God for such wondrous kindness? The Lord has not given His people a drink of a twinkling rivulet, but He has been pleased to give the river of Himself to them, that they may drink to the full. Did you ever get the meaning of that passage, "That ye may be filled with all the fulness of God"? Oh! that is a text that one would like to preach from in heaven. If there are pulpits there, and congregations, give me that for a text above all others, except that best of all, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His blood, to Him be glory." "Filled with all the fulness of God!" Beloved, have you learned this wonder? Will you now bless the Lord that there is such a marvel of love for you to learn? You have already had as much as you could bear of God's goodness. You have had providential goodness, and spiritual mercies. Is there no spark of gratitude in your soul? Can you not afford a song—at least, a stanza? O you who think yourselves banished to-night, and are in the dark, lift up your heads. Sing of the light you once had, and of the light that is yet to be revealed, that is laid up for them that fear Him, and which shall yet bless your eyes. Be grateful.

In the next place, when you think of the great goodness of God, *be humble.* I know of no consideration which tends more to humble us than the great mercy of God: like Peter's boat, which floated high in the water when there was nothing in it, but when it was filled with fish it began to sink, our minds are humbled by a sense of undeserved love.

> "The more Thy mercies strike my eye,
> The humbler I shall lie."

A sense of divine goodness will never puff us up, but will mightily pull us down. It tends to make the believer say, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant!"

And, lastly, *let this inspire us with confidence.* If, to-night, we are bowed down and distressed, let us think of the laid-up goodness of God and go to Him for it. He will surely give, for He has laid it up. He will not deny, for He has prepared it. God seemeth to say to His people to-night, as of old He said to the multitudes outside His banqueting hall, "My oxen and fatlings are killed, come ye to the supper!" All that you can want is provided in Christ. Come in, come in! "Eat, eat," saith the spouse in the song, "drink, yea, drink abundantly." O beloved, you cannot diminish the fulness of Christ! Come, now, and put your mouths down to the well-head, and drink a draught such as old behemoth drank when he said he would drink the Jordan dry

at a draught. You may have all you can take, believer; there is no stint or limit here! "Open thy mouth wide," saith the Lord, "and I will fill it." Be not slack concerning the promise in receiving it, for God will not be slack in keeping it. Only be thou strong, and full of trust, and thou shalt live to bless the Lord thy Rock, in whom is no unrighteousness nor unfaithfulness, but who keepeth truth unto His people for evermore. I would to God that all of you had experienced this great goodness of God, but if you have not, and I know some of you have not, there is one thought that at least I would leave upon your minds, which should make you feel that He is great and good, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." Trust the Master, and you are saved.

May boundless goodness magnify itself in us all, for Jesu's sake. Amen.

CONSOLATION FOR THE DESPAIRING

"For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes: nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee."—Psalm xxxi. 22.

I DESIRE at this time to speak to those who are much depressed in spirit, the sons of despondency and daughters of mourning, who dwell upon the dreary confines of despair. It may seem objectionable among so large an audience to address my discourse to a class so comparatively small, but I must leave it to your compassion to excuse me; nay, I think I need hardly do that, but may urge as my apology the nature of my calling. When the shepherd comes in the early morning to his flock, does not his eye single out the sick, and does he need forgiveness if for a while he devotes all his skill and his care to those sheep which need it? He does not reason with himself that the largeness of the flock, and his anxious care that all should be fed renders it impossible for him to bind up that which is broken, and heal that which is diseased, but, on the contrary, his attention to all is proved by his special interest in the peculiar cases which most require his tenderness. Or take another parable; the watcher on the sea beach, with his telescope in his hand, paces to and fro, and keeps guard for his appointed time. He looks through the glass again and again, but a glance contents him so far as most of yonder gallant vessels are concerned, which are now in the offing; but by-and-by his glass remains steadily at his eye; his gaze is fixed and in a few moments he gives a signal to his fellows, and they haul the boat to the sea and launch her. What has there been so peculiar about this craft that it has gained the watcher's attention, and stirred him to action? He saw signals of distress, or by some other token he knew the ship's need, and therefore he bestirred himself, and engaged every willing hand to lend her help. I, too, remain upon the look-out, and surely it is meet that my eye should rest most anxiously where the distress signals are visible, and where souls bound for eternity are foundering in doubt and ready to perish in despair.

I feel deeply for the mourners in Zion, and I pray the Lord to cause His word, through my ministry, to be as the oil of joy to them. Surely we may expect the divine help of the Holy Spirit in our endeavour to console them, for the special office of the Holy Spirit under the present dispensation is to be "the Comforter," who is to abide with us for ever. While we bring forth the oil and wine from His own stores, we may hope that He will pour them into the wounds of the afflicted, for this is His office, and it would be blasphemy to imagine that He will neglect it. He comforts effectually in an all-sufficient and omnipotnt manner.

I feel, too, that I have a scriptural warrant for introducing such a subject as this into the midst of a congregation where there are many joyous hearts, because this psalm, which is to a large extent sorrowful was, nevertheless, intended for public worship, for it bears the inscription, "To the chief Musician," as do several others which are even more full of grief; as, for instance, the twenty-second, which is the psalm of the Passion, and, nevertheless, is committed to the chief leader of sacred song in the house of the Lord. If, therefore, griefs which to the full could only be known by a few, were nevertheless to be made the subject of public psalmody, I am quite sure they ought not to be passed over in public ministry; but we ought to consider the cases of the ones and twos whose garments are sackcloth and whose drink is wormwood. It is our bounden duty to sympathize with them, and speak with them for their good. Nor need we fear that the rest of the assembly will suffer, for the ninety and nine in the wilderness never come to any ill because the shepherd is seeking the one lone wanderer.

I do not intend considering the text strictly in its connection, but shall use it as a suitable expression of the mental grief of those I would benefit, I notice that it indicates *an inward sorrow*; it speaks of *a rash* expression—"I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes"; it mentions *a pleading cry*; and it bears witness to *a cheering result* to that cry—"nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee."

I. At the outset, note that there is implied in the text a deep, bitter, INWARD SORROW.

The man who wrote the verse before us was pained at his heart. There are many in like case at this moment; their soul fainteth for heaviness, and their life is a burden. How came they so? Verily, there are many causes for melancholy. Some have their spirit pitched upon a low key constitutionally, neither will their music ever reach the highest notes till they are taught to sing the new song in another world. The windows of their house are very narrow, and do not open towards Jerusalem but towards the desert. Something is wrong with their bodily frame, the tacklings are loosed, they cannot well strengthen

the mast, and the vessel labours terribly. When there is a leak in the vessel, it is little wonder that the waters come in even unto the soul.

With other mournful ones depression began through a great trial. As we have heard of some that their hair turned grey in a single night through grief, so doubtless many souls have aged into sorrow in a single trying hour. One blow has bruised the lily's stalk, and made it wither; one touch of a rude hand has broken the crystal vase. Suns have faded in the midst of the brightest summer days, and a morning of delight has been followed by an evening of lamentation.

In some cases, God knoweth how many, a secret sin, unconfessed to the Father, has festered into misery. There may have been wanton presumption, or pride of heart, or discontent, or inward rebellion against the will of God, or wilful negligence of the means of grace, or despising of the value of the fellowship and joy of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the Lord may have hidden Himself for a while in chastisement. Or it may be that there has been a gradual fretting of the spirit with minor vexations, long-continued and wearisome, which have worn the heart, even as constant droppings wear away stones. Incessant opposition or neglect from those we love may at last cause the spirit to yield, and when that takes place, life becomes bondage. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

I have also known an unwise ministry add to the sorrower's woe; a legal ministry will do it, and so also will that teaching which bids men look within for comfort, and sets up one uniform experience as the standard for all the people of God. The causes are various, but the case is always painful. O ye who are walking in the light, deal gently with your brethren whose bones are broken, for you may also suffer from the like downcasting. Lay yourselves out to comfort the Lord's mourners. They are not good company, and they are very apt to make you unhappy as well as themselves, but for all that be very tender towards them, for the Lord Jesus would have you so. Remember what woes Ezekiel pronounces upon the strong who roughly push the weaker sort. God is very jealous over His little children, and if the more vigorous members of the family are not kind to them, He may take away their strength, and make them even to envy the little ones whom once they despised. You can never err in being tender to the downcast. Lay yourself out as much as may be in you to bind up the broken-hearted and cheer the faint, and you will be blessed in the deed.

When the natural spirits sink in those men who have no God to go to, their depression takes its own particular shape. Any physician can tell you of instances of mental distress in which persons have surrounded themselves with imaginary ills, and made themselves martyrs to fancied disorders. We have seen cases which might almost compel an observer to laugh if they had not been so terribly serious to the patients themselves. If a man be a Christian, it is very natural that his troubles should assume a spiritual form. The only shades which can effectually darken his day are those which arise from sacred things; the fears which haunt him are not fears about his daily bread, but fears about the bread of life, fears as to his entrance into the eternal kingdom. The disease, from the physical side, is at bottom probably the same in the Christian as in the ungodly man, but, as his main thoughts are set upon divine things, he, in his depression, naturally dwells most upon his soul's affairs. At such times the spiritually afflicted are filled with horrible apprehensions. What, let me ask you, is the most horrible apprehension that a Christian man can have? Is it not that of the text, "I am cut off from before Thine eyes"? Nothing distresses a Christian so much as the fear of being a castaway from God. You shall find no real Christian in despair because he is becoming poor, you shall not find him utterly cast down because worldly comforts are taken away; but let his Lord hide His face, and he is troubled; let him doubt his sonship, and he is overwhelmed; let him question his interest in Christ, and joy has fled; let him fear that the life of God never was in his soul, and you shall hear him mourn like a dove. How can he live without His God?

Yet this bitter sorrow has been endured by not a few of the best of men. If it could be said that only those Christians who walk at a distance from Christ, or those who are inconsistent in life, or those who are but little in prayer, have felt in this way, then, indeed, there would be cause for the gravest disquietude; but it is a matter of fact that some of the choicest spirits among the Lord's elect have passed through the Valley of Humiliation, and even sojourned there by the month together. Saints who are now among the brightest in heaven, have yet in their day sat weeping at the gates of despair, and asked for the crumbs which the dogs eat under the master's table. Read the life of Martin Luther. You would suppose, from what is commonly known of the brave Reformer, that he was a man of iron, immovable and invulnerable. So he was when he had to fight his Master's battles against Rome; but at home, on his bed, and in his quiet chamber, he was frequently the subject of spiritual conflicts, such as few have ever known. He had so much joy in believing, that at times he was carried away with a tumult of boisterous exultation; but on other occasions he sank to the very deeps, and was hard put to it to bear up at all, and that happened, too, even in his last moments, so that the worst battle of his life was fought upon that mysterious country which stretches towards the gates of the Celestial City. Do not condemn yourself, my dear sister, do not cast yourself away, my dear brother, because your faith endures many conflicts, and your spirits sink very low. David himself said in his haste, "I am cut off from before Thine eyes," yet there sits David in the blessed choir in heaven, and even here on earth he was a man after God's own heart.

There are great benefits to come out of these severe trials and depressions. There is a needs be that for a season we should be in heaviness. You cannot make great soldiers without war, or train skilful seamen upon shore. It appears necessary that, if a man is to become a great believer, he must be greatly tried; if he is to be a great helper of others, he must pass through the temptations of others; if he is to be greatly instructed in the things of the kingdom, he must learn by experience; and if he is to be a loud singer to the tune of sovereign grace, he must hear deep calling unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts. The uncut diamond has but little brilliance, the unthreshed corn feeds none, and so the untried professor is of small practical use or beauty. Many have a comparatively smooth pathway through life, but their position in the church is not that which the experienced believer occupies, neither could they do his work among

the afflicted. The man who is much ploughed, and often harrowed, may thank God if the result of it is a larger harvest to the praise and glory of God by Jesus Christ. The time shall come with you whose faces are covered with sorrow, when you shall bless God for your sorrows; the day will come when you shall set much store by your losses and your crosses, your troubles and your afflictions, counting them happy which endure.

> "From all your afflictions His glory shall spring,
> And the deeper your sorrows the louder you'll sing."

II. I will speak no more upon this inward sorrow, a handful of bitter herbs is enough: I shall now pass on to notice THE RASH EXPRESSION of the Psalmist's aching heart, "I said in my haste." We have in the psalms other instances in which David spake hastily. He had better have bitten his tongue. We may speak in a moment words which we would give the world to recall. Oh, if some rash speeches could be unsaid! No price would be too dear to purchase their unsaying,—unkind, provoking, cutting things towards men, and unbelieving, fretful, petulant, injurious words towards God. Better count a dozen before we speak, when we are in an agitated state of mind. It is a common sin for persons whose hearts are in bondage to allow their tongues too great a liberty. David said, "I am cut off from before Thine eyes"; and many have not only said this in haste, but they have continued to repeat it for a long time, which is much worse. Some have spoken in this fashion by the month together—aye, and some for years. Sorrowful is it that they should have done so, but so it has been.

Now this rash speech rests altogether on insufficient grounds. Why does a man in despondency argue that God has cast him away? He reasons first that his circumstances show it, he is surrounded with much difficulty and tribulation, and therefore he infers that God is wroth with him. But is there any force in that argument? You might as well say that God had cast away His own dear Son when He allowed Him to say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I the Son of man have not where to lay My head." You might as well say that God had cast away the martyrs when He left them to lie in prison, or suffered them to be burned. Many of the Lord's dearest children have a rough passage to glory. After all, your circumstances are not so bad as those of far better men. It would be most unfair to argue that you are therefore a castaway. Is it not written, "In the world ye shall have tribulation"? Do you not know that affliction is a covenant blessing? Therefore no argument derived from circumstances is worth listening to.

But others argue from their feelings; they feel as if God had cast them away. Can there be anything more uncertain to argue from than our feelings? I might be quite sure that I am safe for heaven to-day if I judged by my feelings; to-morrow I might be equally as certain that I am a reprobate if I judged by the same rule. Judged by changeful feelings, one might be lost and saved a dozen times a day. The wind does not veer more fitfully than does the current of our emotions. Draw inferences from the waves ere ye reason from your feelings. Do you not know that many persons who are full of very confident feelings are nevertheless deluded and deceived? "Peace, peace, where there is no peace" is a very common cry. These persons judge themselves by feeling, and consider that they are safe for heaven, but their lives show the contrary; and, on the other hand, others judge themselves to be castaways, who are true Christians. Apply these facts to your own case. Feelings are a very uncertain and erroneous gauge indeed, and are not to be relied upon; and to build such a terrible inference as that of your being lost upon a few gloomy feelings, or even a great many of them, is absurd to the last degree. Have you never heard the story of the man who, travelling in the dark over a new country, suddenly came to a place where the earth crumbled from under his feet, and he felt sure that he was slipping over an awful precipice. Clutching at the roots of a tree, which grew out of the bank, he maintained his hold in desperation, feeling that if he let go he should be dashed into a thousand pieces. There he hung till his hands were unable to bear the strain any longer, and, giving all up for lost, he fell, but alighted upon a soft couch of green sward which was just an inch or two beneath his feet. So do great dreads frequently arise from nothing at all. Fancy with her magic wand is busy at creating sorrows. In many and many a case, if the patient would believe the truth, or at least would cease to believe in his own unreasonable surmises, he might drop into perfect peace at once. The foundation of the mental troubles of very many lies nowhere but in their own settled determination to be miserable. They have resolved to believe that everything is wrong with them, and that obstinate resolution stands to them instead of reason. They are deaf as adders to all comfort, but are not silent as to their woes; they ask to see the minister, but they will not give him opportunity to do them good. Did you ever have an interview with a despairing woman? If you have been able to get in six words edgeways between her incessant talk, you must have been a very clever person, for it is by no means an easy thing. They ask for advice, but do not mean to listen to it or to follow it, for they know better than their advisers; they only want the opportunity of pouring out their lamentations, they are not prepared to receive consolation. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near to the gates of death. In vain do you argue; they cannot be reasoned with: it would be as wise to try and argue away a typhus fever, or reason a broken bone into soundness. Instead of all reasoning stands their solemn decision not to be comforted. If they saw such a resolve in other people, they would call it absurd, and perhaps be vexed with them. Oh, that they would see their own conduct in the same light! but while they remain in their present mind, what can we do for them? We quote a promise, and they tell us it does not apply to their case, though it is as plain as the nose on their face that it is for them. You shall next remind them of a great doctrine, which contains a general principle applicable to themselves; they cannot deny the truth, but by dexterous devices they escape from its cheering influences. It is wonderful how exceedingly learned and profound despairing people are in their own esteem. I met, the other day, with a person who insists upon it that he has committed the unpardonable sin. Now, I know as much about the Scriptures as he does, yet upon the subject of the unpardonable sin he is fully informed, and I am in the dark. I can prove that, according to the Scriptures, my desponding friend has not committed the unpardonable sin; but he knows he has, and is

as sure of it as if he could prove it rationally. Scriptural proof he cares little about, but says over and over again that *he knows, and is quite sure*, and nobody shall ever convince him to the contrary. You might as well argue with a bottle of vinegar, in the hope of turning it into wine. It is nothing to him that all the divines in Christendom who have ever written about this sin have regarded it as a dark subject, he is wiser than seven men that can render a reason. In many instances the cause of their distress is impalpable, ghost-like, misty; they cannot describe it, and you cannot deal with it; it is unreasonable, and preposterous, else might a little calm conversation be a means of grace to them. As I have already remarked, instead of reason stands this declaration of theirs; they will not be comforted, but prefer to nestle down in hopeless melancholy. Poor souls—poor souls! What a choice they make!

Here let us say that the declaration that God has forsaken us, or forsaken any man who seeks Him, is diametrically opposed to Scripture. There is not in all the pages of inspiration one single text which advises any man to despair of the mercy of God. I challenge the most diligent reader to find one solitary passage in which any seeking soul is bidden to believe that there is no mercy for him. I shall even go further, and say that there is not one solitary passage of Scripture which warrants any soul to give itself up in despair, no matter though it may be a strong passage upon election, or a terrible threatening of divine wrath against sin; there is no text, nor anything like a text, which will warrant a soul in saying that there is no mercy in God for him. Further than that, there is not a text in Scripture which gives an excuse to any man to despair. If God Himself were to appear and say to the despairing, "You have dared to doubt My mercy, and to declare yourself to be finally given up: bring Me a solitary word out of My book which can excuse you for saying this,"—no such text could be brought. Indeed, the whole of Scripture condemns unbelief. Faith is the grace which Scripture commends, it never urges men to despair. It is full of promises to the most sinful, it reaches to the greatest extremity of our need, and cries in generous love, "He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him." The Lord Jesus declares, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out"; and in summing up the testimony of Scripture it is fair to say with Dr. Watts—

> "No mortal has a just pretence
> To perish in despair."

"Oh, but still I know there is no hope for me." My dear friend, you know nothing of the kind; it is a dream, a horrible nightmare, and there is no truth in it. This blessed Scripture sounds from the cross to you, like sweet music, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". As long as you breathe, the blessed lamp of grace still burns, to light your joy. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

And do remember, O my despairing friend, that your belief that God has cast you away is very derogatory to God Himself. Do you know how merciful He is? Will you think hardly of Him? Did He not save Manasseh? Did He not blot out the sins of Saul of Tarsus? Has He not declared, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he turn unto Me and live." Will you snatch the pen out of the hand of mercy and write your own death warrant with it? Why be so ill-advised? Will you dishonour God rather than receive salvation through Jesus Christ? Why thus madly yield to despair? Do you not know how much you grieve the Spirit of God, and how sadly you dishonour Jesus? Not all the pangs He bore on Calvary grieve Him like that unkind, ungenerous thought that He is unwilling to forgive. What, you hating your sin, and yet Jesus hating you? Impossible! What, you with a strong desire after eternal life, yet left to perish? Impossible! What, you, casting yourself upon His mercy, hoping to touch the silver sceptre of His grace, and yet be driven from His presence? Impossible! Among the damned in hell there is not a soul that ever came and rested upon the blood of Christ, and there never shall be such. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but it never shall be said that seeking ones were cast off, or that those who gave themselves up to the covenant mercy of God, were rejected. Do not, then, I pray you, dishonour the love and glory of the Lord of mercy.

One thing I would like to put in here by way of interjection; this giving of one's self up to despair is so very unlike what we generally do in other things that it appears all the less defensible. Yonder vessel has been broken in a collision; she will soon sink to the bottom, the sea rushes in most furiously. Let us take to one of the boats. This boat cannot be stirred, what then? We will fly to another. We will seize a life-belt, or clasp a spar. At any rate, we will leave no means unused if by any possibility we may escape. A sensible man does not fling himself down on the deck and give all up for lost; his fears arouse him, and he bestirs all his faculties with the utmost energy. He seizes anything which promises deliverance. Look at a person sick with a deadly disease. He has tried his family physician, and he is no better; but he hears of another practitioner, and he goes straight to him. Yes, and if fifty quacks were recommended to him, he would sooner try them than die; even a forlorn hope he will pursue sooner than utterly perish. Yet here are persons who know, and cannot deny that they know it, that Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto Him, and yet because they unreasonably conclude that their case is hopeless they will not go to Jesus, but prefer to die in their sins. Oh, madness, madness, to doubt the infinitely loving One! Insanity reaching its very height to dare to think that He who died on Calvary will repulse a coming sinner! I should like an artist to attempt to draw a picture of Jesus Christ scorning a sinner who asks mercy at His hands. How would the man proceed? He must cover the face of the Lord, for that lovely visage could not look unkindly. He must leave out the scars from the hands, and the nail-prints from the feet, for these could not repel a sinner. There is not a part of Jesus' body or soul which could be made to reject a lost sinner; His whole nature would revolt against being so represented. Oh, if you could but know Him as some of us know Him, you would fly into His arms. Poor guilty one, if He had two swords, one in each hand, you would sooner fly on the points of His swords than not come to Him, for you would perceive that He is such a gracious Redeemer, and so mighty to save that you must rely upon Him, and cry with the patriarch of Uz, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

I am bound to add that this despair, to a very large extent, involves sinful unbelief, and of all sins this is the most damning. It amounts to this, that Jesus says, "I can save," and the sinner says, "You cannot," and so he makes Christ a liar. God saith, "Jesus is able to save to the uttermost," and the sinner denies it point blank. Now if the sinner will make God a liar, what can he expect? When the Lord comes to judge the quick and dead, what will be the portion of the unbelieving? God save us from it! May that rash expression be withdrawn, and may we say no longer, "I am cut off from before Thine eyes."

III. Thirdly and briefly, we have before us the interesting topic of A PLEADING CRY. When David feared that he was cut off from God, he was wise enough to take to crying. He calls prayer crying, and it is a very significant word. Crying is the language of pain; pain cannot cumber itself with letters and syllables and words, and so it takes its own way, and adopts a piercing mode of utterance, very telling and expressive. Crying yields great relief to suffering. Every one knows the benefit of having a hearty good cry; you cannot help calling it "a good cry," for, though one would think crying could never be especially good, yet it affords a desirable relief. Red eyes often relieve breaking hearts. Madness has been prevented by the soul's finding vent. Prayer is the surest and most blessed vent for the soul. In prayer the heart runs over, as the eyes do in crying. To pray is just as simple a matter as to cry. Do not get down that book; bishops and other prayer-makers can write good prayers for people who have no particular trouble upon them, but when you really need to pray, no ready-made prayers will suit your case. You never heard of a form of common crying. I never recollect seeing in my life a form of crying for a bereaved woman, a form for a babe to cry when it is hungry, and another form for a child to cry when it is put to bed in the dark. No, no, forms are out of the question when we cry. Men, and women, and children, when in trouble, cry without a book; and so when a man really wants the Saviour, he does not require book-prayers. Never say, "Oh, I cannot pray!" My dear friend, can you cry? You want to be saved; tell the Lord that. If you cannot say it in words, tell it with your tears, your groans, your sighs, your sobs.

Prayer, like crying, is a natural utterance, and an utterance available on all occasions. As sure as a child is in trouble, it can cry without putting on its best frock; and so can we without gowns and copes and surplices. No child needs to be educated in Greek and Latin in order to know how to cry, neither is learning needed in order to effectual prayer. God teaches all His little ones to pray as soon as they are born; they have but to confess their sins, and plead their necessities, and they do really pray. Never is a child in such a bad plight that it cannot cry. It never says, "Mother, it is so dark I cannot see to cry"; no, no, the child cries in the dark. And are you in the dark, and in terrible doubt and trouble? Then cry away, my dear friend, cry away, cry away; your Father will hear and deliver you.

Now, crying is by no means a pleasant sound to hear; there is no music in it, except I suppose it be the crying of the very little ones in their mothers' ears. A cry is a kind of music one would be glad to have ended, and yet our poor prayers, which might be thought to grate in the ears of God, for He must note their imperfections, are nevertheless regarded by Him. Though a cry is an unpleasant sound, it is very powerful. If you were walking the streets and heard or saw a poor child crying, you would be far more affected by it than by the oration of the pretended mechanic who is eloquently stating his wants to the dwellers on both sides of the way. A poor child crying in the dark, under your window, in mid-winter, in the snow, would move your pity and obtain your help. Even if it were a foreigner, and knew not a single word of English, you would fully feel its pleading. The eloquence of a cry is overwhelming, pity owns its power, and lends her aid. There is a chord in human nature which responds to a child's cry, and there is something in the divine nature which is equally touched by prayer. The Lord will not suffer a young raven to cry in vain, and much less will He suffer men who are made in His own image to cry to Him in the bitterness of their hearts, and find Him deaf to their entreaties.

According to our text this cry was addressed to the Lord. David thought the Lord had cast him away, but he did not cry to any one else; he felt that if God did not help him, nobody else could. To whom or whither should I go if I should turn from Thee? It is important to observe that he cried to the Lord, even though he thought himself cut off from hope. "I am cut off from before Thine eyes," says he, yet he cries to God. Ah, soul, if thou be in despair, yet resolve to pour out thy heart before thy God. Dost thou fear He will refuse thee? Cry on. Has He long been angry with thee? Cry on. Has He hitherto shut out thy prayer? Cry on. Dost thou think He has reprobated thee altogether? Nevertheless cry on. Hast thou said, "His mercy is clean gone for ever, and He will be favourable no more"? Yet cry on. For David felt in his soul that he was cut off from before God's eyes, yet still he cried. Do so, poor heart: yea, the more sad you are, cry the more; for if a little child's mother were to say, "Now go along with you, I will never love you again, I will put you out of doors, you shall never be my child again," what would the little one do? Would she say, "Therefore I will not cry"? Oh, no, but she would sob her little heart out, and the more she believed the severe words of her parent, the more she would cry. O despairing soul, the more thou dost despair, the more do thou pray, and it will be well with thee.

The Psalmist cried to a God concerning whom he entertained unbelieving thoughts. Thou, poor mourner, dost not believe as thou shouldst believe; thy faith, if thou hast any, is like a spark smouldering in the smoking flax; yet pray on! I was about to say, when thy faith seems dead, cry, "Lord enable me to believe. I am a poor, dead, lost, ruined sinner, but do have pity upon my misery." That is good crying, and good will come of it.

IV. That is my last point, THE CHEERFUL RESULT. This poor soul in despair continued to cry, and the Lord heard him. "Thou heardest the voice of my supplication when I cried unto Thee." This blessing went beyond the promise. The promise is that God will hear believing prayer, but the Lord in mercy goes beyond His promises: such is the infinite sovereignty of His grace that He meets even with unbelieving ones, and when they are crying in their unbelief He gives them faith, and saves their souls. Now, if this be not guaranteed in the promise, yet the action is quite consistent with the divine

character; indeed, it is like the God whose name is love to listen to the cries of the wretched! We are like lost children in a wood, all scratched by the briars, weary with having lost our way, and ready to die with cold and hunger; all we can do is to cry, and will God leave us to die in the dark? Oh, do not believe it, do not let the devil make you believe it, that God will hear you cry and yet not come to your help. I will never believe of God what I would not believe of man. I cannot dishonour Him so. Do but thou cry, dear heart, out of thy soul's despair, and the Lord's infinite goodness will constrain Him to come to thee. He has taught thee to cry, and He will assuredly answer thy prayer.

Inasmuch as David says that God heard *him*, how encouraged you ought to be, for He who has heard one will hear another. Let me tell thee one thing: thou art in a position, poor, despairing soul, to be made the means of honouring Christ more than anybody else. Are you the blackest sinner that ever existed? Do you think that your case is the most desperate that ever was on the face of the earth? Are you just the one person who is least likely ever to be saved? Do you think so? Oh, what a splendid specimen you will make for Christ's grace to triumph in! There is no honour to Him in washing those sinners who have only a few pale spots upon them, if there be such people; but, O you foul and altogether polluted sinner, your washing and cleansing will bring Him immortal renown! The angels tune their harps for new songs when an unusual sinner is reclaimed. You cannot conceive your own salvation to be possible, you say. Oh that you would believe it possible! Oh that you would come now to the foot of the cross and say, "Dear Saviour, Thou hast never saved such a soul as I am! This day Thou shalt have greater glory then Thou hast ever had before, for I cast myself at Thy dear feet, believing that Thou wilt save even me, for Thou hast said, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" Do not you see that the badness of your case gives you a glorious opportunity to glorify Christ by greater faith than other men, and by putting it in His way to do a more splendid act of grace than to your apprehension, He has ever done before? I hope to be most importunate in prayer with God the Holy Spirit that He may bring just such cases as yours under the power of mighty grace.

One truth remember and take away with you. If you are in the dark, the only light for you is in the Sun of Righteousness. If you are lost, the only help for you is in Jesus, the Lord. If you want to see the Saviour where His light is brightest, and His salvation clearest, think of His cross. See those dear hands and feet, and streaming side; those wounds are windows of hope for the prisoners of despair. There is no hope for you, whoever you may be, except in Jesus. Look at His thorn-crowned head, and His visage more marred than that of any man! Look at His emaciated body, and at the spear gash in His side! Look at Him in the agonies of death, with shame and scorn waiting upon Him! Gaze till you hear Him cry, "It is finished!" ere He gives up the ghost; and I pray you believe it to be finished, so that there is nothing for you to do, since everything is done. All that is needed to render you acceptable with God is fully accomplished, and there is nothing for you to do but to accept what Christ has completed. Weave no more garments, there is the robe! Fill no more cisterns, there is the fountain! Lay no more foundations, there is the precious corner stone! Come, ye despairing! The Lord help you to come and find peace at this hour, through Jesus Christ your Lord. Amen.

GUILE FORSAKEN WHEN GUILT IS FORGIVEN

"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."—Psalm xxxii. 2.

THE only blessing the law can give it bestows on those who do no iniquity, and walk perfectly in God's ways: the gospel alone has a blessing for the guilty. On them upon their believing in Jesus it pronounces the benediction, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." To be "blessed" is to be in the most desirable state, at peace with God, happy in yourself and full of divine favour. A man cannot be more than blessed, or, what if I say, doubly blessed? since the benediction is pronounced twice. Nor is it a stinted blessing, for no limiting word is put before it or after it to mark an inferior benediction. When our Lord opened His mouth in the Sermon on the Mount He poured forth a stream of blessings, and even so doth the gospel: when it speaks to the soul, rivers of blessing flow from its every word. The language of the text is very emphatic in the original and implies a multiplication of blessings. There cannot be a more true, real, and assured blessedness than that which belongs to the forgiven sinner. All the blessedness which could have come to a perfect man does come to the man whose transgression is forgiven. O thou who hast sinned against God, and art conscious of it, rejoice that thou art nevertheless not shut out from blessedness; for if by faith thou canst believe in the sin-forgiving God, and accept the matchless atonement which covers all thy guilt, and if thou wilt exercise faith upon that blessed system by which sin is no longer imputed, then art thou even now among the blessed. God Himself has blessed thee, and neither men nor devils can reverse the benediction.

Now, mark that at the very same time that the guilt of sin is taken away and blessedness is bestowed it happeneth unto the forgiven man that he undergoes a change of nature. The work of the Spirit is linked with the work of the Son: when the Son removes guilt the Spirit removes guile. He who takes away our offences also cures our deceit. When we begin to be believers we cease to be liars. He who was aforetime crafty as Jacob no sooner receives the blessing of the Lord in answer to prayer than he becomes "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

It is to this fact that I am going to draw your

attention at this time, and as I desire to use it as a means for self-examination and arousing, I pray the Holy Ghost to apply it with power to many souls.

You must all have noticed in David's case that after he had fallen into his foul sin with Bathsheba he ceased to exhibit that transparent truth-speaking character which had charmed us so much before. Until he had obtained a sense of pardon for his great crime, David was as crooked and perverse as well could be. Guile was as abundant in him as guilt; for he made no confession of his sin, and would not allow himself to see the heinousness of it; but he must have put a fearful strain upon his conscience to have hushed its protests against his grievous offence. Perhaps even months passed without any honest acknowledgment to his own conscience and to God that he had so foully sinned. His entire endeavours were concentrated upon the concealment of his crime, and to that end all his wits were set to work with horrible cunning. What crafty devices he practised in seeking to hide his sin, such as bringing Uriah back and making him drunk. Could this be David—the honest and conscientious David of former days? Could he have become so mean, so full of low scheming? Could he be the psalmist who sung so sweetly? Could he deliberately plan the death of the man whom he had so fearfully wronged? Yes, and worse, when Uriah, being wilfully exposed to danger, fell in battle, David manifested no compunction, nor uttered a word by way of confession, but he put it off with apparent indifference, saying, "the sword devoureth one as well as another." He knew right well how Uriah came to die, and Joab knew also, and yet he trumped up a message, as if nothing had been arranged between them beforehand. Ah, David, what a deceitful heart thou hadst, and how didst thou practice guile upon guile! Yea, so blind had his mental vision become as to his own sinfulness that, when Nathan outlined a picture which was the very photograph of his own case, he did not see it, but pronounced a fierce sentence against the supposed culprit. It needed the prophet to come forward and to say, "Thou art the man" before that guileful heart of David was able to perceive that Nathan spake of him. Yes, sin gives a twist to our entire manhood, and makes us play a thousand tricks both with our conscience and with God. But notice, as soon as ever Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die," David became another man; he wrote the fifty-first Psalm, which is one of the most honest pieces of writing that ever fell from human pen. How plain-spoken it is all through! How bare is the penitent's bosom! In it you do not so much hear the sound of vibrating harp-strings as of throbbing, breaking heart-strings. All through it the man's soul is running over at his lips and at his eyes; concealment and trickery are quite out of the field. Pardoned sin makes an honest heart, but while sin is unconfessed and unforgiven the serpent rules within, and, men twist, and wriggle, and wind, and turn in a thousand deceitful ways.

My first head to-night is this—*many men play tricks with God and their consciences;* and, secondly, *the forgiven man gives evidence of having ceased from this evil habit*—"In his spirit there is no guile."

I. While I speak upon my first head—that MANY MEN PLAY TRICKS WITH GOD AND THEIR CONSCIENCES, I shall be very glad if you will each carefully notice how much of what is said belongs to you personally. I want to be very honest with you, but I should be sorry to be unjust. Do not take home what does not apply to you, but anything which is really yours I pray you to lay to heart. Court the entrance of truth, even though it should cut you to the quick. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Avail yourselves of the opportunity which the Lord is now affording you to search our hearts, as in the presence of the Lord who weigheth the spirits. May the Holy Spirit aid us in this business.

The guile of the human heart shows itself in a *refusal to come to serious consideration.* Men cannot be induced to examine themselves and to look to the state of affairs between God and their souls; we press them to it, and plead with them even to tears but they refuse to do themselves this necessary service. They are more or less conscious that something is very wrong, but they have no mind to enquire. Is this truthful? Is it reasonable? If their house were reported to be on fire, would they not see to it? But no, they could not enjoy the fool's paradise of false peace if they were seriously to think and enquire, and therefore they prefer to take matters easily and ignore as much as possible all that is unsatisfactory about their condition and prospects. From week to week there is no calling of conscience to account; sabbaths follow one another, and though there may be a little occasional awakening there is no resolute determination to cast up accounts and find out the soul's actual condition. They prefer to shut their eyes and stop their ears rather than see signs and hear tidings which would distress them. What childishness is this! It is worse; it is dishonesty to their souls and God. When a steward declines to render an account you may easily guess the reason. When a shipmaster refuses to have his vessel surveyed you shrewdly suspect the sea-worthiness of the ship. When a merchant does not care to look into his books you judge on which side the balance has turned. Honest men are prepared to go into matters, and are willing to see the naked truth, but men who are not brave enough to face uncomfortable facts play the foolish game of bandaging their eyes. Putting the telescope to the blind eye and declaring that you see nothing is an old trick, and commonly practised even now. May we never be suffered to persevere in the self-deception which is supported by a heedless disregard of warnings. Most men will do anything sooner than think about eternal things. The most frivolous amusements, the most stupid songs, the most carking cares, and even the most weary ceremonials of fashions, are adopted as a happy release from the labour of reflection. Death, judgment, eternity, heaven, and hell—they dare not think of these: and why? Because they know that all is wrong with them, and so they practise a crafty carelessness and a cunning indifference.

Others who do think a little are *partial in their judgments of themselves.* They present accounts, but these are cooked and made to appear other than they should be by a sort of spiritual financing. Ungodly men colour all that they do with a rosy tint, and endeavour to be gratified with the appearance of their lives. Is it not very usual for business men, when their financial position is becoming more and more unsound, to make a show of prosperity in order to keep up their credit? Doubtful investments are reckoned as available assets, and heavy liabilities

are toned down by clever adjustments. Public companies often show us fine specimens of the art of colouring. Alas, that reasonable beings should practise this art upon themselves in relation to their most vital interests: yet they do so year after year. They put darkness for light and light for darkness, and reckon themselves to be rich and increased with goods, while they are naked and poor and miserable. Well skilled are many in the method of "making the worse appear the better reason"; they exaggerate any little excellence which they think they possess, and greatly under-estimate their faults. They deny, or extenuate, or altogether excuse their sin; they blame their nature, or their circumstances, or the temper, but they themselves must be excused. How could they help sinning? Others would have done the same had they been in their position, why then should they be blamed? Moreover, what they did was not so very bad after all, and there are all their good deeds as a set off against the bad. Men use false weights and deceitful balances when they are dealing with their souls, and they will not endure honest handling. They cry "peace, peace" where there is no peace, and prophesy smooth things for themselves. Like the unjust steward, they permit false statements to be made of what is due to their Lord, and when they come up to their false standard they congratulate themselves as if they were the pink of honesty.

Again, many are evidently tricking themselves wilfully because *they rest on such frivolous grounds of confidence.* Could any man depend on his own good works unless he had juggled with his judgment? What think you? Do you believe that any man would build his hope for eternity upon his being christened when he was a baby, and his having taken the communion at certain seasons since, if he were not anxious to be deceived? Do you think that any man, unless willingly duped, could believe that he was made a child of God by an outward ceremony? Do you think any man would rely upon sacraments unless he desired to be misled? If any mortal man believes in absolution given to him by a fellow sinner who calls himself a priest, is he not willingly deceived? If any man relies upon outward performances as a means for the putting away of sin, do you think he has not sense enough in him, if he chose to use it, to know that this is utter absurdity? True, many are duped by the teachings of others, but, if they possess even so much as a trace of brain, might they not see through such false teaching if they chose? If a man would sit down and only think, would he not see that confidences based upon such frail foundations are as sure to fall as houses built upon the sand? But, alas, multitudes of men play such tricks with themselves that they are led by the nose by the servants of Antichrist. They see that others yield their assent to the pretensions of priests, and they conclude that they will go with the many; it is inconvenient to be too particular, and so they leap with the majority. But what a wretched way of doing business, and how hollow the peace which comes of it. Men will trust their souls upon statements so flimsy that they would not risk a half-crown upon them. There is guile at the bottom of this, and those who profess to be easy in these confidences are not so. Sirs, there is no man honest in his peace but the man who gained it through the blood of Jesus Christ. If you come to testing and trying, all other confidences fail you save confidence in the Christ of God; but the sinner is full of guile, and does not want to test and try; like the simple, he believeth every word because it would be tedious to discriminate, and troublesome to doubt a good report.

Some practise guile in another way. *They avoid all home truths, and keep clear of searching doctrines.* If they hear a faithful sermon, and it comes home to them, do you know what they say? "The preacher was so very harsh. I could not hear a man like that. I want more love." Of course they cannot abide a ministry which reveals their true state, for "he that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved." Only honest hearts ask to hear that searching word which lays bare the thoughts and intents of the heart, but gracious men know that to be turned inside out by a searching discourse is the very thing they need, and they are grateful to the honest man of God who will not spare them.

Those persons must be very foolish who prefer a doctor who, when they are dreadfully diseased and near to death, nevertheless flatteringly says, "Oh, this is but a small matter; I shall soon set you right. Here is my wonderful pill; take a certain quantity of boxes and you will be perfectly restored. I have seen many cases worse than yours completely cured." The poor wretch is almost in his grave, and yet he promises him long life. Sensible men hate such a deceiver. Rational men choose a trustworthy physician who will, so far as he knows, tell them what ails them, and not bolster them up in falsehood. So, if men would but let their senses exercise themselves on the best things, they would prefer an honest teacher and prize his faithful warnings, and be glad that things should be put plainly, even if harshly, lest haply they should perish in self-deception. Very commonly we meet with people foolish enough to endeavour to turn the edge of an unpalatable home truth by finding fault with the preacher. He is too censorious, and that is your excuse for remaining in spiritual apathy: he blundered in pronunciation, or grammar, or style, and that is tacitly placed as an excuse for your rejecting the gospel which he preached. Even books come in for like censures. The plain-speaking volume is not "conceived in a gentle spirit," or is too narrow, bigoted, and one-sided. The witness is hated because he prophecies only evil. If the sinner cannot escape the censure of his conscience, he will raise a deal of dust and throw handfuls of it upon those who seek his good, so that in the smother he may effect a retreat. Ah, foolish trickery!

Beyond this, many are clever at *parrying home thrusts by introducing other themes.* Many imitate the Samaritan woman at the well. When our Lord began to unveil her character and touch her conscience about those five husbands of hers, she sought to change the subject by the remark, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem men ought to worship." Thus with questions about rites or ceremonies, or doctrines, or types, or prophecies, men shield themselves from the blows of the Spirit's sword. A brother minister told me some time ago that he visited a woman whose husband had died very suddenly, and he found that she had at one time been an attendant upon his ministry. She was sitting in the room, with her brother, who was an elder of the Scotch Church, who began at once somewhat harshly to remind her of her negligence of Christian ordinances: the woman evidently feared that the minister would follow in the same strain, and

so she cleverly warded off the expected attack by stating that she had a great difficulty which she could by no means get over. The minister had no idea of rebuking her while just newly made a widow, but her conscience was evidently putting her into a state of alarm, and so she again interrupted the minister's kindly earnest remarks by saying, "But still, ye see, sir, I cannot get my mind easy about this one thing. In the Shorter Catechism it says, that God is without beginning, and I cannot understand how that can be. That He should be without end I can understand, but that He should be without beginning is quite beyond me." "Well," said the pastor, "my good soul, I do not think that this is quite the time to talk about such a mysterious matter. You see the Lord has removed your husband from you, and it is well for us to hear the voice of the rod." It was of no use, for the woman held to her shield, and repeated that still she could not understand how God could be without a beginning. At last her brother, the elder, silenced her objection, by saying, "Woman, what are you at? To make such a fuss about a plain subject. Of course the Lord never had a beginning, and He never needed any, for He was always there." This for awhile silenced that particular form of cavilling, but before long the woman was at the same mode of defence. You know how the lapwing pretends to have a broken wing, and flies as if it must be taken and all with the view of leading the passenger from her nest, so do our hearers try to lead us away from the main matter. When comparing notes about the way in which the unconverted meet us when we try to deal personally with them, ministers can all bear witness to the cleverness of many in the art of turning the switch and shunting the conversation. You know how it has been with some of you when you have been hardly pressed, you have crept under the doctrine of election, you have hidden in the dark corner of predestination, or dodged the gospel behind some theory of free agency. This is sheer trickery, a display of evil subtlety, exceedingly mischievous. What would it help you if you could understand all mysteries? As long as you are unreconciled to God, what does it matter about what you understand or do not understand? Is it not your business to confess your sin, and go and seek mercy at the hands of the Most High, and what degree of knowledge will excuse you if you neglect this chief duty? Those points which are worth your knowing God will teach you in due time by His Spirit, I beseech you attend to the main business, which is that you should be saved from sin by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Another very cunning trick which is often practised by sinners who are full of guile is this, they *pass on to other people anything which is uncomfortably applicable to themselves*. It seemed as if the preacher had made a cap specially to fit that head, but the result was that the person who watched the making exclaimed, "Dear me! How well he has taken my neighbour's measure." The letter is meant for him, but he puts it in another envelope, drops it into his friend's letter-box and runs away. If there be a solemn warning for unregenerate men he does not see its bearing on himself, but he perceives somebody in the crowd who needs just such a serious word, and he hopes that it will be useful to him. You will hear him sometimes say after a sermon in which almost every point has been put personally to himself, "I cannot think how our friend Smith could keep his seat while the pastor was dealing so faithfully with him." "Thou art the man" is an application as much needed now as ever, for it is one of the common tricks of sinners to get another to wear their robes that they themselves may pass unwounded through the battle. Alas for such wretched guile.

One sorry piece of craft which Satan teaches to many is to make them *doubt, or pretend to doubt, anything in Scripture which frowns upon them*. If they find that dying as they are they will be driven from the presence of God for ever, they comfort themselves by recollecting that a wise man has discovered that everlasting does not mean for ever, and they hear that a clever divine has found out that there is to be a general jail delivery in hell, and everybody is to be admitted into heaven in due time. They hear this and they hear that, and as drowning men catch at straws so do they cling to any new inventions which promise them ease in their sins. They lay the flattering unction of false doctrine to their souls as if it were the balm of Gilead. "Perhaps it may be so," they say, and thus they risk their future happiness upon so poor a chance as the hope that, perhaps, these modern thinkers may turn out to be right, and the plain teaching of Scripture prove to be a mistake. It is a wonderfully easy thing to make yourself out to be an honest sceptic, and from this earthwork to assail your assailants, and yet all the while you may have no doubt at all, but in the core of your heart may, like the devil, believe and tremble. Ah, ye pretended doubters, if you were stretched on a dying bed you would believe the old revelation fast enough, and begin to cry out for mercy in the scare which the approach of death would bring upon you. Half the men who talk so much about their not believing, believe a great deal more than they would like to admit, and they dare not test their own imaginary infidelity by spending an hour alone in their chamber at eventide and looking into their own hearts. There are many hypocritical believers, but are there not quite as many pretended unbelievers to whom doubting is a mere sop to quiet the Cerberus of their conscience? Guile plays its part with the human intellect, and conjures up an army of ghosts in the form of doubts, but when the sun of truth arises they immediately disappear.

Let us examine another product of the guile of the natural heart. While yet they are far from God *many calm and quiet themselves with outward religion*. They never pray in sincerity, neither does their heart speak at any time with God, and yet they dare not go to bed at night without kneeling down at their bedside and repeating a form of prayer. They never yet repented of sin, and yet they will repeat words of confession the most humble. They do not praise the Lord in sincerity, and yet their voices may be heard in psalm and hymn. On the Sabbath-day they go up to the house of God, and sit there, and do as God's people do, and they would not be easy if they did not do so; and yet their heart is in none of the worship. Far be it from me to discourage even outward reverence, but it is a strange cheat that a man puts upon himself when he supposes that mere formal, heartless worship can be a reason for peace of mind. To have mocked God with solemn sounds upon a thoughtless tongue ought not to be a ground of comfort. Repeating words of prayer without life and feeling should rather move us to self-condemnation than to self-congratulation. How can men feel content with rending their garments when the Lord bids them rend their hearts? O sirs, if you do not pray with your hearts what are all your forms worth? What are

bended knees without broken hearts? If you do not indeed repent of sin and lay hold on Christ, what are all your church goings, or your chapel goings, however constant they may be? Of what good can external religiousness be to you while you deny to God the homage of your minds? And yet too many wrap themselves up in this garment of guile.

There are others who conceal in the secret of their hearts a blasphemous notion which they hardly dare to put into words, but it amounts to this that *the reason why they are not saved is not by any means due to themselves.* They reject the Saviour and refuse to leave their sins, but they are not to blame for it; in fact—only they dare not actually *say* so—they insinuate that the blame of their condition lies with God Himself. They have been waiting, but grace has not come: *they* are quite ready, but God is not. They are poor victims of adverse fate, and rather to be pitied than condemned: so they endeavour to make out for themselves. Distorted truth is used to support their egregious falsehood, and conscience is drugged into a dangerous slumber. Thus do men cozen themselves out of their souls with sophistical arguments forged by him who from the beginning is a murderer and a liar. Be not hoodwinked by this slanderous falsehood, but read God's word where He declares, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he turn unto Me and live." He testifies that He waiteth to be gracious, and all the day long stretches out His hands to a disobedient and gainsaying generation. What a strong delusion is this when men dare to lay their blood at God's door, and make Him to be the author of their sin! In their consciences they know better, but their inward crookedness delights in lies.

Perhaps the most numerous victims of this guile are those who *flatter themselves that they will come right some day.* They have been hearers of the gospel for twenty years and are not saved, but they have a full persuasion that they shall not die as they now are. They nurse the fond idea that one of these days it will be convenient for them to seek the Lord. The convenient day has never come yet, but still they think it will. There will be a favoured hour and a peculiar time, and they half promise that it shall not be very much longer delayed. O ye who play at procrastination, ye are knaves to your own souls. Look ye to it. If you resolve that you will repent in a year's time what is that but a daring defiance of God by declaring that you will continue in sin for twelve months at least? Have you ever looked at it in that light? Even if a man knew that he could live a year, and that on this day twelve months he could carry out his resolution to become a Christian, yet if he should make such a resolution, what would it amount to but this—"I mean for twelve months to refuse the Saviour's claims, and remain an enemy to God?" Do you think that he who thus resolves is in a hopeful condition? If he be determined for twelve months to rebel against his Lord, do you not prognosticate, that at the end of the year he will be a worse man and be even less likely to yield himself to God?

Thus I have exposed a few of the many "knavish tricks" by which our unrenewed hearts manifest their guile. May God the eternal Spirit bless the searching Word to all who are deceiving themselves.

II. But now, secondly, THE PARDONED MAN GIVES EVIDENCE OF CEASING FROM THIS GUILE, for, in the first place, *he makes an open confession of his sin to God.* Here he stands before the Most High, and cries, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," for he feels his guiltiness. He takes his fault and criminality to himself, and does not cloak his iniquity. He owns that he has sinned against heaven and in the presence of the Most High. This he does all the more freely because he has no motive to do otherwise. Why should he hide his sin? There is full forgiveness for him. Why should he deny it when the precious blood of Christ is ready to put it all away? I think the most honest confession is that which falls from the believer's lip when he gazes upon the

> "fountain filled with blood,
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins."

"There," says a creditor to his debtor, "you owe me a great deal of money, but if you will bring me the account I will receipt it all." My friend, would you not willingly put down all you owed in such a case? Ah, I think you would rather put down too much than too little when such a promise was before you. You would be afraid lest you should overlook anything, and would be eager to make a clean breast of all your liabilities. And so when the Lord Jesus gives a full pardon to the soul that believes in Him it is sure to be met with a full confession. How could it be otherwise?

The pardoned man has also *done with all sorts of excuses and palliations.* He does not try to set his virtues in a brighter light than that of truth, or to make his sins appear less heinous than they are; but he confesses all their guilt, and heartily humbles himself in the sight of God. The lowliest words in the language he loves best; the lowest place in the synagogue is his choice: once he boasted that he was almost a saint, but now he owns that he is altogether a sinner. You shall hear no extenuations, excuses, or denials now. The man beholds the pardon of God, and it makes him honest. Now *he desires to know the worst of his case,* and longs to be searched and probed. He who has found peace through Jesus Christ surrenders the keys of the most secret chambers of his soul, and asks for inspection. "O Lord," saith he, "I pray Thee make sure work with my case. I beseech Thee cut from my heart this dreadful cancer of sin, even though the painful knife must follow every rootlet of the hideous evil, for I desire truth in the inward parts and the complete eradication of the love of sin. He is not content to make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, and leave the inward part filthy, but he cries for inward cleansing and for renewal in the hidden fountains of thought and action. Now he courts Divine investigation, and begs his Redeemer to let the winnowing fan discover and remove his chaff. Now would he put himself in the full blaze of Jehovah's light, and desire the consuming fire to burn up his dross. He cultivates heart-searching, and practises daily repentance; a lowly estimate of himself he continually desires, because he feels that self-abhorrence endears Christ to his heart as the great Saviour of unworthy ones. He would rather have a little true grace than abound in great pretensions, and he considers the lowest place among the children of God to be better than he deserves.

Sincerity has also entered into the sinner's belief in the terrible things of God's Word. He now sees their certainty and their justice and does not pretend to question them; he is one who trembles at the Word of the Lord, and he leaves the cavillers to do their daring work alone. He knows in his own conscience that there is a hell, he confesses also that it is just

that there should be such a place of punishment, and he only wonders that he has not been driven there himself.

Such a man now *wishes to be dealt with personally and impartially* whenever he reads a book or hears a sermon. He does not want the preacher to speak to others and leave him out; nay, but he has come hungering and thirsting after the Word and he opens his mouth and pants for his portion; and if instead of getting comfort he is to receive rebuke, he is reverently ready to receive it so long as it shall be for his real good. He is ready to take bitter medicine, for he is anxious to be healed. He lays bare his breast, for he desires the heavenly Surgeon to inflict any wound sooner than leave the heart of stone within his flesh. He delights in the searching Word, and the more closely it tries and tests him the more thankful he is for it.

The pardoned man also *desires in everything that he does to be true.* He is often afraid to pray in public lest he should say more than he feels. When he rises from his knees in private he frequently questions himself—"Has it been real devotion? Did I really mean all that I said?" He catechises himself lest he should be a hypocrite. And I have known a man, whose sins have been pardoned, when he has dared to preach a sermon, sit down afterwards and take all his sentences to pieces lest he should have said more than he altogether knew and actually felt, for he was exceedingly afraid of going beyond the line of his actual knowledge. The saved soul hates paste gems and mimic jewels; he desires to have true precious stones or none at all. He is afraid of shams. He wants to be real in all things, and hence he sometimes doubts his own safety, because he is in the habit of pulling himself to pieces, to dissect his heart and to see whether it is sound all through. This habit may be carried to excess, but in itself it is an exceedingly good one. It is infinitely better than the dishonesty of setting down all our gilt as gold.

The really pardoned man also *desires to be rid of all sin.* I know some who can never hope to obtain forgiveness, for they continue in their iniquity. Can a woman expect to find peace with God while she goes on taking her sly drop and becoming intoxicated in private? Can a man find joy in God who still clings to the drunkard's vice? Will God receive into His favour those who continue to practice dishonesty in trade? Shall sin be fondled and yet pardoned? No one dares to expect it, and yet deceitful hearts attempt to think so. They will condemn other people's pet sins, and yet excuse their own. They pretend to much sorrow for sin in general, and yet hold to one favourite sin in particular. Their delicate Agag must live. Kill all the rest, but surely as to this one the bitterness of death has passed! O sirs, be not deceived; you must be willing for all sin to go. If you desire one sin to live you will not live yourself. The honest-hearted sinner—he whom the Lord absolves of iniquity—desires to see all his sins brought forth and hung up like the kings whom Joshua found in the cave at Makkedah—hung up in the face of the sun that they might die the death.

> "The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
> And worship only Thee."

We are not perfect, but every really pardoned man wishes that he were so. Though there are sins into which we fall there are no sins which we love. Though we come short of the glory of God, yet we do not rest happy in falling short, and we can never be wholly content till it is no longer so with us. Beloved, the pardoned man is cleansed from the guile which would ask for quarter for darling sins.

He seeks after perfect purity of life, and he has heartily ceased from guile, for now as an heir of heaven *he lives in the presence of God*, and delights to remember the all-seeing eye. Now, he does not say to God, "Depart from me: I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways," but he looks upon every action of every day as done before his Father's face. He wants nothing but truth, and that which will bear the test of the judgment day. Beloved, I can well understand why a pardoned man becomes a man without guile—because his pardon is a real pardon; there is no fiction in it. God justifies him, but he does not justify him by a subterfuge, as some have blasphemously ventured to say. No, but there is my sin, Christ took it and was punished for it, and therefore my sin was honestly put away without any violation of justice, for Christ has made a full atonement for it, and so my sin has justly ceased to be. Why, with such an honest foundation as that, an honest pardon may well make an honest man. God makes the believer righteous—righteous beyond dispute. His faith is counted to him for righteousness, seeing he hath believed in Jesus Christ, and that is a righteousness which, at the last great day, will stand the test of the most searching enquiry. The man is saved on honest principles, and therefore, henceforth, there are no tricks for him. He stands erect and fears no accuser, while he cries, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

The lesson from the whole is this: be honest. Sinner, may God make you honest. Do not deceive yourself. Make a clean breast of it before God. Have an honest religion, or have none at all. Have a religion of the heart, or else have none. Put aside the mere vestment and garment of piety, and let your soul be right within. Be honest.

And you that are Christian men recollect that your blessedness will never be enjoyed by yourselves unless you continue to be without guile. Some Christian men live rather by policy than by honesty; I hope they are Christians, but I am not sure, for their life is full of scheming. They never go straight; they would not care to go straight: they rather like going a little round about just to show that they can dodge in and out. There are men of this sort in business, and you need not go out of your road to meet them. Even their thinking seems to revolve on a wheel—all round about and round about. Now, friends, you will never be happy while you act craftily. The only life in which a man can enjoy the blessedness of pardoned sin is a downright straightforward life. Be like clear glass, so that all who choose to do so may see right through you. There is a way of living guardedly, in which you never speak your mind, but are diplomatic and reserved; you take your words out of your mouth and look at them, and judge what other people will think of them, and then you put the best of them back again. There is a system of living, as it were, in armour, buckled up, with your vizor down; you never dare show your real self, but maintain great prudence and reserve. What is this but to live in fetters?

I would sooner die at once. " I would as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself." To speak his heart, and to act honestly is to a true believer the path of peace and happiness. If any man choose another path, and try diplomacy and policy, so he may, but as sure as he lives he will come to a sorrowful ending, and find that such a course is not a way which God approves, nor will He let His servants have peace in it. God of His infinite mercy bring us all to follow Jesus, trusting in His blood, and treading in His footsteps; and to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE DANGER OF UNCONFESSED SIN

" When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."—Psalm xxxii. 3.

IT is well known that in ordinary cases grief which is kept within the bosom grows more and more intense. It is a very great relief to shed tears; it gives a vent to the heart. We sometimes pity those who weep, but there is a grief too deep for tears, which is far more worthy of compassion; we ought most to pity those who cannot weep. A dry sorrow is a terrible one, but clear shining often follows the rain of tears. Tears are hopeful things; they are the dewdrops of the morning foretelling the coming day. So is it also a very great consolation to tell your story to a friend: I do not know whether it would not be a comfort to speak it to a little child, even if the child could not understand you. There is something in telling your sorrow and letting it out; otherwise it is like a mountain tarn which has no outlet, into which the rains descend and the torrents rush, and at last the banks are broken and a flood is caused. Let thy soul flow forth in words as to thy common griefs, it is well for thee. A festering wound is dangerous. Many have lost their reason because they had good reason to tell their sorrows, but had not reason enough to do so. Much talk hath in it much of sin, but a heart full of agony must speak or burst; therefore let it talk on and even repeat itself, for in so doing it will spend itself.

" Sorrow weeps!
And spends its bitterness in tears;
My child of sorrow,
Weep out the fulness of thy passionate grief,
And drown in tears
The bitterness of lonely years."

We shall now, however, think of spiritual sorrows, and to these the same rule applies. " When I kept silence," and did not pour out my sorrow where I ought to have confessed it, " my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

Is it not a great mercy for us that we have the Book of Psalms, and the life of such a man as David? Biographies of most people nowadays are like the portraits of a past generation, when the art of flattery in oils was at its height. There is no greater cheat than a modern biography: it is not the man at all, but what he might have been if he had not been something else. They give you a lock of his hair, or his wig, or his old coat, but seldom the man: they make huge volumes out of a heap of his letters which ought to have been burned, and copy little scraps of pictures which he used to draw for friends, and neither the letters nor the sketches ought ever to have been published. Like burglars, they break into a man's chamber and purloin his hidden things; they hold up to the public eye what was meant for privacy only, and expose the secrets of the man's heart and hearth. Things which the man would never have drawn or written if he had thought that they would meet the public eye are dragged forth and brought out as precious things, and so they are, but precious nonsense. We have no biographers nowadays. When Boswell died the greatest of all biographers died, and he was not far removed from a fool. If a man lives a noble life he may well shrink from dying, because he knows what will become of him nowadays when writers of his memoirs unearth him and tear him to pieces. David's psalms are his best memorial. There you have not the man's exterior, but his inward soul; they do not reveal the outward manifestations of the man, but you see the man's heart—the inner David, the David that groaned and the David that wept, the David that sighed and the David that sinned, the David that yearned after God, and the David that was eaten up with the zeal of God's house—the man who was born in sin and groaned over sin, and was yet the man after God's own heart. What a wonderful autobiography of a wonderful life that Book of Psalms is! David was a many-sided man, and his life was like the life of our Lord in this respect—that it seemed to comprehend the lives of all other men within itself. There is no man, I suppose, who has known the Lord in any age since David wrote but has seen himself in David's psalms as in a looking-glass, and has said to himself, " This man knows all about me. He has been into every room of my soul—into its lowest cellar and into its loftiest tower; he has been with me in the dens of my inbred sin and in the palaces of my fellowship with Christ, from which I have looked upon the glory of God." Here is a man who " seems to be, not one, but all mankind's epitome." Though we mourn over David's sin, yet we thank God that it was permitted, for if he had not fallen he had not been able to help us when we are conscious of transgression. He could not have so minutely described our griefs if he had not felt the same. David lived, in this respect, for others as well as for himself.

I am thankful that David was permitted to try the experiment of silence after his great sin, for he will now tell us what came of it—" When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

We shall apply this first, as it should be, *to the erring child of God convinced of his sin*; and then, secondly, we shall remind you that the same rule holds good with *the awakened sinner in whom the Spirit of God has begun to work a sense of guilt.*

I. First, LET US THINK OF THE CHILD OF GOD. Children of God sin! Some of them have claimed to be

well-nigh free from it; but—I will say no more; I think they sinned when they talked in such a lofty strain. God's children sin, for they are still in the body. If they are in a right state of heart they will mourn over this, and it will be the burden of their lives, Oh that they could live without sin! it is this that they sigh after, and they can never be fully content until they obtain it. They do not excuse themselves by saying, "I cannot be perfect," but they feel that their inability is their sin. They regard every transgression and tendency to sin as a grievous fault, and they mourn over it from day to day. They would be holy as Christ is holy. To will is present with them, but how to perform that which they would they find not.

Now, when the child of God sins, the proper thing for him to do is at once to go and tell his heavenly Father. As soon as ever we are conscious of sin, the right thing is not to begin to reason with the sin, or to wait until we have brought ourselves into a proper state of heart about it, but to go at once and confess the transgression unto the Lord, there and then. Sin will not come to any very great head in any man's heart who does this continually. God will never have great chastisements in store for those who are quick confessors of sin. You know how it is with your child. There has been something broken, perhaps, by carelessness: there has been some violation of a rule of the house, but if he comes and catches you by the sleeve, and says, "Father," or "Mother, I am very sorry that I have been doing wrong"—why, you know, while you are sorry that he should transgress you are glad to think that his heart is so right that without being questioned he comes of his own accord and tells you so frankly that he was wrong. Whatever grief you may feel about his fault, you feel a greater joy in the frankness of his confession and the tenderness of his conscience, and you have forgiven him, I am sure, before he has got half-way through his open-hearted acknowledgment. You feel that you cannot be angry with so frank and penitent a child. Though sometimes you may have to put on a sour look, and shake your head, and reprimand, and scold a little, yet if the little eyes fill with tears, and the confession becomes still more open, and the sorrow still more evident, it is not hard to move you to give the child a kiss and send him away with, "Go and sin no more: I have forgiven thee." Our heavenly Father is a much more tender Father than any of us, and therefore, if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father forgive us our trespasses. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him," and therefore He has compassion upon the children of men when they acknowledge their offences. We are not more ready to forgive our children than our heavenly Father is ready to forgive us. We may be quite sure of that. And so, if it be our habit—and I do trust it is—never to suffer guilt to lie upon our consciences, but to go as soon as ever we are sensible of a fault and own it before the Lord, asking pardon from Him for Jesus' sake, there will be no great amount of damage done to ourselves, and the Lord's anger will not wax hot against us, neither will severe chastisements happen to us. We may endure sharp afflictions, because they are often sent for another purpose, but we shall not have visitations of paternal wrath. Many trials are not sent for chastisements at all, but as preparations for higher usefulness; for every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, evidently not because of any offence in the branch, but even because the branch is good and does bear fruit, and, therefore, it is allowed the special privilege of the pruning knife that it may bring forth more fruit. Speedy and full confession will not prevent tribulations which are meant merely for instruction, but it will avert trials which are intended as severe chastisements; and this will be no small benefit. Did not David pray, "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure?"

Now, it sometimes happens that God's children, when they have done wrong—especially if they have done very, very wrong—do not go and confess it. When there is the most necessity for confession, there is often the greatest tardiness in making it. It was so in David's case. Alas! how foully had he fallen! It is never to any purpose to try and excuse David's sin. There are certain palliating circumstances, but he never mentioned them, and, therefore, we need not. Indeed, if David were here to-night, and we were to begin excusing his sin, he would rise with tears in his eyes and say, "For God's sake do not attempt it. Let it stand in all its deformity, that the power of God's mercy may be the more clearly seen in washing me and making me whiter than snow." But David's heart was very naughty. It was sound towards God as a rule; there was deep love to God always there, but it had become overlaid and crusted with what was always David's great besetment—the strong passions of his impulsive nature. He had followed in some measure the ill example of neighbouring kings, in taking a number of wives to himself, and this had fed rather than checked his natural tendencies; and at length in an evil hour, he fell into a crime of deepest dye. He knew that he was doing wrong. He sinned against light and knowledge, but, alas, he did not hasten to his God and confess the grievous crime.

I think I can see why he could not have gone straight away from the sin to confession, for *the sin prevented the confession*—the sin blinded the eye, stultified the conscience, and stupefied the entire spiritual nature of David. Hence he did not confess at once; but surely he felt as if he must own the fault when the time came for prayer. I have no doubt that David prayed after a sort, but he must have presented very formal and mutilated prayers so long as he refused to acknowledge his transgression. When the time came for David to finger his harp, perhaps he did so, and went through a song or a psalm; but he could never reach to the essence of true praise by pouring out his heart before God while the foul sin was hidden in his bosom. How could he? His psalms and his prayers were silence before God, whatever sound he made, for his heart did not speak, and God would not hear him. However sweet the tone or the tune, his songs were nothing to the Most High, for his heart was silent. And why was he silent when he knew that he was wrong? Why did he not go to God at once? Well, it was partly because he was stupefied by his sin. He was fascinated, captivated, and held in bondage by it. O, brethren and sisters, beware of the basilisk eye of sin. It is dangerous even to look at sin, for looking leads to longing. A look at sin often leads to a lusting after sin, and that soon ripens into the actual indulgence. No man even thinks of sin without damage. I saw a magnificent photograph in Rome, one of the finest I had ever seen, and right across the middle there was the spectre mark of a

cart and two oxen, repeated many times. The artist had tried to get it out, but the trace remained. While his plate was exposed to take the view, the cart and the oxen had gone across the scene, and they were indelible. Often in the photograph of a fine building you will see the shade of a man who passed by, who is there represented by a sort of ghostly figure. Upon our soul every sinful thought leaves a mark and a stain that calls for us to weep it out—nay, needs Christ's blood to wash it away. We begin with thinking of sin, and then we somewhat desire the sin: next we enter into communion with the sin, and then we get into the sin, and the sin gets into us, and we lie asoak in it. So David did. He did not feel it at first, but there he was, plunged into the evil deeps. In such a state sin does not appear burdensome. A man with a pail of water on his head feels it to be heavy, but if he dives he does not feel the weight of the water above him because he is actually in it and surrounded by it. When a man plunges into sin he does not feel the weight of the sin as he does when he is out of that dreadful element; then he is burdened by it. So David did not feel his guilt at first; he knew that he had done wrong, but he did not perceive the exceeding heinousness of his evil deed, and therefore he did not confess it.

Next, *there was much pride in David's heart.* Have you a child who, when he has offended, knows he is wrong, but will not own it? If so, you talk to him, but he will not speak: he is quite silent, or, if he does speak, it is not in the right way; he makes some naughty, obstinate, strongheaded speech. You cannot bring him to say, "Father, I have done wrong"; but he tries to excuse himself in this way and that. Perhaps he partly denies the fault, and only mentions certain things that other people did, by way of excuse for himself. Now, what our children do to us we have often done to God. We have sullenly stood it out before Him. I remember well a story of a reputable Christian man who on a certain occasion was betrayed into drinking. He was a long time in distress of mind about his sin. He had been drunk, but when he was spoken to about it, as he was, by some of the officers of the church, he said that he was "overtaken," and added that "a very little affected him." I think that is what he said; and he pleaded that some others had been overtaken too, and he did not see why such notice should be taken of a little slip. All this he said to leave a loophole for himself. When he had done saying that, he would add—Well, he did not know, he did not believe that he was drunk; he was sure that nobody could prove that he was, though he might have taken a little more than was good for him. His tongue talked in that way, but his heart knew better. He was a child of God, and he knew he was wrong, and he never got peace by making these shocking self-defences. He was, indeed, terribly tortured in his soul, till at last he went down on his knees, and said, "Lord, I have been drunk. There is no use in denying it: I, who am Thy servant, have been drunk. Forgive me for Thy mercy's sake, and keep me henceforth from even tasting of the intoxicating cup." He honestly confessed his transgression, and a sweet sense of pardon followed at once. It takes some professors a long time to get up to that point. We call our sin by some other name, and fancy that it is not quite so bad in us as it would be in others. Oh, the ways we have got of trying to extenuate; and, oh, the sullenness which has sometimes been put on and carried out for days and days together before the living God by God's naughty children when they have fallen into an ill-temper.

I have no doubt that some have been silent before God for a time as to the confession of their wrong, *because of fear.* They could not believe that, after all, their Father loved them. They thought that if they did confess they would receive a heavy sentence and be overwhelmed with wrath. David had often looked up into the face of God and known His love; but now that he had thrown dust into his own eyes he could not see God's face, and he only felt God's chastening hand, for he says, "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." The sun burned him up, but afforded him none of the sunshine of the face of God. Unbelief is sure to follow sin of the kind committed by David. When it has brought on sullenness of temper, then we begin to think that God deals hardly with us, whereas it is we that are dealing hardly with Him. If we would confess, all would be well; but there is the hard point. It is not, *if* He would forgive, for He is ready to blot out the transgressions of His people, but the difficulty lies in *if* we would believe in His love. There is a great deal of the Pharisee in many Christians. You may question the statement, but I should not wonder if there is a good deal of the Pharisee *in you*, or else you would not have doubted the assertion. You are so much of a Pharisee that you do not think yourself a Pharisee. But we are prone to begin thinking, "Surely, surely, I at such a time was a worthy object of God's love, but now I am not." Oh, then, you were once a wonder of goodness, and marvellously worthy and excellent? Do not believe it. My dear brother, perhaps you were as bad when you had not openly transgressed as you are now, for then your disease may have taken the form of pride, and though it has now taken another shape, it may be no worse, for pride is as damnable as any other form of sin. He who says to himself, "I am righteous: I can stand before God and deserve His love," is as surely lost as though he had fallen into gross sin. Take heed of the Pharisee that lurks within you.

Anyhow, whatever was the reason, David was silent about his sin for some long time. The result of it was that his sorrow became worse and worse. He could not pray: he tried to pray, but as he would not confess his sin, it stuck in his throat, and till that was out he could not pray. But still he *must* pray; so he took to roaring. That is to say, it was such inarticulate, indistinct prayer, and there was so much of his soul in it, that he calls it the roaring of a beast instead of the praying of a man. His inward grief over his unconfessed sin was such that his bones began to wax old. They are the pillars of the house, the strongest part of the entire system, but even they seemed as if they would decay. He was brought into ill-health of body through the torment of his mind. He could find no peace, and yet he would not go and confess the sin. He was still sullenly looking up to God, not as a sinner, but as a saved one, and talking to God as if he were righteous, while at the same time his sin was crushing him. All this while, I say, his grief gathered, and there was only one cure for it: he ought to have confessed it to the Lord. As soon as it was confessed he was forgiven. How quick was that act of amnesty and oblivion! David said, "I have sinned," and Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." If pardon be so near at hand, who would linger a moment? Who among us would not at once repair to our heavenly Father,

and with our heads in His bosom sob out the confession of our sin? Because He is so ready to forgive we ought to be ready to confess.

I may be addressing a child of God, or one who thought that he was a child of God, who has grievously fallen. My brother, go thou with haste to thy Lord, and acknowledge thine iniquity. He bids thee come. Only confess thine iniquity in which thou hast transgressed against the Lord, and He will have mercy upon thee now. And oh, what a relief it is when you have discharged the load, and when the voice of mercy has said, "Thou art forgiven: go in peace." What would I give for that, says one. Well, thou needest not give anything. Do but confess, and if thou confess into the ear of God, with faith in His dear Son, for Jesus' sake He will accept thee, and seal thy pardon home to thy soul. Come and unburden thy spirit at the bleeding feet of the Redeemer, and leap for joy.

Thus have I tried to encourage the Lord's own children to own their sins. I do not know for whom these words are particularly meant, but I am driven to say them, for I labour under the strong impression that there is some child of God here who is almost despairing of the Lord's mercy and who is well nigh ready to renounce his profession of religion because he fears that the Lord's mercy is clean gone for ever. My dear friend, judge not so harshly of Him who loves thee still. Did He not love us when we were dead in trespasses and sins, and will He not love us if now our sin has wounded us again? He never loved us because we were good, and therefore as He knew all that we should be, He will not change in His affection. He "commendeth His love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly"—died for us *as sinners*. If you never did come to Him—if all your religion has been a mistake—do not begin to argue upon that matter but come to Jesus now, for the first time. Many and many a score times have I done that. When the devil has said, "Your faith has been mere delusion, and your experience has been all a fiction," and I have replied, "I will not dispute with you, Sir Devil, but I will just go to Christ as a sinner, for I know He came to seek and to save sinners, even lost ones, such as I am; and I will humbly ask Him anew to be my Saviour." That is a short cut to comfort, may the Spirit lead you into it. Be not baffled by Satanic suggestions, but come to Jesus over again, and over again, and over again, "to whom coming as unto a living stone"—looking unto Jesus—not having looked once, but continually looking and trusting in Him.

II. But now I must have a few minutes, while we use this same subject in reference TO THE AWAKENED SINNER.

Some in this place, perhaps, have lately been aroused to a consciousness of guilt before God; but one thing they have not done, they have never made confession of their sin. They feel the burden of it in a measure, and they will feel it more, but as yet they have kept their grief to themselves: neither to God nor man have they poured out their souls. To speak to our fellow-men about our heart troubles is comparatively of little use, and yet I would not recommend persons under conviction of sin always to hide their souls' sorrows from their Christian friends. They might often be much helped if they would communicate their thoughts to those who have gone further on the road to heaven, and know more about Christ and the way of salvation. Yet, for the most part, a wounded conscience, like a wounded stag, delights to be alone that it may bleed in secret. It is very hard to get at a man under conviction of sin; he retires so far into himself that it is impossible to follow him. Ah, you poor mourners, I know how you try to conceal your pains. I will tell you one reason why you do not like to tell your mother, your sister, your brother. It is because you think your feelings are so strange: you suppose that nobody ever felt like you; you have the notion that you must be the worst person that ever lived, and therefore you are ashamed to tell what you feel for fear your friends should scout you out of their society. Ah, poor soul; you do not know; you do not know. We have all been on your road. When you tell of your sin, you put us in memory of the way in which we talked, perhaps five-and-twenty years ago, or more, when we, too, felt sin a burden as you feel it now. When you tell us of the greatness of your sin, and think that we shall surely despise you, and never speak to you again, tears of joy are in our eyes to think that you feel as we did. We are glad to discover your tender and contrite spirit; we only wish that thousands felt as you do. Do you not remember what George Whitefield said when his brother at the dinner-table said that he was a lost soul? Mr. Whitefield said, "Thank God," and his brother wondered. "Why," said Whitefield, "Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost." The more black you think yourself to be, the brighter is our hope of you; when you poor tremblers give yourselves an awful character we know it is correct, and we do not wish to contradict you, but we are glad to hear you say it, and to know that you feel it, because now we see in you that which will prepare you to value a precious Christ. A man who says, "I am well clothed," is not likely to accept Christ's righteousness. But when he cries, "How naked I am, how useless are these fig-leaves," he is the man for Christ's robes. When you meet with a man who says "I am full; I feast on my own righteousness," what is the good of inviting him to the gospel banquet? You must invite him, for you are commanded to do so; but he will refuse to come. But when you meet with another who is hungry, and faint and ready to die—ah! there is the man for your money. Bid him come where the oxen and the fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. His mouth is watering while you speak to him, and he will come with you, and sit down at the banquet of the King. We are glad, poor sinner, to hear your tale; and therefore the next time you meet with a Christian, I would advise you to tell him a little of it. But still that is not what you most want. You need to lay bare your deep sorrow before your God; and, oh, if you do it, there stands the promise, "He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy." Confession before God was never sincerely offered but absolution from the Most High was sure to follow.

Remember that, even though you do not go and tell the Lord, He knows already, and therefore concealment is in vain. He needs not your confession for His information, but for your own benefit. But if you do not confess to Him, you certainly will never obtain pardon, for there is not between the covers of the Holy Bible a single intimation that God will ever pardon unconfessed sin. If you cover and cloak it, and feel no repentance about it, and do not bring it to Christ, you cannot expect to receive mercy from the offended Lord.

Now, it happens with some that, though they are conscious of sin, they do not confess it; and what

is the result? Why, it increases their misery. It is impossible that you should find peace while sin continues to gather in your soul. It is a festering wound: the lancet must be let in, there cannot be rest until it is so. I have known a sinner before confession of sin feel as if he could lay violent hands upon himself, so intense was his anguish. Well do I remember repeating to myself the words of the prophet, "My soul chooseth strangling rather than life," for all the tortures in this world an awakened conscience, pressed down with a sense of guilt, is the worst. The Spanish Inquisition invented cruel racks and thumbscrews, but there is no inquisitor like a man's own conscience, for it can put the screw upon the soul to the uttermost degree. Let a man's conscience loose upon him, and at once the worm commences to gnaw, and the fire begins to burn. They used in olden times to ascribe the torment of hell to the devil: but we do not want any devil for that; conscience can measure out an infinite misery. Let but remorse lay its thongs of wire upon a man, and it will scarify him, and gash him to the very soul. So long as a man continues silent before God, and does not own his sin, if the Lord really has begun to deal with him, he will have to suffer more and more from the pangs of conscience.

But, then, increase of sorrow accompanied by this silence is a very dangerous piece of business. I spoke cheeringly just now of those of you who are under a sense of sin, but it was only in the hope that you would go to God, through Jesus Christ, and confess your sin; for if you refuse to do so, your position is one of very great danger. "What danger?" say you. Why, if sin remain festering within you, and your sorrow increases, you will come to despair altogether, and that is an awful prospect indeed. You remember John Bunyan's picture of the man in the iron cage? There is not in the *Pilgrim's Progress* an incident more terrible. Now, you are forging the bars of a cage for yourself as long as you refuse to acknowledge your guilt before God. Those who are in the iron cage of despair will tell you that they delayed to acknowledge sin, that they refused to accept Christ, that they suppressed their feelings, and so brought themselves into bondage. They were pleased to hear ministers preach about conviction of sin, and speak of deep sorrow, and the like; but they did not care to be told that it was their duty, there and then, to believe in Jesus: they could not endure that doctrine. They liked to be comforted in the notion that there was something good in feeling a sense of sin, apart from believing; whereas, if a soul will not believe in Christ, its sense of sin may be an evil instead of a benefit to it. Nothing can be good that is unsalted with faith. "With all thy sacrifices thou shalt offer salt"; and if the salt of faith be absent, the sacrifice is unacceptable.

We have known some who, through getting into despair, have afterwards fallen into utter hardness of heart. They used to be malleable; they used to feel the strokes of the divine hammer; now they feel nothing, but are as hard as the blacksmith's anvil. They have got into such a condition that they wickedly say, if God will save them they will be saved, but they have nothing to do with it. They once were tender; now they are presumptuous. They say "there is no hope," and therefore, on the theory of the old proverb that they may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, in all probability they will go on to commit worse sins than ever. Some of the biggest sinners that have ever disgraced the name of humanity have been persons who were once tender of conscience and were on the point of conversion, but they did violence to conviction, came to despair of ever entering heaven, and in the end determined that as they must go to hell they would go there with a high hand and an outstretched arm. He who has seen heaven's gate open before him, but has not stepped in, is the man who above all others is likely to find the hottest place in hell. You may think it strange for me to say so, but I know it is so, for such persons go by the way of despair into hardness of heart, and then into the grossest transgression. Yes, and this is the back door to atheism, for when a man feels that God and he never can be at peace—when he has made up his mind that he never will confess his sin,—what is the first thing that he does to comfort himself? He says—"There is no God." And what does the declaration, "There is no God," mean? It means this, that the man feels that he would be much more happy if there were no God. That is what it means, and nothing more. It is the man's wish rather than his creed, and he wishes it because he despairs and his heart has grown hard. Oh, when God makes your heart soft as wax, mind who puts the seal upon it. If the Spirit of the living God set not the seal of deep repentance and holy faith upon the softened soul, there is another that will put the seal of despair, and perhaps of atheism and of defiant sin upon it; and then woe worth the day to you that ever you were born. Refusal to confess is a perilous thing for your soul. I am sure that when a man begins to be awakened to a sense of sin, if he tarries long in that condition he is being entangled moment by moment in the satanic web. The devil cares little about careless sinners. "Let them alone," says he, "they will come to me by-and-by," And as for very religious people who possess no true godliness, the devil does not bother them; he says, "No, let the hypocrites be in peace; they are going my way as nicely as possible. Why should I arouse them by causing them mistrust as to their state?" But the moment that souls are startled into a sense of sin the devil says to himself, "I shall lose them," and so he plies all his arts, and uses all his crafts, if by any means he may prevent their escape. Man, now is your time to flee away to the city of refuge without tarrying even for an hour, for even now all the devils in hell are after you. They did not trouble about you before, but they are after you now with sevenfold energy. Close in with Christ, then, and at once escape them all. Oh, may the Spirit of God enable you now to find eternal mercy through the confession of your sin to God and looking to Christ for mercy—the mercy which He is so willing to give.

This is the last point. There is no hope, then, of any comfort to a bruised heart except by its confessing its guilt. I would earnestly urge upon every one conscious of sin to go with troubled heart and heaving bosom and confess his transgression to the Lord at once. I would do it in detail, if I were you. I find it sometimes profitable to myself to read the ten commandments and to think over my sins against each one of them. What a list it is, and how it humbles you in the dust to read it over! When you come to that command—"Thou shalt not commit adultery." "Ah," say you, "I have never been guilty there." But when you are told by the Saviour that a lustful glance breaks that command, how it alters all! Then you perceive that fleshly desires and

imaginations are all sins, and you humble yourself in the dust. You read also, "Thou shalt not kill,"—"Well," say you, "I never killed anyone"; but you change your note when you hear that "he that is angry with his brother without a cause is a murderer." When you see the spirituality of the law, and the way in which you have broken all the commandments ten thousand times over, be sure to confess it all, right sorrowfully. I find it good to look all round sometimes, and think, "I am a father; there are my sins against my children. Have I trained them up for God as I should? I am a husband; there are sins in that relationship. I am a master; there are sins in that position: how have I acted towards my servants? I am a pastor; how many sins occur in that relationship?" Why, you will not look around you, if God opens your eyes, without being helped to see what you ought to confess. Take the very limbs of your body, and they will accuse you: sins of the brain in evil thoughts, sins of the eye in idle glances, sins of this little naughty member, the tongue, which does more mischief than all the rest. There is no member without its own special sins. There are sins of the ear—how often have we heard the gospel, but heard it in vain. On the other hand, have we not too often lent a willing ear to unholy words, and to wicked stories against our neighbours? I need not read over the calendar of our offences from this pulpit; go and write it out in the closet, and pour out a flood of tears over it. If you are willing to confess, everything will help you to confession, and there is good reason for doing it at once. May the Holy Spirit work with His tenderest influences to melt your heart into contrition.

Remember while you are confessing, that each one of your sins has a world of evil in it. There is a mine of sin in every little sin. You have taken up a spider's nest sometimes—one of those little money-spinner's nests—and you have opened it. What thousands of spiders you find hanging down and hastening away in divers directions. What a myriad of them. So in every sin there is a host of sins. There is a conglomeration of many kinds of evil in every transgression, therefore be humbled on account of each one. Confess your iniquities before God, and accept the punishment as being your righteous due. There stands the block, and there is the place for your neck; put it down, and say, "Lord, I submit to my sentence, and if Thou biddest the headsman strike I cannot complain." Go before God as the citizens of Calais came before the English king, with ropes about their necks. Submit yourselves to the punishment due to your offence, and then make an appeal *ad misericordiam*, to the mercy of God alone, and say, "For Christ's sake—for His blood's sake—have mercy upon me." There is no man, woman, or child in this Tabernacle who shall do that to-night who shall be rejected; for "him that cometh to Me," saith Christ, "I will in nowise cast out." And this is the right way of coming—the way of confessing your sin and acknowledging the evil of it and turning to the great Substitute for deliverance. Say that you deserve to be sent to hell, and cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, trusting in the great Surety and Sacrifice, and you shall be accepted in and through Him. This is the way of life, and he who runs therein shall find salvation.

May the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, lead every one of you without exception to mourn your sin, and rest in Jesus. Amen.

BIT AND BRIDLE: HOW TO ESCAPE THEM

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."—Psalm xxxii. 8, 9.

THE joy of full forgiveness is described in the first two verses of this psalm: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." Oh, the blessedness of sitting at Jesus' feet, a sinner washed in His blood! Outside of heaven there is no greater joy; and even there they sing of blood-washed robes.

After a man is pardoned, anxiety is awakened as to how he shall be kept from sin in the future. The burnt child dreads the fire; and although his burns have all been healed, he dreads the fire none the less, but all the more. Those who have been scorched by sin tremble at even a distant approach to the flame. You will always know whether you are delivered from the guilt of sin by answering this question—Am I delivered from the love of sin? He who lost his way yesterday feels his need of a guide for to-day and to-morrow. How can the pardoned one endure the thought of again sinning against the Lord? David's great anxiety on this score is met by the gracious answer of the Lord: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go."

Another thing is noteworthy: David was now rid of guile as well as guilt. Orientals pride themselves on their cunning, and David, by nature, had a considerable share of craft about him; but he now drives it from his spirit: he will not henceforth tolerate himself in deceit. When he had thrown away this false wisdom, this carnal prudence, he felt that he must look elsewhere for guidance. If he is no longer to plot and plan with the cunning which he had shown in the matter of Uriah, he will need other direction, and he looks up for it. See how gracious God comes in with the promise of guidance. "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way." "The Lord preserveth the simple." The upright, who can no longer trust their own deceitful hearts, shall find the Lord an all-sufficient guide. Happy is it for them that He has spoken such a word as this: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go."

One other observation. We find David, in this psalm, reaching to a high state of joy, on account of his being forgiven. He exclaims, in the seventh verse, "Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." A very proper state of mind to be in.

It is meet that the pardoned sinner should leap for joy. But, at the same time, the wisdom of God comes in, not to check the joy, but to render it more deep, more sure, and to prevent its coming to an untimely end. David is in ecstasies of delight; but he is to be reminded that he is not yet in heaven, and that he is compassed about with other things besides songs. The voice of God commends his joy, but also reminds him that there lies before him a future full of perils, a life strewn with temptations. He is henceforth to be a disciple as well as a singer; he needs to be instructed and taught in the way, for he is a pilgrim still, and not yet at his journey's end. Sound the timbrel if you will, and shout for joy and sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; but remember that on the other side of the Red Sea there is a wilderness, and you will require much grace to traverse it—such grace as only the Shepherd of Israel can give you. You will be wise to address yourselves to your journey, and resolve to follow Him whose eye discerns the way, and whose hand can help you in it. A pilgrim's life is not all feasting. He has something else to do besides praising God upon the high-sounding cymbals. We must sit at Jesus' feet, as well as look to His cross. We are to bear His yoke and learn of Him, that we may find rest unto our souls.

This may stand as an introduction; for now I want to conduct you further into this grave business of the saved man. You are pardoned, my friend, you know you are, and you feel the joy of that knowledge. God grant that your joy may abound yet more and more! Sitting in your seat this morning, you are saying, "Oh, the heaped-up blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered!" Yes, but you are not in heaven yet; something more is needed; not to secure the love of God, not to complete the work of sovereign grace; but to educate you for the skies, to make you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. About that matter we are going to talk as the Holy Spirit shall enable us.

That I may set before you, to the full, the teaching of the text, I would have you note, first, *a privilege to be sought*—divine instruction, practical teaching, and tender guidance: secondly, *a character to be avoided*—"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding." This will bring us to consider, thirdly, *an infliction to be escaped*—"Whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." If you do not wish to be bitted and bridled, be readily obedient to the direction of your Lord. We will come to a close by reflecting that there is *a freedom to be attained*. You may be free from bit and bridle, and guided by the eye of God; you may find your way to heaven without the need of those rough chastisements which compel obedience. Oh, for the help of the great Teacher in this matter!

I. First, here is A PRIVILEGE TO BE SOUGHT. I will proceed at once to set it forth from the words before us.

This guidance is *very full in its nature*. Three words are used to describe it: "I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shall go: I will guide thee with Mine eye."

The first word is, "I will instruct thee"—a promise fuller of meaning than would appear upon its surface. God is prepared to give you an inward understanding of spiritual things; for His instruction is intensely effectual upon the mind. The Lord is prepared to teach you in His truth; to make you wise in heavenly matters. Though saved, you are as yet a mere child, and unfamiliar with great truths. You know but little of divine things: you know little of yourself, little of your danger, little of holiness, and little of God; but the Lord here promises to take you for His pupil, and to be Himself your instructor. He instructs so effectually as really to build up the mind; hence the psalmist says, "Through Thy precepts I get understanding." Other instructors can awaken that measure of understanding which is already ours; but God giveth understanding to the simple. A good understanding is one of the gifts of His grace, and blessed are they who receive it.

The second word is, "I will teach thee"; and this teaching is most practical, for the promise is—"I will teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." God adds the precept to the doctrine, and instructs us in both. Eminently precious is that practical teaching by which you are made to know what to do, and how to do it. Theoretical teaching is of small importance compared with this practical learning. The Lord will teach us the art and mystery of holiness. He will apprentice us to the Lord Jesus as the Master of righteousness: He will make us journeymen one of these days, and turn us out full-blown "workmen that need not to be ashamed." Our great Teacher sends forth fine workmen, whose good works are seen of men, and cause them to glorify the Father in heaven.

The promise of the Lord, in the third word of the verse, goes even further than doctrinal and practical instruction; for we read, "I will guide thee with Mine eye." Herein is fellowship as well as instruction; for the guide goes with the traveller, and thus will God, in the process of our instruction, give us fellowship with Himself. Blessed are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth: they have both the privilege of holy walk and heavenly company. It is our high privilege that, while our Shepherd goes before us, He calls us by name, and we follow closely in His footsteps, as His well-beloved sheep. We are not only to be told the way, and led into the way, but to be accompanied in it by our teacher and friend. The education which the Lord provides is complete in all its branches. Mind, and life, and heart are all under the divine tuition. This is no pauper school, or merely preparatory seminary: the text describes a high school of holiness, a grammar school of grace, a University of holiness. In this place of sacred instruction you may take high degrees if you will, and become teachers of others also. He who forgave you provides for you everything that you can need to make you a disciple indeed, a learner who in the ages to come shall make known to angels and principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God. Who would not be a scholar in such a University as this?

Note, next, that *this teaching is divine in its source*. See how it runs: "*I* will instruct thee." How delightful! "*I* will instruct thee: *I* will guide thee with Mine eye." The Lord will not put us in a low class, where some half-instructed usher or pupil-teacher shall look after us. No; we shall all of us be taught by the Lord Jesus Himself, and His Holy Spirit. It is written, "*I* will instruct thee: *I* will guide thee." Our Lord may instruct us by men who are taught of Himself; but, after all, the best of His servants cannot teach us anything profitably except the Lord Himself teaches by them and through them. He alone teaches us to profit. What a wonderful condescension it is that the Lord should become a teacher! Sunday-school teachers, adore the head of

your sacred college, even God Himself! "*I* will teach thee, I will instruct thee." They are well taught that are taught of God; and this privilege is common to all the family of love; for the Scripture saith, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." It is not said that a portion of them shall be left to be trained by angels or archangels; but they shall all be taught of the Lord. Jehovah Himself will be the instructor of every soul that comes to Him through Jesus Christ.

Observe *how wonderfully personal is this promised guidance.* While the address in the ninth verse is in the plural, "Be *ye* not as the horse, or as the mule," the promise is in the singular to each individual: "I will instruct *thee* and teach *thee* in the way which *thou* shalt go; I will guide *thee* with Mine eye." Wonder of wonders, the Infinite focuses Himself upon the insignificant! We who are less than the motes in the sunbeam, are nevertheless considered individually by Him who filleth all in all, who is greater than all that He fills. "I will instruct *thee*." Yes, Jehovah will condescend to instruct that believer who is feeblest of all the company. Rejoice, my brother, that though thy understanding be a commonplace one, and though thy position be very obscure, yet the Lord does not say, "I will send thee to a preparatory school kept by some inferior teacher"; but He does say, "*I* will instruct thee." God instructs each believer as truly as if he were His only child. It is delightful to reflect that while Christ's death has a sufficient efficacy in it to save a believing world, yet if His design had been to save only me, He must have offered the same sacrifice as He has done. His death would have been needful to prove that "He loved me, and gave Himself for me. So, while our Lord's teaching would suffice to instruct myriads of men who are willing to learn, yet does He condescend to bring all His teaching to bear upon each single person: "I will instruct *thee*, and teach *thee* in the way which *thou* shalt go." I note with comfort, in the text, what the French call *tu-toi-age.* Speaking to one another familiarly, they say "thou" and "thee." How sweetly is this seen in this passage: "I will instruct *thee*, and teach *thee* in the way which *thou* shalt go. I will guide *thee* with Mine eye"! Hear you not the great Father talking to His dear child? Yes, I hear Him speaking to you and to me! Blessed be His name for such familiar love! Let us profit by its promise even to the full.

Furthermore, *this teaching is delightfully tender:* "I will guide thee with Mine eye"; that is to say, if you are willing to be so directed, the Lord will guide you, not by the rough means of bit and bridle, muzzle and cord, but with His eye—a way which implies understanding on your part, and love on His part. It is a recognition of confidence in us when He promises thus to guide us. The mistress at the head of the table gives a nod to Sarah, she knows what it means, and the will of the lady is done at once. The master has not to enter into details with old John, who has been with him for so many years; he knows his wishes, and a wink or a look will speak volumes. Well-trained children of God have their faces toward Him, and soon perceive His mind, and this secures their prompt obedience. They see much in little, and they make great account of every word of the Lord. When we are what we ought to be, the guidance of the Lord is not sent us in thunder, but in a still small voice; and His instruction comes, not in tempests and hailstones, but in sunbeams and dewdrops. Some saints can be effectually led with a hair-thread. Cords of love and bands of a man are at once the tenderest and the strongest bonds for a sanctified soul. "I will guide thee with Mine eye" is a charming promise, but it is of no use to the blind, the stubborn, the careless, and the self-willed. What a pity that any should debar themselves from so choice a privilege!

See, dear friends, you that have been lately pardoned; and you, of older years, who have long been forgiven, see what guidance there is for you all the way from your starting-point to the gate of pearl at the end of the road! I say this because I mean to wind up this point with the remark—*This teaching is constant.* "I *will* instruct thee and teach thee; I *will* guide thee." He that has begun to guide will not suddenly desert: He that has commenced to teach you will never dismiss you from His class; He that has in a measure instructed you, and given you an understanding, will continue to teach you until He has perfected you in the knowledge of Himself, and conformed you to the image of His Son. I feel most happy to think that such a privilege is promised and provided. I have heard of some who dream that, once forgiven, they may live as they list; but to such I would say, "You know nothing about the matter; you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." The man who believes in Jesus for salvation, believes in Him so as to be set free from his sins; and his great anxiety is to be saved from all iniquity, and to be led in the ways of righteousness to the glory of God. Here is comfort for you that are really seeking a holy life: God has made provision for your being led in it. He who has made you His child, will put you to school, and teach you until you shall know the Lord Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. Soon shall you know your Father's name and character, and sing unto His praise among the bright intelligences that surround His throne.

II. I now ask your attention while I show you A CHARACTER TO BE AVOIDED. We are told that since the Lord is ready to instruct us, we are not to be stubborn and wayward. It is ours to be docile and obedient. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."

We are not to imitate *creatures of which we are the superiors.* Man is made to have dominion over the horse and mule, and the whole animal creation: let him not seek his models among his servants. I have sometimes heard speeches which have looked in that unwise direction. One said, in my hearing, as an excuse for a passionate speech, "I could not help it. If you tread on a worm it will turn." Is a worm to be the example for a saint? By a worm in that case, I suppose, is meant a serpent; and are you to follow serpents in their malice and venom? I have heard the same thing turned the other way, and it has been made to appear as if an animal might be all the worse for copying a man. The driver of an omnibus was using his whip pretty freely upon one of his horses, and a gentleman sitting on the box-seat observed, "You never strike the horse on this side." "Bless you!" said the driver, "if I were to touch that mare, when I went near her in the stable at night, she would kick me like a Christian." What a remarkable simile, was it not? Like a Christian! Is that so, that Christians kick? that Christians are found taking revenge? Here is a matter about which we would urgently cry, "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule." Never render evil for evil, railing for railing; for that is to

copy the beasts of the field. Let us look upward to the Highest for our model, and never go down to the beasts of the field for models.

We must mind that we do not imitate *creatures to whom we are so near akin.* The mule has a touch of the ass in it, and I fear it is not the only creature of which this may be said. Is not man, as unredeemed, likened to the ass in the types of the Mosaic law? Ah, brethren! we are likened in Scripture to many strange beasts, and not without reason. St. Augustine and other ancient writers discuss, at length, the likeness which exists between men and mules. I am not going to follow them in their observations, but would simply say with Dr. Donne, "They have gone far in these illusions and applications; and they might have gone as far further as it had pleased them: they have sea-room enough, that will compare a beast and a sinner together; and they shall find many times, in the way, the beast the better man." I am afraid that it is so. David himself says, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee;" and yet he was so good a man that he could add, "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee." A large part of us is animal, and its tendency is to drag down that part which is more than angelic. How abject, and yet how august is man! Brother to the worm, and yet akin to Deity. Immortal and yet a child of dust. Be ye not the prey of your lower natures. As children of God, yield not yourselves to that which it is your duty to subdue. Have the horse and mule in subjection: keep under your body: do not bear the burden of the animal, but make the animal your burden-bearer. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule," but rise superior to flesh and blood. May the Spirit of the Lord help your infirmities in this matter!

I believe the psalmist here alludes to the horse and mule *as creatures naturally wild, and needing to be broken in and trained.* We are by nature as the wild ass that snuffeth up the wind of the wilderness: "he scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver." These wild creatures we can make nothing of till we break them in: be not like them, useless, untrained, unbroken. Yet this is how we begin life, naturally and spiritually. It is good to get broken in early in life: "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." It is an ill thing for a man to have no restraint in youth, and no trouble in full-grown manhood. When men and women follow out their own sweet wills, the end thereof is seven-fold bitterness. A mind uncorrected is a vine unpruned, which yields no fruit, but trails along the ground, and rots as it trails. It is a grand thing to learn the meaning of the word "obey." It is ill with those who remain unsubdued: they are of little worth to themselves or to others. The Holy Spirit would not have any of the Lord's people to be of that wild, untameable character, for which there is neither use nor hope.

Furthermore, we are not to imitate *creatures devoid of reason.* "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding." He especially lays stress on this—that they are without understanding. What does he mean by that? Horses and mules have been so trained that they have needed neither bit nor bridle, but have performed marvellous feats at a word. It is possible for these animals to be brought to so high a training that they obey the word of command without the use of force. They come to have an understanding of their owner's intent, and act as if they really entered into their master's designs. With the horses and mules of our streets, and of David's day, this is not the case; these display little understanding; and we are not to be like them. You are a reasoning man; act reasonably. You have understanding; do not act under mere impulse, blind wilfulness, or ignorant folly. Here is the point, brethren: what we need is to come to an understanding with God, and to keep in that condition. The horse does not understand his driver's wishes, except as he intimates them through the bit and bridle. When he is to turn, when he is to quicken his pace, and when he is to stand still, must be told to him through the rein; for apart from the bit in his mouth, he has no understanding of the man's mind. That thought which works in the mind of the driver is not working in the mule's mind, and therefore he has to feel a pull at his mouth to make him know his master's desire. We need to come to an understanding with God. "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Be sensitive to the Spirit of God. So dwell in God that He shall dwell in you, and his indwelling shall cause you to feel at once what it is that He would have you to do. May your will be so in accord with the Lord's will that you will only what He wills! This is the highest form of understanding that I know of; may we never rest till we have it. "Give me understanding and I shall keep Thy law." You know how we say, "I should like to come to some understanding with that man," for you feel that without it your relations are unsatisfactory. When two friends really understand each other's purpose, and enter into each other's design, then they act as if they were one. Be you so near to God in heart that you can be guided with His eye, because you understand the mind of your heavenly Father, and are in full sympathy with Him.

But the psalmist also adds, concerning the horse and the mule, that having no understanding, they are *creatures with much self-will and waywardness.* "Their mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." If you look at the Revised Version, you will find it is "else they will not come near unto thee;" and Calvin has it, "lest they kick at thee." This is a very obscure passage as to the words, but it is not at all doubtful as to its sense; for the point is that the animal will not do what it should do, but it will obstinately do what it ought not to do, until it gets the bit in its mouth to compel it to do its master's will. So is it with ourselves; but so it should not be. At one time we find men rashly rushing near to God; they have no reverence, no holy trembling and awe. Some appear to be as familiar with God as if He were one of themselves. Thus the Lord complains in the psalm: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Such vain people need a bit, lest they come near to God. They need to hear the voice which cries, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet." Oh, for more holy reverence! Others will not come near to God at all, and need a bit because they run off from the Lord into infidelity, blasphemy, or open vice. These endeavour to carry out their own wild wills, throwing up their heels as they please, and prancing over hill and plain with a defiant contempt of rule and order. We know that kind of people: let us not in any measure grow like them. There are horses and mules that will kick, and bite, and do grievous harm to those round about them, unless they are restrained with straps and harness. I am afraid I know some kicking saints as well as kicking sinners; and I am more afraid of these

kicking professors than of the outwardly wicked. I would sooner be bitten by a wolf than by a sheep; that is to say, I could more readily bear injury from an ungodly man than from a professed believer. A kick from a Christian causes very serious wounding to a gracious heart. "It was not an enemy: then I could have borne it." Remember the question and answer—"What are these wounds in Thine hands? Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends." Those are wounds indeed which our Lord receives from a traitorous disciple. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they kick at thee." Kick not at the will of your Lord. Kick not at the doctrines of His Word. Kick not at the precepts of His house. Kick not at His servants. Kick not at His providences. Kick not at His cross. Surely, I need not further urge you to avoid this unlovely character. None of you would wish to be as the horse, or as the mule.

III. I will now dwell for a few minutes upon AN INFLICTION TO BE ESCAPED. If you mean to be like the horse or the mule, you may readily be so, but you will have to pay the penalty. If the Lord means to save you, He will use a bit and bridle upon you, if you render them necessary by your wilfulness. If you will be guided by His eye, there will be no need for such stern work: but if you are stubborn, He will not spare you.

I may say of this bit and bridle, that such trappings are *a curb upon freedom.* A man would not endure to go about wearing a bit and a bridle; yet many a child of God is in that condition spiritually, because he is not subdued to the will of the Lord. Because he is not tender of conscience, because he is frequently disobedient, because he does not carry out his Lord's will, he has to suffer severe discipline, and labour under serious disadvantage. If the man were willingly obedient to the divine will, things would go more happily with him.

The bit is not applied unless it is found necessary; but *it will be applied if needful.* My text says, "Whose mouth *must* be held in with bit and bridle." Mark that "*must.*" That *must* arises out of the nature of the creature dealt with. Some men, if they are to go to heaven, must be poor on the road, or must be sick, or must be defeated, or must be misunderstood: not because there is any real necessity, apart from their obstinate, cross-grained nature, but because they themselves render it needful. God is resolved to save them, and therefore He will drive them to salvation with bit and bridle, rather than leave them free to rush downward to hell through the indulgence of their own passions and ambitions.

Dear friends, *what a wretched descent is this from being guided by God's eye!* In the first case we have an intelligent servant so in accord with his Lord that a look suffices to set him running in the way of obedience; and in the second case we have an avowedly Christian man so out of accord with God that he has to be treated like a mule which will only yield under compulsion, and only obey as it is made to smart. I do not know, dear brethren, if this description applies to any one of you; but if it does, kindly take it home, and if I seem to be personal to you—well, I intend to be personal, and, therefore, I dare not apologize. I am afraid that many of us ought to make it more personal to ourselves than we are likely to do. There is a hair of the mule's tail in every one of us.

"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule," or you shall have your mouth held in with bit and bridle. *That is always a very unpleasant matter.* It is not comfortable, even to a mule, to wear bit and bridle; and it certainly must be very unpleasant to a man. I have known brethren whom God could not use in the conversion of many souls, for they could not bear prosperity. The Lord did bless the preacher once, and he grew so great in his own esteem that he was not bearable to those around him. For the man's own sake the good Lord saw that it was not safe to let him be useful. Here is a man who formerly succeeded in business; but he grew so worldly, so purse-proud, so forgetful of God, that it was necessary to take his wealth away from him; and it has been done—and now he is devout and lowly. Another man, when he is in health and strength, is so full of levity and carelessness that he plays the fool; and in order to keep him right it is necessary to let him have a sluggish liver, or an aching head. or a sick home, or something else, which may sober him. My friend, if God means to get you to heaven He will lead you there gently if you will freely go; but if you are obstinate and hard, He will thrust the bit between your jaws and drive you there. The less wilfulness the less harness; but if need be, you shall wear all the paraphernalia of an unquiet horse; for the great Trainer will have the upper hand of you, and thus He will save you. The Lord would be glad for you to go without these disagreeable things; but if you will have them, you shall have them. I know a person who is always grumbling; and I do not wonder that he always seems to have cause for it. It is like the child that I heard crying, and its mother said to it, "Hold your tongue! If you cry for nothing, I will soon give you something to cry for." Many a child of God has found something to cry for as the result of wanton murmuring. Some hearers even got to the house of God, and complain that the preacher says this, and does not say that, and omits the other. Before long the Lord removes the preacher they complained of, and they have nobody to feed their souls, and then they begin to wish they had the old preacher back again. Well, well, if you make rods for your backs, God will use them upon you. It is His custom not to let anything lie idle in His house; so, if you are busy making a rod, He will be busy in putting it to its proper use.

But all this is *unnatural to the child of God.* Your children do not go about your house with bits in their mouths and bridles on their heads. God would not have His own regenerated ones going up and down in the world all bitted and bridled: but it shall be so sooner than they shall be lost. Disobedience is ruin: from that He must deliver His people. If we take delight in holiness we shall not need rough usage. Here is the sweet alternative—"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye." This is God's way. Oh that it may be our way! May the good Spirit lead us into it! Do not drive your Saviour to be stern with you. Do not choose the way of hardness—the brutish way, the mulish way. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding," for then you will become sad, gloomy, dull, stupid, and full of disquietude. It is essential that your iniquities should be subdued, and they shall be. He will save you—save you from rebellion, save you from self-seeking and self-will. He will bend you to His holy will; and if it cannot come to pass anyhow else, then the bit and the bridle shall conquer you. O souls, submit

yourselves unto God. Vex not His Holy Spirit by hardness of heart.

IV. Now I close by noticing A FREEDOM TO BE ATTAINED. There are children of God who wear no bit or bridle: the Lord has loosed their bonds. To them obedience is delight: they keep His commands with their whole heart. The Son has made them free, and they are free indeed.

They are free: first, *because they are in touch with God.* God's will is their will. They answer to the Lord as the echo to the voice. Happy is he who can say, "Whatever thou desirest, O my Lord, I would desire it because Thou desirest it." Then it is safe for the Lord to leave the man free from compulsion. It is written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." This large liberty can only be promised to those whose desires are in accordance with their heavenly delight. When the desires run towards God with delight, they shall surely be granted. When you and God have come to a good, clear understanding with each other, so that you yield to Him in all things, then He will hear your prayers and give you the blessing which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow therewith. When you rejoice in Christ Jesus, in whom the Father is well pleased, then will the Lord be pleased with you. When you cry to Him in the day of trouble, coming to the mercy-seat where He delights to dwell, then He will meet with you, and lift up the light of His countenance upon you.

You shall be free, next, because *you are tutored.* The Lord cannot trust our wild nature: He gives freedom where He gives His Spirit: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." How does our Lord put it?—"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." He gives rest through His blood; He makes you find rest through learning of Him, and bearing His yoke. It is only a horse that has been long taught and trained by great skill that can be trusted to go through a performance without bit and bridle. I sometimes hope there will come a day when those who drive horses will not need to carry whips, because the noble animals have been so trained by kindness as to answer to a word. I fear that time is a long way off; but I have greater hope of you, beloved brethren, that you will be so trained that no constraint but that of the love of Christ will be needed to be put upon you. The law was not made for a righteous man. I hope we shall not need church discipline, or providential discipline, because we have been trained to joyful, watchful, exact obedience. Oh, that it were so! Teach me, O Lord! Teach me Thy way. Show me what Thou wouldest have me to do. Make me to know the perfect love which casts out fear. When we are thus instructed, the Lord will leave us by His sweet grace to be encompassed about by mercy, and to be guided by His eye.

We shall be free, again, because *always trusting.* Look at the tenth verse: "He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." Faith gives life, and more faith gives light and liberty. When we completely trust in God we shall do His will completely. When we raise no questions with God; when our reliance upon Him is without reserve; when we know by faith that His will and way for us are perfect, then we shall run in the way of His commandments, because He has enlarged our steps. When we have received life more abundantly through a growing faith, it will be safe for our Lord to take away all bits and bridles; but not till then. When, through grace, faith has triumphantly mastered our whole being, we shall be victorious over the law of sin and death which dwells in our members, and tends to unrighteousness; and then shall the yoke be taken away, and the burden be removed. Blessed freedom this!

Especially *free because tender.* "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule:" these are thick of skin, and tough of mouth, and so they are mastered by hard means. If we become as tender as the apple of an eye, God will guide us with His eye. If we avoid even the appearance of evil, and shun every false way with delicate sensitiveness of mind, we shall hear little about bits and bridles, and the many other sorrows which shall be to the wicked. Ah, dear brethren! what a difference there is between one man and another even in the same church, holding the same faith! One Christian man needs warnings repeated and urgent, and another is distressed with half a word of admonition. It is hard to stir one to generosity, or to any exertion in the Lord's cause while amother is earnest at once. Love works more in some than fear can produce in others. We have to use strong arguments and sharp cuts of the whip with certain sluggish minds, while others are all sensitiveness, and take to themselves censures which were never meant for them. Oh for a tender heart! May the heart of stone be taken away, and a heart of flesh be granted! May we be to the Lord's will as sensitive as the mercury to air and heat! The wave is flowing, and a cork upon the water is carried wherever the current moves. That same wave merely ripples at the side of a man-of-war, and it does not stir in the least degree. Saintly souls feel the ripples of the Holy Spirit, while self-sufficient professors know nothing of anything less than a tornado. Crave as a choice gift the renewal of a right spirit within you, and that right spirit will be eminently tender and pliant to the will of the Lord. My brothers and sisters, my longing is that you and I may stand with our faces towards the Lord, watching for the faintest indications of the divine will. May we be humble, teachable, and mild! May our souls be even as a weaned child!

All this will lead to high joy. See how the psalm ends, "Shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart!" When the bit is taken from the mouth, the tongue will show forth the praises of the Lord. When the bridle is gone, the mouth is free to sing unto the Most High. If the heart be well adjusted there will be music in the life. When we follow the Lord's guidance with alacrity, peace shall be our companion, and joy shall hover over us like a guardian angel. This world will be the vestibule of heaven when we begin even now to rehearse that perfect obedience which is the essential condition of bliss.

Beloved, all this the Holy Ghost must work in our hearts, or it will never be there. Cry to Him for it in the name of Jesus, and the Lord will give you an answer of peace.

A POOR MAN'S CRY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

" This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."—Psalm xxxiv. 6.

ON the morning of last Lord's-day we laboured to bring sinners to their God; and the Lord graciously made the Word effectual. We gave voice to the invitation to return, and we entreated men to take with them words, and turn unto the Lord. God's people found it a happy time. It is a very singular fact, but an undoubted one, that the simple gospel which saves sinners also feeds saints. Saints are never better pleased than when they hear those first truths which instruct sinners in the way to God. The Lord be thanked that it is so!

On this occasion I want to speak of what happens to those who do return to God; because many have newly been brought, through mighty grace. Some of them I have seen; and I have rejoiced over them with exceeding great joy. They tell me that they did distinctly lay hold on eternal life last Sabbath day; and they are clear about what it means. They came out of darkness into His marvellous light; they knew it, and could not resist the impulse at once to tell those with whom they sat in the pews, that God had brought them up out of the horrible pit, and had set their feet upon the rock of salvation. For this joyful reason, I think we will go a step further, and talk of the happiness of those who have come back to their Father, have confessed sin, have accepted the great sacrifice, and have found peace with God. It is my heart's desire that those sheep who have come into the fold may be the means of inducing others to enter. You know how one sheep leads another; and perhaps when some come to Christ, many others will follow. When one of our professional beggars knocks at a door, and gets well received, he is very apt to send another. I have heard that vagrants make certain marks near the door by way of telling others of the confraternity which are good houses to call at. If you want many beggars at your house, feed one and another of them well, and birds of the same feather will flock to you. Perhaps while I am telling how Christ has received poor needy ones, others may pluck up courage and say, " We will go also." If they try it, they may be sure of receiving the same generous welcome as others have done; for our Lord keeps open house for coming sinners. He has distinctly said, " Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." That does not refer merely to those who have come, but to those who are coming; and to you, dear hearers, who will come at this hour. Jesus bids every hungry and thirsty soul come to Him at once, and be satisfied from His fulness. Our text tells how they have sped who have cried to God. " This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

I. The first lesson we shall learn, this morning, is upon THE NATURE AND THE EXCELLENCE OF PRAYER: " This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him."

> " Prayer is appointed to convey
> The blessings God ordains to give."

He gives us prayer as a basket, and then He pours the blessings of His grace into it. We shall learn from the text much about prayer.

Evidently *it is a dealing with the Lord.* " This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." He cried to the Lord that the Lord might hear him. His prayer was not intended for men, nor was it mainly meant to be a relief to his own mind; it was intended for the ear of God, and it went where it was intended to go. The arrow of desire was shot towards heaven. It reached the mark it was designed to reach. This poor man cried to the Lord; and the Lord is the right person to whom to appeal in prayer. I am afraid that many public prayers are a performance to please the congregation; and when they are mixed with music, it is hoped that they will influence men of taste. Even private prayer is not always directed to God as it should be. I have heard ignorant people sometimes use the expression, " The minister came and prayed to me." That is a great mistake. We do not pray *to you;* we pray *to God.* We pray *for* you, but not *to* you. Yet I am afraid that the blunder reveals a mournfully dark state of mind as to what prayer is and does. I fear that many prayers are meant for the ears of men, or have no meaning at all beyond being regarded as a sort of incantation which may mysteriously benefit the utterer of them. Believe me, to repeat good words is a small matter: to go over the best composed forms of devotion will be useless, except the heart rises into real dealings with God. You must speak with God, and plead with Him. I often question those who come to join the church in this fashion: " You say there is a great difference in you: is there a difference in your prayers "? I very frequently get such an answer as this: " Yes, sir; I now pray *to God.* I hope that He hears me. I know that He is near, and I speak *to Him;* whereas before I did not seem to care whether God was there or not. I said my prayer by rote, and it did not seem like speaking to anybody."

Prayer is dealing with God. The best prayer is that which comes to closest grips with the God of mercy. Prayer is to ask of God, as a child asks of its father, or as a friend makes request to his friend. O my hearer, thou hast forgotten God; thou hast lived without speaking to Him: this has been the case for years. Is not this a wrong state of things? Thou art now in need: come and spread thy case before thy God; ask Him to help thee. Thou needest to be saved; beg of Him to save thee. Let thy prayer reach from thine heart to the throne of God: else, however long it may be, it will not reach far enough to bless thee.

From this psalm we learn that *prayer takes various shapes.* Notice, in the fourth verse, David writes, " I *sought* the Lord, and He heard me." Seeking is prayer. When you cannot get to God, when you feel as if you had lost sight of Him, and could not find Him, your seeking is prayer. " I sought the Lord, and He heard me "; He heard me seeking Him; heard me feeling after Him in the dark; heard me running up and down if haply I might find Him. To search after the Lord is prayer such

as God hears. If your prayer is no better than a seeking after one you cannot as yet find, the Lord will hear it. In the next verse David puts it, "They *looked* unto Him." Then a looking unto God is a prayer. Often the very best prayer is a look towards God—a look which says, "Lord, I believe Thee: I trust Thee; be pleased to show Thyself to me." If there is "life in a look," then there is the breath of life in a look, and prayer is that breath. If you cannot find words, it is oft-times a very blessed thing to sit still, and look towards the hills whence cometh our help. I sometimes feel that I cannot express my desires; and at other seasons I do not know my own desires, except that I long for God; in such a case I sit still and look up. "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up." A look is a choice prayer, if it is the look of a tearful eye towards a bleeding Saviour.

We might describe prayer in many other ways; as for instance, in this one—"O *taste* and see that the Lord is good," which you meet with in verse eight Tasting is a high kind of prayer; for it ventures to take what it asks for. When we come boldly to the throne of grace, we have a taste of grace in the act of coming. That is a very acceptable prayer which boldly ventures to believe that it has the petition which it has asked of God. Believe that God has heard thee, and thou art heard. Take the good thy God provides thee: take it to thyself boldly, and fear not. Come boldly to the throne of the heavenly grace, that you may find and receive. Lay hold upon the blessing which you need so much, and it will be neither robbery nor presumption.

But *frequently, according to our text, prayer is best described as a cry.* What means this? "This poor man cried." This poor man did not make a grand oration; he took to crying. He was *short:* it was only a cry. In great pain a man will cry out; he cannot help it, even if he would. A cry is short, but it is not sweet. It is intense, and painful, and it cannot be silenced. We cry because we must cry. This poor man cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That is not a long collect, but it collects a great deal of meaning into a few words. That was a short cry, "Lord, save, or I perish"; and that other, "Lord, help me." "Save, Lord," is a notable cry, and so is "Lord, remember me." Many prevailing prayers are like cries because they are brief, sharp, and uncontrollable. A cry is not only brief, but *bitter.* A cry is a sorrowful thing; it is the language of pain. It would be hard for me to stand here and imitate a cry. No; a cry is not artificial, but a *natural* production: it is not from the lips, but from the soul, that a man cries. A cry, attended with a flood of tears, a bitter wail, a deep-fetched sigh—these are prayers that enter into the ears of the Most High. O penitent, the more thou sorrowest in thy prayer, the more wings thy prayer has towards God! A cry is a brief thing, and a bitter thing. A cry has in it *much meaning, and no music.* You cannot set a cry to music. The sound grates on the ear, it rasps the heart, it startles, and it grieves the minds of those who hear it. Cries are not for musicians, but for mourners.

Can you expound a child's cry? It is pain felt, a desire for relief naturally expressed, a longing forcing itself into sound; it is a plea, a prayer, a complaint, a demand. It cannot wait, it brooks no delay, it never puts off its request till to-morrow. A cry seems to say, "Help me now! I cannot bear it any longer. Come, oh come, to my relief!" When a man cries, he never thinks of the pitch of his voice; but he cries out as he can, out of the depths of his soul. Oh, for more of such praying!

A cry is a *simple* thing. The first thing a new-born child does is to cry; and he usually does plenty of it for years after. You do not need to teach children to cry: it is the cry of nature in distress. I never heard of a class at a Board School to teach babes to cry. All children can cry; even those who are without their reasoning faculties can cry. Yea, even the beast and the bird can cry. If prayer be a cry, it is clear that it is one of the simplest acts of the mind. O my hearer, whatever thou needest, pray for it in the way which thy awakened heart suggests to thee. God loves natural expressions when we come before Him. Not that which is fine, but that which is on fire, He loves. Not that which is dressed up, but that which leaps out of the soul just as it is born in the heart, He delights to receive. This poor man did not do anything grand, but from his soul he cried.

A cry is as *sincere* as it is simple. Prayer is not the mimicry of a cry, but the real thing. You need not ask a man or woman, when crying, "Do you mean it?" Could they cry else? A true cry is the product of a real pain, and the expression of a real want; and therefore it is a real thing. Dear souls, if you do not know how to pray, *cry.* Cry because you cannot pray. Cry because you are lost by nature and by practice, and will soon be lost for ever unless grace prevent. Cry with a strong desire to be saved from sin, and to be washed in the precious blood of Jesus. Pour out your hearts like water before the Lord. Just as a man takes a pitcher, and turns it upside down, and pours the water all out, so turn your hearts upside down, and let them flow out until the last dreg has run away. "Ye people, pour out your heart before Him." Such an outpouring of heart will be a cry and a prayer.

But now note, further, concerning the nature and excellence of prayer, *that prayer is heard in heaven.* "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." He was all alone, so that nobody else heard him; but the Lord heard him: yes, the Lord, even Jehovah of Hosts, the All-glorious, bowed His ear to him. In God's ear the songs of angels are continually resounding; yea, He heareth all the voices of all the creatures He has made: yet He stooped from His eternal glory, and gave attention to the poor man's cry. Never imagine that a praying heart ever pleads to a deaf God; or that God is so far removed from men that He takes no note of their desires. God does hear prayer: He does grant the desires and requests of lowly men. I do not think that we shall ever pray in downright earnest unless we believe that God hears. I have been told that prayer is an excellent exercise, highly satisfying and useful, but that there its result ends; for we cannot imagine that the Infinite Mind can be moved by the cries of men. Do not believe so gross a falsehood, or you will soon cease to pray. No man will pray for the mere love of the act, when he has arrived at the opinion that there is no good in it so far as God is concerned. Brethren, amidst all the innumerable goings forth of divine power the Lord never ceases to listen to the cries of those who seek His face. It is always true: "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth." Wonderful fact this! Truly marvellous! It might surpass our faith if it were

not written in His Word, and experienced in our lives. Many of us know that the Lord has heard us. Doubt about this matter has long been buried under a pyramid of evidence. We have often come from the throne of grace as sure that God had heard us as we were sure that we had prayed; in fact, our doubts all lie round our own praying, and do not touch our assurance that God hears true prayer. The abounding answers to our supplications have been proofs positive that prayer climbs above the region of earth and time, and touches God and His infinity. Yes, it is still the case that the Lord hearkens to the voice of a man. It is still Jehovah's special title—the God that heareth prayer. The Lord will hear your prayer, my hearer, even if you cannot put it into words: He has an ear for thoughts, and sighs, and longings. A wordless prayer is not silent to Him. God reads the intents of the heart, and cares more for these than for the syllables of the lips. This poor man could not speak: his heart was so full that he could only cry; but Jehovah heard him.

Once more, prayer has this excellence: that *it wins answers from God.* "The Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." God does put forth power in answer to prayer. I know the difficulties which are started concerning this. There is a fixed purpose, from which God does not depart; but this is by no means inconsistent with the prevalence of prayer; for the God who decrees to give us blessings has also decreed that we shall ask for them. The prayer and the providence are alike appointed by the predestination of God. Our praying is the shadow of God's giving. When He is about to bestow a blessing He first of all works in us earnest prayer for it. God moves us to pray; we pray; God hears, and answers: this is the process of grace. The Lord does in very deed answer prayer. I read yesterday certain notes taken by an interviewer, who called on me some years ago. He reports that he said to me, "Then you have not modified your views in any way as to the efficacy of prayer?" In his description he says—"Mr. Spurgeon laughed, and replied, 'Only in my faith growing far stronger and firmer than ever. It is not a matter of faith with me, but of knowledge and every-day experience. I am constantly witnessing the most unmistakable instances of answers to prayer. My whole life is made up of them. To me they are so familiar as to cease to excite my surprise; but to many they would seem marvellous, no doubt. Why, I could no more doubt the efficacy of prayer than I could disbelieve in the law of gravitation. The one is as much a fact as the other, constantly verified every day of my life." The interviewer reported me correctly, and I would repeat the testimony. I could speak with even deeper confidence to-day. More than forty years I have tried my Master's promise at the mercy-seat, and I have never yet met with a repulse from Him. In the name of Jesus I have asked and received; save only when I have asked amiss. It is true I have had to wait, because my time was ill-judged, and God's time was far better; but delays are not denials. Never has the Lord said to me, or to any of the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye My face" in vain. If I were put into the witness-box, and knew that I should be cross-examined by the keenest of lawyers, I should not hesitate to bear my testimony, that by many infallible proofs the Lord has proved to me that He heareth prayer. But, my hearers, if you need evidence on this point, try it yourselves. Remember, the Lord has said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." Here is a fair test. Make an honest experiment concerning it. I have no doubt that at this moment I could call upon hundreds in this congregation who would not refuse to stand up and say that the Lord heareth prayer. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." I might call on many a man and woman here who could solemnly declare that they cried, and the Lord heard them." Are you at this service, Hannah? You were here the other morning with a sorrowful spirit; and now I see by your countenance that the Lord has smiled upon you, and your soul is magnifying His name. Prayer has done this for you. Is it not so? God answers the supplications of His believing people; and of this we are witnesses. Thus have I set the matter before you; and I would remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Thus have we been instructed by our text as to the nature and excellence of prayer.

II. Let us move on, and note, secondly, that our text leads us to think upon THE RICHNESS AND FREENESS OF DIVINE GRACE. Great grace is revealed in this statement—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

You will see the richness and the freeness of grace, when you consider *the character of the man who prayed:* "this poor man cried." Who was he? He was *a poor man;* how terribly poor I cannot tell you. There are plenty of poor men about. If you advertised for a poor man in London, you might soon find more than you could count in twelve months: the supply is unlimited, although the distinction is by no means highly coveted. No man chooses to be poor.

David, on the occasion which suggested this psalm, was so poor that he had to beg bread of the Lord's priests; and though he was a soldier he had to borrow a sword from their treasures. He had no house, no home; no calling, no income, no country, no safety for his life. He was poor indeed who wrote these words—"This poor man cried." Why should men imagine that poverty is an injury to prayer? Will the Lord care about the age of your coat? What is it to Him that you have a shallow pocket, and a scanty cupboard? "This poor man cried." Does God hear poor men? Aye, that He does, the poorest of the poor, the poor in spirit. He hears those who are so poor that even hope has dropped out of their box; and that is the last thing to go.

This poor man was also *a troubled man,* for the text speaks of "all his troubles"—a great "all," I warrant you. He did not know what to do; he could not see his way in his blizzard of trials; he was surrounded with difficulties, as with an iron net, and he could not hope for a deliverer. He was a troubled man, and because he was a troubled man he cried. People wondered what he cried about, but they would not have done so had they known his inward griefs. His old companions thought he had gone out of his mind: they said religion had turned his brain, and they kept out of his way. This poor man cried, and no man noticed him because

he was so poor and so wretched; but "the Lord heard him." He does not turn away from the doleful and the desolate: He takes delight in coming to them, and binding up their wounds.

This poor man was *a mournful man:* a man altogether broken down, a man who could not hold his head up: he blushed and was ashamed, both before God and man. All he did, when alone, was to cry; and if one watched him closely in company, the tears might be seen forcing their way from his heart through the eye, and down the cheek. This poor man cried: for he was so feeble, so faint, so forlorn, that he could not do otherwise; but "the Lord heard him." The Lord so heard him as to make that poor man rich in grace.

I feel sure, also, that "this poor man" was *a strange fellow.* What did he want with crying when others were laughing? It is not a pleasant nor a usual sight to see strong men weep. Some men weep because they are very tender-hearted; but many others do so, I am persuaded, because they have been given to drink. This man was given to inward crying: he cried day and night unto the Lord because of a secret wound which never ceased to bleed. People could not make him out, and they came to despise him, or at least to be shy of him: but "the Lord heard him."

He was also *a changed man.* Why, he used to come in of an evening, and to be a thoroughly jolly companion; but now he looks as miserable as an owl, and nobody desires his company, he is such a kill-joy. "Poor miserable creature!" people say. Even his wife sighs and says, "What has become of my poor dear husband?" He was a poor man, and as sad and singular as he was poor. He sought out secret places, and there he sighed and cried before the Lord.

But yet he was *a hopeful man.* There must have been some hope in him, though he could not perceive it; for people do not cry for help unless they have some hope that they will be heard. Despair is dumb: where there is a cry of prayer there is a crumb of hope. A cry is a signal of distress, and people will not hoist a rag on a pole unless they have a little hope that a passing vessel may spy it out, and come to their rescue. There is not only hope *for* a man, but hope *in* a man as long as he can pray; aye, as long as he can cry. If you do but long, and look, and seek, and sigh after God, you are one of those poor men whom I have tried to describe, and good will come to you. I can see that poor man now. I used to know him, for he was born in my native town, and he went to the school where I was a scholar. He was hardly a man, but only a youth; and then I used to sleep with him, or rather to lie awake at nights with him, and hear him groan. He has prayed in my hearing many a time, and very poor praying it was; but he meant what he said. I have been with him in the fields, and he used to tell me that he was such a vile creature that he feared that he must be cast into hell for ever; he was afraid that he was not one of the chosen and redeemed people of God, and that he should never be able to believe in Jesus. I knew him when he gave himself up for lost. I know him now. I see him whenever I use the looking-glass, and I must say on his behalf this morning—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Oh, the freeness and the richness of grace, that God should hear nobodies, that God should look upon those who are less than the least of all saints, and the very chief of sinners!

If you desire further to see the richness and freeness of grace, by the help of the Holy Spirit, I beg you to remember *the character of the God to whom this poor man cried.* He who prayed was poor, and his prayer was poor; but he did not pray to a poor God. This poor man was powerless; but he did not cry to a feeble God. This poor man was empty; but he went to God's fulness. He was unworthy; but he appealed to God's mercy. Our God delighteth in mercy; He waiteth to be gracious; he takes pleasure in blessing the weary sons of men. This poor man cried to that Saviour who is able to save to the uttermost. O my friend, never mind how poor you are: you are not crying to your own poor self. Remember, you have not to draw water out of your own emptiness; you come to God, who is the fountain of grace. Your merit is poverty itself; but the mercies of God are unsearchable riches. The power by which you are to be saved lies not in your own spirit, but in the Holy Spirit. Therefore cry with great hope, and believe that God is as great in His grace as in His power and wisdom.

While we are thinking of the freeness and richness of this grace in the text, I would have you notice *the character of the blessing.* "The Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." He gave him salvation from the whole of his troubles. His sins were his great troubles; the Lord saved him out of them all through the atoning sacrifice. The effects of sin were another set of grievous troubles to him; the Lord saved him out of them all by the renewal of the Holy Ghost. He had fallen into a perilous position by his own fault, and troubles came upon him thick and heavy; but in answer to prayer the Lord made a way of escape for him, out of them all, and led him into peace. He had troubles without and within, troubles in the family and in the world, and he felt ready to perish because of them; but the Lord delivered him out of them all. Note that word "all"; it is large and comprehensive. If you will kindly look at the psalm, you will see the range of this delightful deliverance. We read in verse four: "He delivered me from *all my fears.*" Sometimes our fears are more painful than our troubles. We suffer more in dreading troubles than in enduring them; but prayer banishes such fears. We see that *all shame* was removed in the same way: "They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." Happy men; for the shame of their sin is gone! Their shame and their fears went when their prayers were heard. They were no longer distressed about the past, and no longer under apprehension of wrath in the future: "He saved them out of all their fears." If you will look further on you will find that the Lord saved them out of *all* their wants (verse 9): "There is no want to them that fear Him"; "they that wait upon the Lord shall not want any good thing." Oh, to be saved from the pinch of dire necessity within the soul—saved from all fear, all shame, all trouble, and then from all want! This is a grand salvation! But this is not all; for this poor man was saved from *all dangers* (verse 20): "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." He saved him out of all real peril. And, lastly, He saved him from *all apprehension of desertion.*—"None of them that trust in Him shall be desolate." The salvation that God gives in answer to prayer is a perfect one; and He

gives it freely, gives it in answer to a poor man's cry, without money or merit. How complete is God's deliverance!

Did you ever notice how perfect was the answer which God gave to the prayer of Moses when he cried to God for Pharaoh in the day of the plagues? When the locusts covered the land, Moses prayed, and we read, "There remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt" (Ex. x. 19). So was it with the frogs, and even with the flies: "He removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; there remained not one." Pharaoh could not have found a specimen of locust, or fly, in all Egypt. So you may be devoured with troubles as the land by locusts, and they may be croaking in your ears like the frogs in the bed-chambers of Egypt; but when the Lord bids them "go," they will depart from you, and you will be in quiet. He who puts away as a cloud your iniquities, and as a thick cloud your sins, will soon drive away your troubles like a swarm of buzzing flies. "The Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Is not this free grace? Is not this rich mercy?

And, once more, think that *this all came through a cry.* A cry is all that the poor man brought. He did not go through a long performance; he did not perform a laborious set of ceremonies—"This poor man *cried,* and the Lord heard him." What can be simpler? Oh, you think you want a priest, do you? —a priest on whom a bishop has laid his hands? Or you dream that you must go to a holy place, a pile of stones put together in architectural form. Possibly you even dream that you must pine all through Lent, and not expect joy till you reach Easter. What folly is all this! You have but to cry, and the Lord will hear you. There is but one priest—even the Lord Jesus. There is but one holy place—His glorious Person. There is but one holy time, and that is to-day. When the Spirit of God works a cry in the heart of the poor man, that cry climbs up to heaven by the way of Jacob's ladder, and at the same instant mercy comes down by the same ladder. Our Lord Jesus Christ is that ladder which joins earth and heaven together; so that our prayers go up to heaven, and God's mercy comes down to us on earth. Oh, that men would be content with the blessedly simple apparatus of grace: "This poor man cries, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles"!

III. I must be brief on my last head; but it is a very important one. Consider THE NEED AND THE USEFULNESS OF PERSONAL TESTIMONY. It is David who says, "This poor man cried." You see he tells the story: he writes it down in a book for us to read; he weaves it into a psalm for us to sing.

Testimony is a weighty thing for the persuasion and winning of men; but *it must be of the right kind.* It should be *personal,* concerning things which you yourself know: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Never mind if you should be charged with being egotistical. That is a blessed egoism which dares to stand out and bear bold witness for God in its own person. "*This* poor man cried"; not somebody over the water—"and the Lord heard *him,*" not a man down the next street. The more *definite and specific* your testimony, the better and the more convincing. One of our evangelists writes me, that when he was praying with an inquirer, and trying to lead him to Jesus, he was much helped by a working man coming in, and kneeling down by their side, and saying, "Lord, save this poor soul, even as Thou didst save me at two o'clock this morning!" Afterwards the evangelist asked him how he came to use such an expression. "Well," said the man, "I *was* saved then; just as the clock struck two I found the Saviour, and I always like to tell when a thing happens." Somehow or other, that "two o'clock in the morning" helped the inquirer mightily; it put such a reality into the transaction. He thought, "This man knows that he was saved at two o'clock in the morning, why should I not be saved now, at eight o'clock in the evening?" I do not say that we can all tell the date of our conversion: many of us cannot. But if we can throw in such details, let us do so; for they help to make our testimony striking.

Our witness should be an *assured* one. We must believe, and therefore speak. Do not say, "I hope that I prayed; and I—I—trust that the Lord heard me." Say, "I prayed, and the Lord heard me." If you begin to stutter when you are giving your evidence for the Lord Jesus, worldlings will not believe you. Are you sure? If you are not sure yourself, you cannot assure others. The accent of conviction is indispensable if you would convince. Be sure that you have cried, and be sure that God has heard you, and then bear testimony to what you have tried and proved.

Give your testimony *cheerfully.* "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Do not say it as if it were a line from "the agony column"; but write it as a verse of a psalm—of such a psalm as this, which begins with, "I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Your testimony must have for its sole aim the glory of God. Do not wish to show yourself off as an interesting person, a man of vast experience. We cannot allow the grace of God to be buried in ungrateful silence. When He made the world the angels sang for joy, and when He saves a soul we will not be indifferent. Let us call together our friends and our neighbours, and charge them to rejoice with us, for our Lord has found us, though we were lost. Remember how the father, when the prodigal came back, said to his household, "Let us eat, and be merry." So, dear friends, be glad at heart that the Lord has saved you, and tell others of what He has done, saying, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him."

Testimonies to facts have weight with men. Those who live to win souls have learned from experience that facts are grand things to use in their holy service. When you are teaching people doctrines they will often be inattentive and unmoved; but when you come to facts they listen and feel their force. I sat not long ago with one whom I would fain win for my Lord, and I told him certain facts with regard to the Lord's hearing prayer for the College and the Orphanage, and other parts of my work for the Lord. I marked the deep interest which these facts produced. He believed me to be a man of integrity, and he could not resist the conclusion that the Lord is a prayer-hearing God. To yourself and to others one fact is better than a dozen inferences. Even the hardest of the Gradgrinds can only say, "What I want is facts." Test prayer for yourself, and then boldly state the results, and you will have power with men. Personal experience is far more convincing than observation: tell facts which you

have yourself experienced: "This poor man cried and the Lord heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles."

Such testimony will have most weight with the same sort of men as yourselves. When a poor man tells what the Lord did for him, he wins the attention, and gains the belief of other poor men. When any event happens to a person like myself, I become interested in it. The poor man says, "I see he is a poor man like myself, and if God hears him, why should He not hear me?" Does not your brother's salvation cheer you, and make you feel that you will cry to the Lord too? How wonderfully God has heard prayer from men in singular positions! He heard Jacob when his angry brother Esau was close upon him with armed men. At Jabbok the Lord heard him by night; and he met his brother the next morning with a smiling face. Israel in Egypt was in sore bondage, but the Lord heard His people's cry, and sent Moses, and divided the Red Sea, and brought forth His chosen. The Lord heard Samson when he was ready to die of thirst. He heard the men of Reuben who cried to God in the battle against the Hagarites, "and He was entreated of them, because they put their trust in Him." He heard Hezekiah and Isaiah when Rabshakeh wrote his blasphemous and slanderous letter. We read that, "for this cause they prayed, and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty men of Assyria." David prayed in the cave, and Elijah on Carmel and Jeremiah in prison, and the Lord heard them. There was once a man in the belly of a fish miraculously kept alive. The great fish felt ill with such a thing as a living man within him; and therefore it dived deep down till the prisoner felt himself to be at the bottom of the mountains. Then, to get vegetable medicine, the fish rushed among the sea meadows, and Jonah cried, "The weeds were wrapped about my head." He was in a strange, dark, horrible place, and he says of it, "Out of the belly of hell cried I." Was his cry of any use? Yes; we read, "Out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice. My prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple." Wherever you may be, and in whatsoever trial you may be involved, the Lord will hear your cry, and come to your help. If any soul here is, like Jonah, in the very belly of hell in feeling and apprehension, yet, his cry will prevail with heaven, and he shall know that "salvation is of the Lord." A poor man's cry will sound, through the telephone of Christ's mediation, in the ear of God, and He will respond to it.

Now, this witness, dear friends, while it is very strong to those who are like ourselves, *will be increased in force as one and another shall join us.* One person says, "I cried to the Lord, and He heard *me*." "But," says an objector, "that is a special case." Up rises a second witness, and says, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." "Well, that is only two; and two instances may not prove a rule." Then, up rises a third, a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and in each case it is the same story—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Surely he must be hardened in unbelief who refuses to believe so many witnesses. I remember the story of a lawyer, a sceptic, who attended a class-meeting where the subject was similar to our theme of this morning. He heard about a dozen tell what the Lord had done for them; and he said, as he sat there, "If I had a case in court, I should like to have these good people for witnesses. I know them all, they are my neighbours, they are simple-minded people, straightforward and honest, and I know I could carry any case if I had them on my side." Then he very candidly argued that what they all agreed upon was true. He believed them in other matters, and he could not doubt them in this, which was to them the most important of all. He tried religion for himself, and the Lord heard him; and very soon he was at the class-meeting, adding his witness to theirs. If I were to put the question at this moment to my present audience, what would be the result? Our friend Mr. Stott said just now in prayer that we were a very promiscuous company this dark morning I agree with him. Still I will try it. You that have had answers to prayer say, "*Aye.*" (The response came like a thunderclap.) I am sure there are none of us who have ever tried the power of prayer who would have to say "No." If I were to put the contrary, there would be no answer. All who are accustomed to pray will vote with the ayes. Go home, then, with the words of our text in your hearts and on your tongues—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Glory be to God! Amen.

FULL ASSURANCE

"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."—Psalm xxxv. 3.

THE Psalmist, when he wrote these words, was surrounded by many and furious enemies. He pleads with God to take hold on shield and buckler, and to come forth for his defence. Yet he feels that there is only one thing which God hath need to do in order to remove his fears, and make him strong in the day of conflict, "'Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation,' and I will defy them all. In the name of God I will set up my banner; and though weak in myself, yet shall I be able to overcome them readily, and tread them as straw is trodden from the dunghill, when the joy of the Lord shall be my strength, because Thou hast said unto me, 'I am thy salvation.'" Brethren, there is nothing that can make you strong to labour for God, bold to fight against your enemies, and mighty to resist your temptations, like a full assurance that God is your God, and your sure salvation. Your doubts and fears weaken you. While they nourish your despair, and diminish your joy, they do at the same time cut the sinews of your valour, and blunt the edge of your sword. A fully-assured Christian is a very giant in our Israel; for happiness and beauty he standeth like Saul, head and shoulders

taller than the rest; while for strength and courage he can match with David, and is like the angel of the Lord.

It is upon the subject of full assurance that I shall address you this morning, without further preface. I shall first bid you *hear objectors*, who oppose themselves to full assurance; secondly, I shall beg you to *hear the text;* and then I shall request you to *hear the preacher.*

I. First of all, let us HEAR OBJECTORS.

There are some who say, it is better that a man should stand in jeopardy of his soul every hour—better for him to be exercised with doubts and fears, than that he should grow confident, and have the joy of knowing assuredly that he is a saved man, is in the favour of God, and shall never be condemned. We will hear these objectors for a moment, and answer them speedily.

One of them advances, and he says, "First, I object to your preaching this morning, the doctrine of full assurance, *because I believe it to be impossible. I cannot conceive that any man can know in this life, whether he shall be saved in the life to come. Perhaps I may grant you that, in the dying hour, some men may get a little confidence; but, with the exception of a few of the eminently holy, and the profoundly spiritual, it cannot be possible that Christians should attain to a full confidence, and an infallible assurance of being saved.*" To this, sir, I reply thus. You say it is impossible: I say it is not only possible, but has been certainly enjoyed by the people of God. Doth the Spirit of God teach men to pray for impossibilities? Yet David prays for it here: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." The thing is possible, then, or else David would not have asked for it; it *can* be granted by God; it *can* be received by the Christian, else this prayer had never been put in inspired record. Besides, do you think that the Holy Ghost would exhort us to do an impossibility? And yet, does He not speak by the mouth of Paul, and say, "Give diligence to make your calling and election *sure?*" Does He not bid us be assured that we are called by grace, and that we are chosen of God? I say, that which *may* be a matter of prayer, and which *is* a subject of precept, cannot be an impossible thing. Besides, it has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of even ordinary every-day Christians. We could read you their biographies, and find expressions like this: "I have no more doubt of my interest in Christ than I have of my existence." "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him." And there be many in this house to-day, who, if this were the time for them to give their personal testimony, could say, "I *know* that I have been born again; I *am sure* that my sins are all forgiven; I am neither afraid to die, nor do I fear to live; for, living, Christ is with me, and dying, I shall be with Christ; being justified, I have peace with God through Jesus Christ my Lord." Brethren, it is *not* impossible; it is attainable by the man who hath faith, if he know how to use the proper means.

But shall I tell you who the gentlemen are who generally raise objections to the glorious privilege of assurance? There are, first of all, the adherents of the Pope of Rome. Of course, the Papist does not like full assurance. And why? The Pope and his priest would have a lean larder if full assurance were well preached. Only conceive, my brethren, if the Roman Catholic could get the full assurance of salvation, surely the Cardinals would hardly find money enough to buy their red hats. For where were purgatory then? Purgatory is an impossibility, if full assurance be possible. If a man knows himself to be saved, then he is not to be troubled with a silly fear about waiting in the intermediate state, to be purified with fire, before he can enter into heaven. Purgatory is only acceptable to those poor trembling souls who know of no sure salvation here, and are glad of this deceptive hope of a salvation to be wrought in the world to come. Purgatory being thus builded upon a lying imposition—on the fears of ignorant consciences, becomes what brave old Hugh Latimer used to call it, "Purgatory Pick-purse," to the poor sinner, and Purgatory Fill-purse to the vagabond priest. Once let full assurance be given to all Christian men—first make the Romanist a Christian, and then let him be fully assured of his interest in Christ, and away goes purgatory, and there will never be a soul found to tremble at it any more.

The other persons who object to this doctrine, are generally people who have no religion, and who want, therefore, to make themselves a little easy by the notion that nobody has any more than they have. Your easy church-goers and chapel-goers; your ladies and gentlemen who think that religion consists in buying a Prayer Book, who imagine that to have a book of Psalms and Hymns, constitutes godliness; your fine folks to whom religion is as much a matter of fashion as some new colour, or some new form of dress;—these people, having no vitality in their godliness, never having a religion which could either make them cry or sing, never having godliness enough either to make them miserable, or make them blessed—these think there is nothing more in godliness than they get themselves. They say, "*I* never knew *my* sins were forgiven," and judging all others by themselves, they think that no one else can know it. And I am sorry to say, grieved at heart to say it, not seldom I have known professed ministers of the gospel, who have even rebuked those who have reached to the high attainment of assurance. I was waited upon, not very long since, by a lady of considerable standing, who had long been seeking rest, and nothing would satisfy her, unless she knew her sins were forgiven. She had called upon a clergyman, of some standing too, and he had assured her that the thing was utterly impossible; and she was ready to go mad with the idea that she must all her life go mourning on somewhere between hope and fear, in the balances between despair and hope. When I told her that it was not only the privilege of the Christian, but his duty, to *know* himself to be saved, and that no man ought to rest till he was infallibly assured by the Holy Ghost that he was in a gracious state and delivered from fear of hell, the joy that flushed her face was something worth beholding, and she went on her way to seek, and I trust to find, the grace which is in Christ Jesus. I would have each of you put aside those carnal quibbles which are raised by Romanists and Romanizers, against the idea that we *can* know that we are saved, for not only can we know it, but we ought never to be satisfied till we do know it. And this, mark you, is not *my* statement; it is the manifest testimony of the Book of God, and was plainly held by all the fathers of the Church, Augustine, Chrysostom, and the

like; it is the testimony of all the Reformers—of all the giant divines of the Puritanic times; it is the testimony of all true evangelical Christians, that every Christian has a right to have a full assurance of his salvation, and should never be content until he attains thereunto.

But another objector rises, and faintly says, "*But I am afraid, sir; I am afraid of your preaching full assurance, because so many persons have boasted of it, and they have been vile pretenders, and have perished after all.*" Friend, it is to be admitted that there have been many who have mistaken presumption for assurance. They have thought that the arrogant impertinence of a proud unhumbled spirit was the same thing as the simple child-like confidence of a renewed, regenerated heart. But mark, assurance is not possible to you, till you are born again; you have no business to dream of it, till you have a new heart and a right spirit. It would indeed be a fearful piece of blasphemy for you to think that God is your Father when your Father He is not, or to dream that your sins are forgiven when your hands are scarlet with them, and your soul is black with your crimes. But because some make the counterfeit, am I to throw away the genuine? Because, forsooth, there be some tin shillings, will you all cast away the silver? Because some pass upon you the base forged bank-note, will you therefore burn those which really come from the bank? I trow not. And, my dear brethren, if thousands presumed, that would not be an argument why one true Christian should not be fully assured of his interest in Christ.

"*Yes, but,*" says another, "*I am afraid, if men get fully assured, they will grow careless.*" This is the old objection that was brought against faith in Luther's time. "If men believe that they will be justified by faith," said the Romanist, "they will never do any good works;" whereas the fact is, men never do any good works till they *are* justified by faith. Those who cry down good works as the ground of hope, are the very men who work with all their might in the service of Christ; and as assurance is but faith come to perfection, the assured man will always be the most industrious man. Why, when I know that I am saved,

> "Then for the love I bear His name,
> What was my gain I count my loss;
> I pour contempt on all my shame,
> And nail my glory to His cross."

A well-grounded assurance is the most active worker in the field, the most valiant warrior in the battle, and the most patient sufferer in the furnace. There are none so active as the assured. Let a tree be planted in this soil, and watered with this river, and its boughs will bend with fruit. Confidence of success stimulates exertion, joy in faith removes sorrows, and realising assurance overcomes all difficulties. Like the sword of Goliath we may say of assurance, "There is none like it; give it to me." Who cares for deaths, or devils, when he can read his title clear? What matters the tempest without when there is calm within? Assurance puts the heart in heaven, and moves the feet to heaven. Its children are all fair, like the holy children in Babylon, and no race can compare for a moment with these "hinds let loose," these "lion-like men," these children of the sun. There never were men so self-sacrificing, so daring, so zealous, so enthusiastic in the cause of Christ, as the men who know that their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and therefore out of gratitude serve their God. Why, I put it to the sinner here, who never thought of this matter before. Poor man! if your sins could be all forgiven this morning, and you could know it—if God should say to your soul, "I am thy salvation," and if you could go out of this house knowing that you were a child of God, do you think it would make you unholy? Do you think it would make you negligent? No, I think I see the tear in your eye, as you reply, "I would do anything for *Him;* I would *live* for Him; I would *die* for Him, to show how I love Him who loved me." Ah! poor soul, if thou believest in Christ *now*, that will be true. If thou wilt cast thyself on Jesus now, thou shalt be forgiven; there shall be no sin left in God's Book against thee; thou shalt be absolved, acquitted, delivered, cleansed and washed; and then thou shalt prove in thy experience that assurance does not make men sin, but that assurance of pardon is the very best means of making men holy, and keeping them in the fear of God.

I have one class of objectors to answer, and I have done. There is a certain breed of Calvinists, whom I do not envy, who are always jeering and sneering as much as ever they can at the full assurance of faith. I have seen their long faces; I have heard their whining periods, and read their dismal sentences, in which they say something to this effect—"Groan in the Lord alway, and again I say, groan! He that mourneth and weepeth, he that doubteth and feareth, he that distrusteth and dishonoureth his God, shall be saved." That seems to be the sum and substance of their very ungospel-like gospel. But why is it that they do this? I speak now honestly and fearlessly. It is because there is a pride within them—a conceit which is fed on rottenness, and sucks marrow and fatness out of putrid carcases. And what, say you, is the object of their pride? Why, the pride of being able to boast of a deep experience,—the pride of being a blacker, grosser, and more detestable backslider than other people. "Whose glory is in their shame," may well apply to them. A more dangerous, because a more deceitful pride than this is not to be found. It has all the elements of self-righteousness in it. I would sooner a man boast in his good works than boast in his good feelings, because you *can* deal with the man who boasts in his good works, you have plain texts of Scripture, and you convict him of being a legalist; but this other man boasts that he is no legalist; he can speak very sharply against legality; he knows the truth, and yet the truth is not in him, in its spirit, because still he is looking to his feelings, and not looking to the finished work of Christ. Of all the Diabolians that ever stole into the city of Mansoul, Mr. Live-by-feeling was one of the worst of villains, though he had the fairest face. Brethren, you had better live by works than live by feelings; both are damning forms of trust, but the one is more deceptive and more delusive than the other by far. You are justified by faith, not by feelings; you are saved by what Christ felt for you, not by what you feel; and the root and basis of salvation is the cross, and "other foundation shall no man lay than that which is laid"; even though he place his experience there, he builds "wood, hay, and stubble," and not the corner stone, which is Christ Jesus the Lord.

I have thus tried to meet my objectors: I shall now turn to the second part of the discourse briefly.

II. Let us HEAR THE TEXT. "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

The first thing the text seems to say is, *David had his doubts, then;* for why would he pray, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation," if he were not sometimes exercised with doubts and fears? Cheer up, Christian brother! If David doubted, thou must not say, "*I* am no Christian, because I have doubts." The best of believers *sometimes* are troubled with fears and anxieties. Abraham had the greatest faith, but he had *some* unbelief. I envy the brother who can say that his faith never wavered. He can say more than David did, for David had cause to cry, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

But, next, the text says that *David was not content while he had doubts and fears*, but he repaired at once to the mercy-seat to pray for assurance; for he valued it as much fine gold. "O Lord!" David seems to say, "I have lost my confidence; my foot slippeth; my feet are almost gone; my doubts and fears prevail; but I cannot bear it. I am wretched, I am unhappy. 'Say—say unto my soul, I *am* thy salvation.'"

And then the text tells you yet a third thing,—*that David knew where to obtain full assurance.* He goes at once to God in prayer. He knows that knee-work is that by which faith is increased; and there, in his closet, he crieth out to the Most High, "Say unto *my* soul, I am thy salvation." O my brethren, we must be much alone with God, if we would have a clear sense of His love! Let your cries cease, and your eyes will grow dim. Much in prayer, much in heaven; slow in prayer, slow in progress.

Now pull the text into pieces, and let us look at the words. And notice, that David would not be satisfied unless his assurance had *a divine source.* "*Say* unto my soul." Great God! if the priest should say it, it is nothing; if my minister should say it, if the deacons, the Church officers, and all the members of the Church should say it, it is nothing. Lord, do *thou* say it! Nothing short of a divine testimony in the soul will ever content the true Christian. The Spirit of God must Himself, after a supernatural sort, speak to our conscience and to our heart, or else peaceful and quiet our spirit can never be. Gracious God! let me not take my hopes at hap-hazard; let not my confidence be ill-founded and built upon the sand. Speak Thyself, with Thy word of truth and wisdom, and say to me, even to me, "I am thy salvation!"

Note, next, David cannot be content unless his assurance has *a vivid personality* about it. "Say unto *my* soul, I am *thy* salvation." If thou shouldst say this to all the saints, it were nothing, unless Thou shouldst say it to me. Lord, I have sinned; I deserve it not; I am sinful, I scarcely dare to ask it; but oh! say it to *my* soul, even to *my* soul, "I am *thy* salvation." Let me have a pointed, personal, infallible, indisputable sense that I am Thine, and that Thou art mine.

See, next, David must have it come deep into *his inner being.* "Say unto my *soul.* Speak it not merely to my ears; say it to my soul. Great God! let me not fancy that I heard it in the air; let me not dream that I listened to it in my sleep; but speak it right into the ears of my spirit, and let the inner man hear the echoes of Thy peace-speaking voice,—'Say unto my *soul*, I am thy salvation.'" Brethren, it is no skimming the surface which will do for us; we must have quiet in the deeps. That blessing "of the depth which lieth under" we need and must have. It will not content us to have a fair skin, scarce concealing with its deceitful gauze the foul and deadly leprosy. Our soul must be sound and healthy to the very core. Lord, say to my *soul*, in my bowels' inner depths, "I am thy salvation." Put it beyond doubt; put it beyond all chance, dispute, or hazard, "I *am* thy salvation."

Note again, David wants *present* assurance. He does not say, "Say unto my soul, I *will* be thy salvation," but, "I *am*." And yet that "am," you will see if you look at the text, is not in the original; it is in italics; it has been supplied by our translators. That word "am" is man's word, not God's, therefore I will say but little of it. It may be, "I *will be* thy salvation," or "I *have been* thy salvation," or "I *am*"; and very rightly there is no word there at all. You can learn as much from God's silence as you can from His speech, and I think this silence means just this. There is no word put there at all, because full assurance enables the Christian to say of God, "He *was* my salvation before the worlds began, He *is* my salvation now, He *will* be when the world shall pass away." So that you may put up the prayer in any tense you prefer. "Say unto my soul, I—thy salvation." The two terms shall be alike. "God—thy salvation,"—"I," the great personal self-existent Deity, "thy salvation." The two shall stand and fall together; they shall both of them be sure, both eternal in the ancient ages, both everlasting in the ages to come. "Say unto my soul, I, thy salvation."

I think we have thus heard what the text has to say to us. You will remark, when you look it all the way through, that the only question which we need put is this: How *can* God say to us, "I am thy salvation?" You do not expect to hear it as you walk along the streets; you do not imagine that you will see it written on the skies? No, God speaketh to His people thus; by His Word, by His ministers, and by His Holy Spirit silently and mysteriously imprinting upon the heart the fact, that that heart is washed in the Redeemer's blood. Dr. Cæsar Malan, of Geneva, has put in a very plain light the way in which God in His Word says to us, "I am thy salvation." You are to suppose the minister is talking to a friend; this friend is anxious and doubting, and wants to know how the Bible can say to any man, that that man is saved. The conversation runs thus:—

"*Pastor:* He who believes in Jesus Christ, has eternal life (John iii. 16); do you know this declaration of the word of God? Very well, but you appear to think it obscure or equivocal. *John:* Never, I am sure it is true. Yet all those who *say*—I believe in Jesus Christ, are not the elected of God, bought of the Lord, or saved by grace. All these are not chosen, for there are many hypocrites who dare say that they believe in the Son of God. *Pastor:* You observe, that the word does not say, that those who *say* they believe, or *pretend* to believe, in Jesus Christ, or who imagine falsely that they believe, have eternal life; but this infallible word says, that those who believe in effect and really, have this life; so, then, the multitude in Christian nations who profess to believe in Jesus Christ, is not proof that they believe in effect; but if this multitude believe in effect on the Saviour, certainly they will have eternal

life. *John:* Thus, then, sir, whoever is able to assure himself that he believes on the Saviour, then he will be certain that he has actually the life eternal, and that he is also elected.—(*The minister took a little bit of paper and wrote upon it these words:*) 'Whoever receives from my hand this paper, and this declaration, I hold him for my friend; (*he put his name to these words, and presenting it to John, he said to him.*) Receive this from my hand, and believe my testimony, for I am a creditable person':—(*John took the paper and read what the minister had written.*) *Pastor:* How am I to regard you, John, after this testimony that I have given you? *John:* I have the minister for a friend. *Pastor:* Is it from you to me that this friendship flows, or is it from me to you? *John:* It is from you to me. *Pastor:* Do you hesitate to say that I am your friend, and that you have become mine? *John:* If I said I did not believe you, I should make you a liar. *Pastor:* Do you, then, look with affection towards me, or is it I with affection towards you? for you are assured that I am your friend, and that I regard you as mine. *John:* You, dear sir, love *me*, and care for *me*. *Pastor:* And how are you assured that this good-will is addressed to you? *John:* Because you have been pleased to say it, and I do not doubt your veracity. *Pastor:* I am sure that I have not written your name, as my friend; why then do you know that I have mentioned you in particular? *John:* You have written with your own hand, that whoever receiveth this paper, you shall have him for a friend; and because I have received this paper, and because I know that you are of good authority, I have no doubt at all upon the subject. *Pastor:* That is, then, because you have been certain on the one hand of having received this paper from my hand, and on the other hand, that I am of good authority, that you are certain of possessing, at the present, my affection. *John:* I do not think that I am able to speak with doubt upon this point, without insulting your veracity."

The substance of which is just this, that when you can take the Word, and find that you *are* the character there spoken of, it is as good as if out of heaven an angel should fly down to you, sitting in your pew now, and should say in your ear, in the presence of this congregation, "God is thy salvation." Now, brethren, I know this day I have no other trust but in the cross of Christ; therefore I *am* saved; and you can say the same, each one of you, if you are resting in Christ alone. There is not an "if" or a "but" about it; you are saved. Oh! do enjoy that thought, and go home and live upon it; it shall be marrow and fatness to your spirit.

But, then, God often speaks by His minister, as well as by His Word. But that is very much in the same way. While the minister is preaching concerning those who *are* saved, you listen, and you say, "Ah, he speaks to me!" He describes your character, and though you are standing far away in the gallery, you say, "Ah, that is *my* character!" He speaks of the weary and heavy laden sinner, and He bids him come, and you say, "Ah, I am weary and heavy laden, and *I* will come"; and when you have come, Christ has given you rest. You need have no doubt about it; if you can fairly take hold on the promise which is offered to certain characters and states, why, then you can go your way saying, "God hath said to me by His servant, 'I *am* thy salvation.'"

Besides this, God has a way of speaking, without the Word and without the ministers, to our hearts. His Spirit can drop like the rain, and distil like the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb. We know not how it is, but sometimes there is a deep sweet calm. Our conscience says, "I have been washed in the blood of Christ," and the Spirit of God saith, "Aye, 'tis true, 'tis true." In such times we are so happy—so happy that we want to tell our joys—so blessed, that if we could but borrow angels' wings and fly away, we would scarce know the change when we passed through the pearly gates, for we have had heaven below, and there has been but little difference between that and heaven above. Oh, I wish my whole congregation, without exception, consisted of men and women who had heard the Spirit say, "I am *thy* salvation." What happy hymns! What happy prayers! You might go home to some poor single room; you might go to a scantily furnished house, and to a table that has barely bread upon it; but happy men! happy men! Better would be your dinner of herbs, than a stalled ox without confidence in Christ; better your rich poverty, than the poverty of the rich who have no faith in Jesus; better all the griefs you have to endure, when sanctified by assurance, than all the joys the worldling has, when unblessed by faith, and unhallowed by love to God. *I* can say now,—

> "Grant me the visits of Thy face,
> And I desire no more."

I shall now pass to my third and last point—a little while only, but earnestly, I trust.

III. Will you patiently HEAR THE PREACHER, in what he has to say?

I know that in this large assembly, I am addressing very many who never knew that they were saved. I must put you all into one class, though, indeed, you are not in the same state; for there are some who never *knew* that they were saved, who *are* saved. They do believe in Jesus: but their faith is so little, that they never know that they are forgiven. I have to put *you* in the class, because you do belong to it for the time being. But there are many of you who never knew that you were saved, because you never cared to know. It has been a matter of concern with you to find out your pedigree; but you never asked, "Is God my Father?" You have made quite sure of the title deeds of your estate; but you never took the trouble to ask whether heaven was yours or no. And possibly, some of you have imbibed a notion that it is a very easy thing to be saved—that there is no need to trouble your heads about it much—that so long as you do your duty, attend your church or frequent your chapel, it is well and good, and there is no use making this fuss about being born again, and having a new heart, and a right spirit. I may never have your ear again, but mark this, at the day of judgment, I will be quit of your blood, if you perish in your delusion. This is *the* delusion of England. We have not half so much to dread Popery as we have that nominal Christianity, fostered by a national Church—that nominal Christianity which has no root nor soul within it. Oh! there are millions of Englishmen who think they are Christians, because they were sprinkled in infancy with holy drops, and because they have come to the Lord's Table; whereas, little do they know that every time they have come there, they did eat and drink damnation to themselves, because they did not discern the Lord's body. This is the

curse and plague of England, that we have so much profession and so little possession—such multitudes of you who are content to sit under a sleepy ministry where ministers will not tell you the truth for fear of hurting your feelings, where they will preach the truth generally, as if a man should wave a sword; but do not come home personally, as if a man should drive it through your very heart. What we want is more home dealing, more plain speaking, more thrusting of the hand inside your soul, to make you tremble, and ask yourselves the question whether you be right before God or no.

I speak then, to the whole of you who never knew that you were saved; and first I say to you, *how foolish you are!* O sirs! you are to die soon, and you are to go to heaven or to hell,—to splendours and glories, or to glooms and horrors; and yet you do not know which is to be your portion. O fools! miserable fools! If some of you should say "I do not know whether I have a cancer or no," I should say, seek the physician, and enquire if there be a fear; but to say, "I do not know whether I am in the bonds of iniquity and the gall of bitterness or no," is awful indeed. Why, you make your estates as tight as law can tie them; all the skill of legal language is employed to make the deed secure; and yet you are content to have heaven as a thing of *if*, and *but*, and *perhaps*. O! fools indeed! How can ye be so mad? Sure to die and yet not sure whether you are saved! Sure to appear before the bar of God, and yet not know whether you shall be acquitted or condemned! Oh! if there be wisdom left within you, if your brain be not turned to perfect madness. I conjure you by the living God to make sure work of it, and never be content till you *know* that you are saved.

But again: I must not only call you foolish, but miserable. Miserable, I say. Do you look at me and say, "We are comfortable, we are easy; we are content?" Aye, sirs, so madmen talk. If I saw a man lying down upon the brink of the crater of a volcano, and I knew that very soon the lava would come streaming up, and then rolling down, I could not call him happy, though he were toying with Nature's fairest flowers, or sucking her most delicious sweets. And you—you are in such a state as this! Upon a puff of wind, a bubble, hangs your eternal state. If life depended on a hair, it were indeed precarious; but here is your soul depending on your life, which depends on something frailer than a dream. O sirs! you may drop dead in this house. Such things are not extraordinary. Men have come into the house of God bodies, and they have gone out corpses. And while I think that any one of you may die, and you are uncertain whether you shall be lost or saved, I could sooner call you kings than call you happy; and the rightest title I can give to you is, O miserable men! miserable men! uncertain as to your future state.

Once more, and let this last thought ring in your ears. Ah! you may go away, perhaps to your gay parties, to your rounds of merriment, to your midnight balls, to your varnished harlotries, mayhap, but let this ring in your ears. "Oh! the danger—the danger of not knowing whether you shall be saved or lost!" You will die! I suppose you will not dispute with me about that. You do not claim to be immortal; you expect to die. You die; and what, sirs;—what, madam;—what if your fears should be true? Your companions are gay no longer; they are the damned spirits of hell; your occupations are frivolous no more; they are solemn and serious now—as solemn as death, and as serious as eternity. Where now the music which once regaled your dainty ears? Your only symphonies are sighs, dirges, and howlings. Where now the soft couch on which you took your rest and pleasure? You have made your bed in hell; and what a change for some of you—from the scarlet of Dives to the flames of hell—from the feasts so sumptuous to the fiends so terrible! Where are ye now, ye church-goers, ye chapel-goers? You have no profession of religion here, no hymn-books here; no minister of mercy; no voice of holy song; no ring of Sabbath bells; no tearful eye; no tender heart; no lip which trembles while it speaks to you, and only speaks of terror because it loves you, and would save you if it could. O my hearers, if you are not sure of being saved, what if you are sure of being damned! And you are either—mark this—not to your own apprehension perhaps, but in fact; you are sure of one or the other. Which is it? Which must it be? I know, when I preach these terrible things, men will not listen to me; but God is my witness. I would not speak about them if I *dare* be silent about them. But if you perish, sirs, it shall not be for want of pleading with, or praying for, or weeping over. Sinner! I beseech thee turn! By Him that died, and lives, and hath sent me to plead with thee, I beseech thee, seek, if thou hast never sought, and if thou hast sought, seek again; and if thou hast found, find yet more fully, till thou canst say, "He *is* mine, and I am His." Put your downy pillow under your head to-night, ye sluggards; but sleep not, for ye may never wake in this world. Sit to your luxurious meal to-morrow; let the dainties be sweet, leave them untasted, for you may one day be denied a drop of water. O sirs! be not happy till you have made your happiness sure. Oh! have no peace, till your peace is everlasting, substantial peace. Talk not of being blessed, till God has blessed you. Think not that you *can* be blessed, while "God is angry with the wicked every day," and hath said, "Cursed is he that is under the law."

But do you wish to be saved? Does the Spirit of God whisper to you, "Escape! escape?" There is forgiveness still; there is forgiveness *now*; there is forgiveness for *thee*. Trust Christ, sinner, and you shall be saved—saved this moment. Believe in Him now with all your guilt and sin about you. May the Holy Ghost now lead you to trust my Lord and Master; and you may go home assured that *He* hath for ever put away your sin, and you are accepted and blessed in Him. May God bless you, each one of you, now and ever. Amen.

"Surrounded by a host of foes,
Storm'd by a host of foes within,
Nor swift to flee, nor strong to oppose,
Single against hell, earth, and sin;
Single, yet undismay'd, I am;
I dare believe in Jesu's name.

What though a thousand hosts engage,
A thousand worlds my soul to shake,
I have a shield shall quell their rage,
And drive the alien armies back;
Portray'd it bears a bleeding Lamb;
I dare believe in Jesu's name."

FATHOMLESS

" Thy judgments are a great deep."—Psalm xxxvi. 6.

CONSIDER the word " judgment " in whatever light you please, this sentence is true. There is much of mystery connected with the terrible calamities which afflict the earth, devastate nations, destroy cities, and sweep away the relics of the past. There is much of mystery about the judgments of God upon the wicked in this life—how they prosper for awhile and are suddenly cut down ; how they wax fat like oxen, and then are taken away to the shambles. The judgments of God regarding the wicked in the world to come are also " a great deep," not to be spoken of with levity. A solemn subject is that of the future punishment of the ungodly—" a great deep," a deep where some, I am afraid, speculate so deeply that the risk they run is imminent—they may drown themselves in perdition.

But I prefer to-night to take the text as it may refer to *God's dealings with His own people.* He deals with them in judgment, not I think, penally, vindicating the inflexible justice of the law by the terrible vengeance He inflicts on the transgressor, as He will deal with the wicked at the last dread assize. I mean not that. I rather interpret it of the salutary discipline and painful chastisements of God's hand, which are called " judgments," in Scripture. They do not come by chance, nor upon us at all as a matter of sovereignty merely, but they are sent in wisdom, because God judges them to be necessary. They are weighed out to us with discretion ; given to us by prudence. It is a sweet name, I think, for affliction—not that I look upon affliction as a judgment upon me for sin, which I cannot do now that I have seen sin punished in Christ ; but I look at my affliction as being sent to me according to the all-wise judgment of a kind Father, not at all without consideration, but always according to His infinite wisdom and prudence, dealt out in measure and at proper times, according to the infinite judgment and wisdom of God. In a word, they are called " judgments," not because they are judicial, but because they are judicious.

Now, these dealings of God with His servants, always wise and prudent, are frequently like great deeps. I shall simply this evening work out three or four thoughts which arise out of that metaphor.

I. THEN THE DEALINGS OF GOD WITH HIS PEOPLE ARE OFTEN UNFATHOMABLE.

We cannot discover the foundation or cause, and spring of them. Some of God's servants who are earnestly desirious to provide things honest in the sight of all men, though they are industrious and energetic, and use proper prudence, do not find themselves able to prosper in trade. They are thwarted in all their purposes. There seems to be a kind of fatality connected with all their enterprises. If *they* do but touch a business or a bargain which will turn into gold with the traffic of others, it melts under their hand into dross. Now, it is not always that this can be explained. " Thy judgments are a great deep" —a matter to be perceived as a fact, but not to be explained by reasoning.

Sometimes in a family a dear child is born and is a great comfort to its parents. It seems, indeed, to be sent in love, to heal some old wound, and to make the house happy, and then just as suddenly as it came, it is removed. Why ? Ah ! here, again, is another deep, which a mother's anxious heart would like to fathom, but which it is not for her to explore. It is a great deep.

Children will be spared to us, and just when they are ripening to manhood and womanhood, and we hope to see them settled and established in life, it happens—as it happened to one of our beloved friends in this church this afternoon—that we have to stand at the open grave, and say, " Earth to earth, dust to dust." Why God takes away the holy and the good, the amiable and the lovely, when they appeared to be most useful, we cannot understand. It is a great deep.

Oftentimes, too, it happens that when a man is surrounded by his family, and all his household are dependent upon his exertions with a business just beginning to prosper, while he bids fair to live for many years, he is cut down as in a moment ; his wife is left a widow ; his children are orphans. He seems to be taken away at the very worst time, just when he could least be spared. The anxious wife may say to herself, " Why is this ? " but she can only say in return, " I cannot comprehend it ; it is a great deep."

I might thus go on recounting instances, but they have transpired before us all in our lifetime, and if they have not occurred to us yet, they certainly will. Trials and troubles will come upon us quite beyond our measuring-line. We shall have to do business in deep waters where no plummet can by possibility fi- a bottom. " Thy judgments are a great deep."

But why does the Lord send us an affliction which cannot understand ? I answer, *Because He is Lord.* Your child must not expect to understand his father does, because his father is a man of riper intellect and understanding, and the child is bu child. You, dear brother, however experienced y may be, are but a child, and, compared with t divine mind, what intelligence have you ? How c you expect, therefore, that God shall always act a rule which *you* shall be able to understand ? God, and therefore it becometh us oft-times dumb, to sit in silence and feel and know it r right, though we equally know we cannot see is so.

God sendeth us trials of this sort *for the exe our graces.* Now, is there *room for faith.* Whe canst trace Him, thou canst not trust Him. canst understand all that He does, there is roo for thy judgment rather than for thy faith and reliance on judgment. But when thou canst not stand it, submit thyself to Him ; say, " I kno God is good ; though He slay me, yet will I trust though I walk in darkness and see no light, ye not an unbelieving word cross these lips, for good, and must be good, become of me what Oh ! then it is that faith is faith indeed, the fait brings glory to God and strength to thy soul. I room, too, for *humility.* Knowledge puffeth u the feeling, that everything is beyond our know that we are non-plussed, and cannot understa sense of ignorance and incapacity to understa dealings of God, brings to us humility, and we sit

at the foot of Jehovah's throne. Beloved, I think there is hardly a grace which the Christian has which is not much helped by the deeps of God's judgments. Certainly love has frequently been developed to a high degree in this way, for the soul at last comes to say, "No, I will not ask the reason; I will not desire the reason; I do so love Him; let His will stand for a reason; that shall be enough for me; it is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." We love not those whom we are always bringing to book and questioning about all they do, but when love cometh to perfection it admireth all, it believeth all to be right and to be perfect. And so, when love c meth to perfection with reference to the most perfect God, then it is that everything that is done is without examination endorsed; everything, even though it be shrouded in darkness, is without a question believed in. It must be right, for Thou, Lord, hast done it.

Many other reasons why God calls His people thus to feel His judgments occur to me; one I may give, then I will leave this point. *We have sins which we cannot fathom*, dear brethren, and it is little marvel, therefore, if we have also chastisements which we cannot fathom. There are depths of depravity within our heart that call for other deeps, as deep calleth unto deep, and there are consequences of sin within us which we are not able yet to reach, consequences that are following us in secret, and damaging us in very vital points. It needs that the medicine should be of a searching kind to follow the disease into the recesses of our soul, where understanding cannot pry. Some of those deep judgments are like secret, potent, subtle medicines, searching out certain secret devils that have found their way into the caverns of our spirit, and hidden themselves there. Perhaps an affliction which I can understand is meant to direct my attention to some known sin; but it may be that the trial which I cannot understand, is, dealing deadly blows against a mortal ill, which, if not destroyed, might have been solemnly prejudicial to my own spirit.

I leave that thought with you—expect that God's judgments will sometimes be unfathomable. In the next place—God's judgments are a great deep:—

II. THEN THEY ARE SAFE SAILING.

Ships never strike on rocks out in the great deeps. Children, perhaps, may fancy that a shallow sea is the safer, but an old sailor knows better. While they are on the Irish coast the captain has to keep a good look out while he is crossing the Atlantic he is in far greater danger. There he has plenty of sea-room, and there is no fear of quicksands or of shoals. When the river begins to come up the Thames, then it is that they see first one sandbank and then another, and he is in greater danger, but out in the deep water, where he finds the bottom, he is but little afraid. So, mark you, the judgments of God. When He is dealing out upon us, it is the safest possible sailing that a man can have. "What," says one, "trial safe?" Yes, very safe. The safest part of a Christian's life is the time of his trial. "What, when a man is in trouble, do you say he is safe?" "Yes, for then he has little fear no fall; when he is low, he need fear no fall; when he is humbled under God's hand, then he is less likely to be carried away with every wind of temptation. Smooth water on the way to heaven is always a sign that the soul should keep wide awake, for danger is near. One comes at last to feel a solemn fear creeping over one in times of prosperity. I shall fear and tremble because of all the good that God shall make to pass before thee," fearing not so much lest the good should depart as lest we should make an ill use of it, and should have a canker of sloth, or self-confidence, or worldliness growing up in our spirits. We have seen many professed Christians who have made shipwreck, in some few instances it has been attributable to overwhelming sorrow, but in ten cases to the one it has been attributable to prosperity. Men grow rich, and, of course, they do not attend the little chapel they once went to; they must go somewhere where a fashionable world will worship. Men grow rich, and straightway they cannot keep to that road of self-denial which once they so gladly trod. The world has got into their hearts, and they want to get more. They have got so much, and they must get more. An insatiable ambition has come over them, and they fall, and great is the sorrow which their fall brings to the church; great the mischief which it does to the people of God. But a man in trouble—did you ever notice a real child of God in trial? How he prays? He cannot live now without prayer; he has got a burden to carry to his God, and he goes to the mercy-seat again and again. Notice him under depression of spirits. How he reads his Bible now. He does not care now for that lighter literature which beguiled many an hour before. He wants the solid promise, the strong meat of the kingdom of God. Do you notice now how he hears? That man does not care a fig for your flowers and your fine bits of rhetoric; he wants the Word; he wants the naked doctrine; he wants Christ; he cannot be fed on whims and fancies now. He cares a great deal less about theological speculation and ecclesiastical authority; he wants to know something about eternal love, everlasting faithfulness, and the dealings of the Lord of Hosts with the souls of His people, of the covenant, and of the suretyship engagements of Christ. Ah! this is the man who, if you notice him, walks tenderly in the world. He walks holding the world with a very loose hand. He expects to be often in the way, and hopes to be up out of the way, for the world has lost its attraction for him. I say, again, God's judgments are a great deep, but they are safe sailing, and, under the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit, they are not only safe but *they are advantageous*. I greatly question whether we ever do grow in grace much, except when we are in the furnace. We ought so to do. The joys of this life with which God blesses us ought to make us increase in grace and gratitude, ought to be a sufficient motive for the very highest form of consecration, but, as a rule, we are only driven to Christ by a storm—the most of us, I mean. There are blessed and favoured exceptions, but most of us need the rod, must have it, and do not seem to learn obedience, except through chastening, the chastening of the Lord. Here I leave that second thought. Thirdly, God's judgments are a great deep:—

III. BUT THEY CONCEAL GREAT TREASURE.

Down in those great depths, who knows what there may be? Pearls lie deep there—masses of precious things that would make the miser's eye gleam like a star. There are the wrecks of old Spanish galleons lost these centuries ago, and there they lie huge mines of wealth, and far down deep. And so with the deep judgments of God. What wisdom is concealed there, and what treasures of love and faithfulness, and what David calls "very tenderness," "for in very tenderness," saith he, "hast Thou afflicted me." There is as much wisdom to be seen in some of the deep

afflictions of God—if we could but understand them, we should see as much wisdom in them as in the creation of the world. God smites His people artistically. There is never a random blow. There is a marvellous degree of skill in the chastening of the Lord. Hence we are told not to despise it, which, in the strongest meaning of it, means that we are to honour it. We honour the chastisements of our parents, but infinitely more the chastisements of God. "For they verily chastened us for a few days after their own pleasure, but He for our profit," and there is a way of chastening us for profit.

Now, brethren, I said there were treasures concealed in the great deeps which we cannot yet reach, and so in the great deeps in which God makes us to do business there are great treasures that we cannot come upon at present. We do not, perhaps, as yet, receive, or even perceive, the present and immediate benefit of some of our afflictions. There may be no immediate benefit; the benefit may be for hence and to come. The chastening of our youth may be intended for the ripening of our age. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." The affliction of to-day may have no reference to the circumstances of to-day, but to the circumstances of fifty years ahead. I do not know that that blade required the rain on such a day, but God was looking not to February as such, but to February in its relation to July, when the harvest should be reaped. He considered the blade not merely as a blade, and in its present necessity, but as it would be in the full corn in the ear. There are certain marks that an artist makes upon the block that you cannot see the reason of as yet, and they spoil the apparent likeness of the block and marble to the image which you know he wishes to produce, but then those lines are to be worked out by-and-by. They are scratches now, but they will be lines of beauty soon, when he comes to conclude them. So, a present trial may even lame us for present service, damage us—I will even go the length of saying—for years to come, and make us go groaning and broken-hearted, so as to be of comparatively little service to the church, and of very little joy to ourselves. But then afterwards—afterwards as Paul puts it—it beareth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, in those that are exercised thereby. Why will you not let the Lord have time? Why will you be in a hurry? Why will you stand at His elbow and perpetually say, "Explain this to-day, and show me the motive and reason of this in this present hour?" A thousand years in His sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. The mighty God takes mighty time in which to work out His grand results; therefore, be content to let the treasures lie at the bottom of the deep for awhile. But then faith may see them. Faith can make the deep translucent till it sees the treasure lying there, and it is yours, and though you may not at this hour be able to be at it, yet you shall have it, "for all things are yours." Everything that is stored up in the great deep of the eternal purpose, or in the deep of the manifest judgment, everything there belongs to you, O, believer; therefore rejoice in it, and let it lie there till such a time as God may choose to raise it for your spiritual enrichment. God's judgments are a great deep:—

IV. Then they work much good.

The great deep, though ignorance thinks it to be all waste, a salt and barren wilderness, is one of the greatest blessings to this round world. If, to-morrow, there should be "no more sea," although that may one day be a blessing, it would not be so to-day, but the greatest of all curses. It is from the sea that there arises the perpetual mist which, floating by-and-by in mid-air, at last descends in plenteous showers on hill and vale to fertilize the land. The sea is the great heart of the world—I might say the circulating blood of the world. We must have it; it must be in motion; its tides, like a great pulse, must be felt, or the world's vitality would cease. There is no waste in the sea; it is all wanted. It must be there; there is not a drop of it too much. So with our afflictions which are Thy judgments, O God! They are necessary to our life, to our soul's health, to our spiritual vigour. "By all these," said one of old, "do men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit." Uprising from my trouble is the constant mist which is afterwards transformed into sacred dew, which moistens my life. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," said David. "Amen?" say all the afflicted ones. A thousand sick beds shall bear witness to the blessedness of the trial. A thousand losses and crosses that have been borne by the faithful, now help the sweetness of the harmony of everlasting hymns in the land of the blessed. "Oh! blessed cross," said one; "I fear lest I should come to love thee too much; 'tis so good to be afflicted!" May God grant to us that at all times, instead of trying to fathom the deep, we may understand that it is useful to us, and be content. Lastly, if God's judgments are a great deep:—

V. Then they become a highway of communion with Himself.

We thought at one time that the deep separated different peoples; that nations were kept asunder by the sea; but lo! the sea is to-day the great highway of the world. The rapid ships cross it with their white sails, or with their palpitating engines they soon flash across the waves. The sea is the world's great canal—a mighty channel of communication. And so, brethren, our afflictions—which we thought in our ignorance would separate us from our God—are the highway by which we may come nearer to God than we otherwise could. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business on the great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. You that keep close in shore and have but small trials, you are not likely to know much of His wonders in the deep; but if you are made to put out far to sea, where deep calleth unto deep and the noise of God's waterspouts astounds the spritual mariner, then it is that you shall see God's wonders—wonders of faithfulness, wonders of power, wonders of wisdom, wonders of love. You shall see them, and you shall rejoice to see them. These troubles shall be as fiery chariots to bear you up to God. Your afflictions, wave upon wave, shall wash your soul, like a tempest-tossed bark, nearer to the haven. Oh! but this is a blessed thing when God's judgments bring us nearer to Him! Old Quarles has a quaint idea when he represents God as swinging a flail in judgment, and he says if you would get away from it, you must get close to His hands, and then you are out of the reach of the swing of the blow. Get close up to God, and He will not smite; get near to God, and the trial ceases.

You know, trials are sometimes weights to keep men down, but you have seen many a machine in which one weight going down lifts another weight up, and there is a way by faith of adjusting the consecrated pulleys so that the very weights of your affliction may lift you up nearer to God. The bird

with a string and a stone to its feet cannot fly, and yet there is a way that God has of making His birds fly even when they are tied to the ground. They never mounted till they had something to pull them down; never ascended till they were compelled to descend. They found the gates of heaven not up there, but down there. The lower they sank in self-estimation, the nearer they came to the everlasting God who is the foundation of all things.

Thus, brethren, I have brought you to the last thought; may the Holy Spirit bring you to make it your own. May God's deep judgments lead you to deeper communion.

Dear child of God, thou art in trouble to-night, the voice of that trouble is to thee—get nearer to God; get nearer to God. God has favoured you, favoured you with an extraordinary means of growth in grace. To use Rutherford's simile, He has put you down in the wine-cellar in the dark. Now begin to try the wines on the lees well-refined. Now get at the choice treasures of darkness. He has brought you on to a sandy desert; now begin to seek the treasures that are hid in the sand. Believe that the deepest afflictions are neighbours always to the highest joys, and that the greatest possible privileges lie close by the darkest trials. If the bitterer your sorrow, the louder your song at the last, there is a reason for that, and that reason faith may discover and experience live upon.

May God bless the tried ones here. But there are some here, perhaps, who are in trial and have no God to go to. Poor souls! Poor souls! Poverty, and no God! Sickness, and no God! A life of toil, and no heaven! A slavery of penury on earth, and then driven for ever away from God's presence! Oh! how pitiable! how pitiable! Pity yourselves, and remember that it need not always be so. You may have a heaven; you may have present bliss. Here is the Gospel—"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Oh! if thou canst but trust Him who bled upon the cross, thou shalt have comfort for thy present trouble; thou shalt have pardon for thy past, present, and future sin. The Lord bless each one of you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

A TESTIMONY TO FREE AND SOVEREIGN GRACE

"But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord."—Psalm xxxvii. 39.

SALVATION is a blessing peculiar to the righteous. The ungodly do not, as a rule, believe that they have any need of salvation: therefore they do not desire it, or seek after it. The righteous know that they are born in a fallen state; they acknowledge that they have destroyed themselves by personal sin; and they are conscious of a thousand dangers which surround them. Hence they need salvation, and seek it, and find it. It is to them that salvation has come to make them righteous, for until they are saved they are unrighteous, even as others; but now that salvation has come to their house, they bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God their Saviour.

This may be used as a description of the believer's life: he lives a life of salvation. He is saved in Christ, who is his life, in whom he has forgiveness of sins, and every other covenant blessing. He is always being delivered, or saved; and from the moment in which he begins as a believer till that last moment on earth when he shall be about to depart out of the world unto the Father, his whole life is encompassed within the divine circle of salvation. God is working salvation for him, and salvation in him, and salvation by him, and is giving him to receive the fulness of salvation which he shall for ever enjoy in the world to come.

> "' Salvation is for ever nigh
> The souls that fear and trust the Lord;
> And grace, descending from on high,
> Fresh hopes of glory shall afford."

Beloved friends, we rejoice in that right royal word "salvation." We would let its echo fly over the whole world. To us it is a word of great meaning. It does not signify alone salvation from the punishment of sin, though it comprehends that blessing, and we are glad that it does so; but it means complete and immediate salvation from the love of sin, conscious salvation from the power of sin, growing salvation from the propensity to sin, and ultimate salvation from all tendency to sin. When we have gained full salvation, we shall never, never sin again, but shall find ourselves before the throne of God as pure as that throne, made perfect by the work of the Holy Spirit, who will have sanctified us wholly, spirit, soul, and body. Men of the world think, when we talk of salvation, that we mean escaping from hell: this is all *they* would fear, and so it strikes them as *the* great matter: but we are not of their mind. Being delivered from the pains and penalties of evil is certainly a great boon, but it is by no means the greatest: it follows in the train of a grander blessing, even as the blaze of the comet follows the central light. The righteous dread sin more than hell, and wrong is more terrible to them than any punishment which awaits it. The joy of salvation to us is that we are delivered from this present evil world, delivered from the lusts of the flesh delivered from the old death of natural corruption, delivered from the power of Satan, and from the dominion of evil. Our salvation will not be full till we are totally and finally delivered from every trace of sin, and are "without fault before the throne of God." Sanctification completed is our salvation perfected: purity without spot will be our Paradise Regained.

"The salvation of the righteous" in the broadest sense of the word "is of the Lord"; and the more breadth of meaning we give to it, the more completely we shall see that it must be divine. At the same time, our life is made up of a series of salvations, and each of these is of the Lord. We are constantly being saved,

saved from this and that form of danger and evil. As each daily trouble threatens to engulf us, we are saved from it. As each temptation, like a dragon, threatens to swallow us up, we are saved from it. Our God is the God of salvations, and unto Him belong the issues from death. We escape from deaths oft; yea, and from the very belly of hell; and still we live to sing, as Jonah sang when he was in the depths of the sea, "Salvation is of the Lord."

I have said that this glorious salvation, which is of the Lord, is the peculiar heritage of believers. They alone know their need of it, and they alone participate in it. Look at the ungodly man who is pictured in this psalm. He does not want salvation. He flourishes like the green bay-tree: he spreads his branches to overshadow everybody else. Such men need no salvation. "Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish." They want no salvation: their lands are abundant, their house is full of treasure, and they leave the rest of their substance to their babes. They put no trust in the name of the Lord: "They call their lands after their own names." They want no God: they have no sighs after Him, they never cry, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God!" They have no trials in their lives, and "there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." The rod of God's children does not fall upon them. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth"; but often those whom He loves not He leaves to indulge in such pleasure as they can find. He gives His swine good measure of husks, for He would not be unkind even to them; and there they lie and feed without fear, knowing nothing of another world, neither caring for it.

> "Fools never raise their thoughts so high;
> Like brutes they live, like brutes they die;
> Like grass they flourish, till Thy breath
> Blasts them in everlasting death."

See the distinction between the righteous man who fears God, and him that fears Him not: were it not for this word "salvation," their ease and prosperity might make us envy the ungodly; but this turns the scale. Because "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord," we would take the worst portion that ever was meted out to them in preference to the best that was ever given to the ungodly. Taking all for all, God's worst is better than the devil's best, and the portion of God's saints at the lowest ebb is better than the portion of the wicked, even when their joys are at the flood.

I am going to speak at this time upon our text as a statement by itself. It is complete and self-contained. It is a diamond of the first water. Its words are few, but its sense is precious. "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord."

I. Our first head is this: THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF SOUND DOCTRINE. "*The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord.*" There are several young men here who go forth to preach the gospel. I hope that they will speak with clear knowledge and attractive speech; but this is far from being the main object of my desire: I want them really to preach the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel. I reckon preaching to be gospel preaching, and sound preaching, in proportion as it is consistent with this statement: "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord." It is not every preacher who proclaims this truth in bold terms, and in plain English. More or less I hope that all who preach Christ crucified would subscribe to this; but some are a little afraid of it in all its breadth and length. They must bring in man a little. They must have him *do* something, or *be* something. They are always afraid lest grace should be misunderstood, and should be turned into licentiousness; and, truly, I share in their fear, though I would not use their way of preventing the evil which I dread. I have known some of these timorous ones try to say "Free grace"; but they have had a little impediment in their speech, and the word has come out "free-will." They have meant that it should be all of grace, but by some means or other there has been so much hesitancy, and such a deal of fencing, that one could hardly tell grace from works. There will be no hesitancy on my part when I say that "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord." neither will you find me guarding the statement as if I thought it a lump of spiritual dynamite which might do infinite damage.

"The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord" *in the planning.* Long before we were in existence, God had planned the way of salvation. Before the fall, He had ordained the covenant by which the fallen should be restored; and that plan shows, in every line of it, that consummate wisdom and infinite love which can be found nowhere but in the Lord. He took counsel with none, and none instructed Him; He alone fixed the eternal settlements of unchanging love.

"The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord," as to the persons who are included in it, for God hath chosen from the beginning His people, and "whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed unto the image of His Son." There is a choice somewhere, and I am persuaded we have not chosen Him, but He hath chosen us. Did not the Lord Jesus say as much? He is first and foremost in salvation, and though we gladly run when He calls, yet His call comes first, and His choice comes before the call. The salvation of the righteous was determined on in the council chambers of eternity or ever the stars began to shine. It is of God, and of God only.

And as it is of the Lord in the planning, so it is of the Lord *in the providing.* It was He who gave His Son from His bosom, and truly our Lord Jesus Christ is the full purchase-price of our salvation. We do not add a penny to it. The mortgage upon lost humanity was paid off by Christ to the last farthing, without any contribution on our part to eke out the matchless price.

The Spirit of God, who is another great item in the provision of salvation, is of the Lord. God has given us the Spirit. The Holy Ghost comes, not according to our mind or will, but according to the gift and purpose of the Lord. Nothing is lacking for the salvation of men. God has provided all. He has not left the garment almost long enough, but needing that we should add a fringe; nor has He provided a feast almost sufficient for us if we bring at least another loaf; nor has He built a house of mercy, almost completed, but leaving us to add a few more tiles to the roof. No, no. The work is finished, and from top to bottom salvation is of the Lord. All covenant provisions are already in the Lord Jesus in full, and the salvation of the righteous is entirely of the Lord in the providing.

So, dear friends, it is of the Lord *in the applying.* The first application of the blessings of the covenant

to us is of God. Of course, that first application is in regeneration, when the soul first begins to live. The first sense of need of mercy springs, not from nature, but is a work of grace. The first desire we have to be right, the first prayer we breathe towards God—all this is the movement of eternal grace upon our souls, which else would have lain as dead as the corpses in their graves. The Lord first deals with us before we have any inclination whatsoever to deal with Him. We do not see this truth at first. Possibly we discover it months after our conversion, when we come to sit down, and look over our experience. Then we cry, "Yes! Hadst Thou not sought me, I had never sought thee. Hadst Thou not drawn me, I had never run to Thee. Hadst Thou never looked on me in love, I had never looked to Thee in faith. It is Thy free grace which began with me. I own that the Alpha of my salvation is of the Lord." The knowledge of this truth usually comes to us as we advance in knowledge: the full understanding of it is a fruit of the Spirit, and belongs to our riper years rather than to our spiritual infancy.

As salvation is of the Lord at the commencement, so it is *as to the carrying of it on*. Rest assured, beloved, there is no true growth in grace except that which is of the Lord. Nay, there is no sustaining the position to which you have reached except by the Lord.

> "'And every virtue we possess,
> And every victory won,
> And every thought of holiness,
> Are His, and His alone."

He has wrought all our works in us, and if we have produced any fruit to the honour of His name, from Him has our fruit come, for our Lord truly said, "Without Me ye can do nothing." We must give Him all the glory, for certainly He has given us all the grace; and as it has been, so will it be. Between here and heaven there will be nothing of our own in the matter. We shall work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because He first works it in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. There is no working out our salvation unless the Lord works it in. We bring to the surface of our life what he works in the deep foundation of our inward nature; but both within and without the spiritual life is all of grace. When we put our foot upon the threshold of glory, and pass through the gate of pearl to the golden pavement of the heavenly city, the last step will be as much taken through the grace of God as was the first step when we turned unto our great Father in our rags and misery. Left by the grace of God for a single moment, we should perish. We are dependent as much upon grace for spiritual life as we are upon the air we breathe for this natural life. Take the atmosphere from us; put us under an exhausted receiver, and we die: take thy grace from us, O our God, and we perish at once! What else could happen to us?

Brethren we must always believe this and preach it, for it is the sum of all true doctrine. If you do not make salvation to be wholly of the Lord, depend upon it you will have to clip salvation down, and make it a small matter. I have always desired to preach a great salvation, and I do not think that any other is worth preaching. If salvation is of man, then you do not wonder that man falls from grace. Of course he does. What man begins, man also soon ends in his own way with a failure. When God saves He saves eternally. Some one said to me the other day. "I do not quite know about that doctrine of final perseverance whether it is true or not." So I said to him, "What kind of life does Jesus Christ give His sheep?" He answered very correctly—"He has said, 'I give unto my sheep eternal life.'" Very well, does not that settle it? If He has given them eternal life, they have eternal life. "But," he said, "might they not die?" I answered, "Is it not clear that those who die have not eternal life? If they had *eternal* life, how could they die? Does eternal life mean six months' life?" "No." "Does it only mean six hundred years' life?" "No." It must mean nothing less than life which has no end." Death is out of the question. I must live if I am one of those of whom the Great Shepherd says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life." But what is next? If you cannot quite see the truth from that one expression, what follows? Will the sheep of Christ ever perish? Here is His answer. "They shall never perish." Does not that secure them? What language could better describe their security? But another question is raised:—May it not mean that if they get away from the Lord Jesus, they shall, perish? Then comes the next sentence—"Neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." Does not that answer it? Oh, but perhaps the Saviour might fail! We think not so: but listen again: "My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."

There are four great reasons why believers are and must be saved; neither can anything shake the force of any one of them. If words mean anything, those who are in Christ are safe. The Lord God Amighty has given unto them eternal life, they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of Christ's hand, and over that first hand of Jesus is the Father's hand to make assurance doubly sure.

Salvation, then, is of the Lord. This is a doctrine to be believed. If you do not believe it, you are sure to minimize and make small the salvation, and specially are you likely to deprive it of its certainty, and immutability. It is a pity that you should attempt this, for thus you rob Christ of His power, God of His glory, and the saints of their comfort. That is the awkward point about a salvation which is of man: it is worth nothing when you get it. We want an eternal salvation. We want a salvation which does really save. We want something which is not made up of "ifs and ans," and "buts," and "peradventures," and "may be," and "if you do this," and "if you do that." We need sure, immutable, abiding, unchanging salvation; and this is what we get, and what we are not ashamed to preach, while we thunder out this truth, "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord."

> "'All of grace'—from base to summit,
> Grace on every course and stone;
> Grace in planning, rearing, crowning,
> Sovereign grace, and grace alone!"

II. Secondly, this is not only the essence of sound doctrine, but THIS IS A NECESSARY FACT. "*The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord.*" Assuredly it must be so, or else they will never be saved. Look for a moment, you that love the Lord, to your own *inward conflicts*. Beloved we are not all alike, tossed to and fro with the uprising of inbred sin; but there are times with most of God's saints when they are

hard put to it to withstand a certain raging temptation: they have to struggle hard to keep it down. And when they have mastered that evil, another form of sin comes on the sly, and attempts to stab them in the back. You were giving all your attention to one insidious foe, and at that terrible moment you were set upon by another; and you had to turn round, and bend all your strength in the name of God to resist this second adversary. Nor was this all, a third evil bent its bow against you, and a fourth prepared a net for your feet. Thus you were beset behind and before; and had it not been the Lord that was on your side, you would have been quickly swallowed up. Some of us know the truth of this in our experience if the rest of you do not.

Salvation must be of the Lord with me, I know, or else my inward lusts, my proud spirit, my rebellious will, and my natural despondency will surely ruin me. Do you not feel it to be so with you? If God does not save you, you are a lost man. You must feel that. I know that those who have no conflicts sing another song, and praise themselves. Your carpet-knights, who wear the regimentals of Christianity, but know nothing of battle with inbred sin, may talk about salvation by self, but he that is hard put to it to wrestle against all wrong-doing will tell another tale. He who grieves if he even utters a rash word, or allows an impure thought to cross his mind, feels that if God does not save him, saved he never can be; and he sees it to be a necessary fact that the salvation of the righteous must be of the Lord.

When you have looked within a sufficient time to convince you, just look at your *outward temptations*. Ah! we little know what many of our brethren and sisters have to endure in the form of temptation in their own houses from their own friends. Many have a very hard fight of it. I know some now present who will I believe persevere and hold on to the end, but almost every day they endure a martyrdom. Cruel words are spoken, and unkind actions are done, and a bitter spirit is shown towards them because they are the people of God. Salvation must be of the Lord to these persecuted ones, or they will faint under their oppressions. Outside in the world, what temptations abound! You cannot engage in any business without finding that it has its peculiar sins. Many things are done in the trade—many matters established by custom—which the scrupulously upright child of God cannot tolerate. He has to set his face against the general habit, and hence he has a battle. Need I go into particulars? Why, brethren, we are surrounded with snares! They are on the table: you may readily sin there. They are in your secret chamber: you are tempted there. They are in the counting-house, and on the study-table. You cannot sit down to read a book without being in danger; you cannot go among the crowd without risk. Depend upon it, if any man is saved in the midst of this wicked and ungodly generation, in which the very air smells of corruption, and the common talk is polluting—His salvation will be evidently of the Lord. If any believer remains steadfast in this day of philosophic doubt, verily, I say unto you, his salvation must be of the Lord. He cannot go through this Vanity Fair, he cannot pass through this horrible slough, this Stygian bog of modern society, and be pure in heart, and lip, and life, unless God shall grant him His salvation.

Besides that, our salvation will certainly be of the Lord, because *the world hates us*. It cannot help it. If you are a genuine Christian, the world will not love you. There may be natural traits of kindness and goodness about you, which even the outside world may respect; but in proportion as you are definitely and thoroughly a Christian you will have the dogs at you. Worldlings will not see a little flaw in your character but what they will report it, and magnify it. Some of us cannot do anything but what we are misrepresented, so that we have become careless of what people say about us, so long as we know in our own conscience that we are clear. The act which we have done with the most transparent sincerity has been the very one which they have set upon as though it were a piece of trickery. Blessed be God, the world is crucified to us, and we are crucified unto the world! But if we are to escape its venom—especially those who stand in the front of the battle—if we are to hold on to the end with a stainless character, then we shall have to say and sing, "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord."

We know, dear friends, that it must be so. It is a necessary fact, even if we only *look at the contrary view*. What professions some make, and how long they keep them up! We have said of such and such a man, "If he is not a child of God, who is?" We have even wished that our soul were in his soul's stead when we have heard him pray, and marked the impressive devotion of his demeanour; and yet we have lived to see the very person we admired rolling in filth, character gone, and hope gone. This happens in the church sadly often. Whenever we see it, we may truly feel that "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord.' If ever you see a Christian man, professedly, so, suddenly disappear and melt away, you will say to yourself, "Ah! had it not been for grace divine it would have happened just the same to me, and my fellow-professors also." We should have gone out, like the snuff of a candle, if God had not preserved us, and kept us alight. The older we grow in the divine life, and the more earnestly we seek to exhibit the character of a Christian, the more we shall feel that, if we had to go to this warfare at our own charges, it would be better for us that we had never been born. The life of many modern professors might be lived without supernatural help, but the life of a genuine Christian is a perpetual miracle, which could be wrought by none but the Lord God. True Christian life is produced by God Himself working mightily, even as when He made the world, or raised His Only-begotten Son from the dead. I say that this is a necessary fact, for there can be no salvation but that which is of the Lord.

III. In the third place, our text being true, that "*the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord*," THIS IS A SWEET CONSOLATION; for if my salvation is of the Lord, then I shall be saved. If it had been of anybody else, I should be lost. Ah, Gabriel! if my salvation had to be accomplished by you, and all your fellow-angels, I should despair. Ah, my brethren! if all of you put together were sent into this world to try and help poor me to heaven, you would never get me there. I should wear you all out. When it is written, "Salvation is of the Lord," I am comforted, for I am sure that the Lord will do it. He can, for He is omnipotent. He will, for He has promised to do it, and He is true and unchangeable. He will go through with what He has begun. If man began, he might leave off before he had finished, for want of stores to go on with it, or because he had made a mistake, and changed his fickle mind; but when God begins, as surely as ever He opens the war, He will push on

till He has won the victory. As surely as He lays the first stone, He will not withdraw His right hand till He has brought forth the topstone, with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!" "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord": therefore it will be accomplished. Not all the temptations of life, nor all the terrors of death, nor all the furies of hell, shall, prevent any soul upon whom God has begun His work of grace from reaching eternal salvation. What a blessing is this, and what a comfort it is!

> "Things future, nor things that are now,
> Not all things below nor above,
> Can make Him His purpose forego,
> Or sever my soul from His love."

This grand fact comforts us partly by leading us to believe in prayer. If the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord, then, whenever we get into any great trouble, we go to Him, and cry "O Lord, my salvation is of Thee! I have come to Thee for it." When strong temptation seems to catch us, like birds in a net, and we cannot break loose, then we cry, "O God, salvation is of Thee alone! Help me. Thou canst. I look to Thee for it!" When our soul lies dead, as it sometimes does, like this heavy weather—when there is little sun to brighten us, or air to enliven us, we feel inactive, and cannot stir. Oh, then it is most blessed in prayer to feel "all my fresh springs are in Thee, my Lord! Thou canst quicken me. Thou canst give me vigour, and force of character, and energy to do Thy work, or suffer Thy will!" In drawing nigh unto God we are coming to the right place: we are only asking God to do what He undertakes to do, since "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord."

This, in addition to increasing our hope in prayer, urges us at all times to look out of ourselves to God. "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord"; then I must not be always searching within my own heart to find some good thing within me; I must not be turning over evidences, and living upon past experiences; but I must remember that the salvation even of the righteous is of the Lord. I have often thrown all my evidences overboard—every one of them. I have felt that I would not give a farthing for the whole lot put together; and I have gone to Christ Jesus just as I went at first, singing my old ditty—

> "I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all,
> But Jesus Christ is my all in all."

We are encouraged to do this by the fact that salvation is of the Lord. Go again to the cross, and read your pardon there. Suppose the devil tells you, or suppose it even to be true, that all your experience is a fiction, all your past profession a lie, all your faith presumption, all your enjoyments delirium, all that you have known and felt a day-dream; well, then, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and He can save you. O my Lord, I can boast nothing whatever of myself, but I come and cast myself on Thee, and Thou hast said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out!" Frequent beginnings again are the very safest things; in fact, we should, in a sense, be always beginning, for the spiritual life begins with coming unto Jesus, and the continuance of that spiritual life is described thus: "To whom *coming* as unto a living stone." To whom coming, always coming: always trusting, always looking out of self, always looking to Christ. When evidences are bright, you know where you are; but at such a time you could tell that without them. It is easy to tell the time of day by a sun-dial, but then the sun must be shining; and when I am at home, and can see the sun, I know whereabouts the sun is at twelve o'clock, and therefore I do not want the sun-dial to tell me the time. Evidences are exceedingly good things when you do not want them, and they are of very little use when you do. Evidences are clear when Christ is present; but when Christ is present you do not want their help; and when Christ is not present, evidences fail to comfort you. It is better to live by a daily faith upon Christ than to live upon evidences. They most readily turn mouldy, and then they are most unwholesome food. Live upon Christ, who is the daily manna, and you will live well. You will be driven to such a life by the force of this blessed truth, that the salvation of the righteous, just as much as the salvation of the wicked, is of the Lord. A sinner cannot be saved by himself; neither can a righteous man. A sinner must look to the Lord for salvation; so must a righteous man. We are on one footing here—the rich saint as well as the poor sinner. Christ must be everything to one as well as to the other; and what a blessed thing it is that He is everything to us! Let us hourly make Him so.

IV. Fourthly, and very briefly, THIS DOCTRINE IS A REASON FOR HUMILITY. "*The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord.*" Are you saved, my dear brother? And do you know it? Then all idea of pride must vanish, for it is clear that you did not save yourself. That regeneration, of which you are a partaker, is the free gift of God to an undeserving one—a work of grace upon one who could not have wrought it upon himself. Pride is excluded. Has the Lord granted you such a salvation that you have remained fast in your integrity all these years? Do not get proud of it, for your salvation from any gross outward sin has been of the Lord. It is none of your doing. Above all, do not begin to censure others; and when you see a poor brother down—aye, when you see a child of God who has erred, and grossly sinned, do not begin censuring him in bitterness, and giving him over to despair. If you had been in his case, you might have done worse. Do I speak harshly? Any man who says, "If I had been in that brother's place I should have done better," is a fool. He does not know himself. The probabilities are that he would have done worse. Ah, Sir Pharisee! you—yes, oh, yes, you are a wonder! Marvellous is your purity! Splendidly you act! What a paragon you are! If you were to see yourself in God's light, you would see that you are a mass of corruption, smelling of pride. That is what you are. The man who begins to exult over his fallen brother is the likeliest man to fall himself. He who points at a rent in his brother's garment is in rags himself. If we have stood fast amid temptation, we may bless God that we have done so; but we must not find fault with others as though there was some good thing in ourselves. The salvation of the most righteous man that ever lived is of the Lord. If his sun has not been eclipsed—if his moon has not been turned into darkness—if his stars have not fallen like withered leaves from the tree, it is all owing to the grace of God, and the grace of God alone. It is needful to say this to keep us from being lifted up with foolish boasting.

So, dear friends, we shall have to sing to a grave, sweet melody as long as we are here, whenever we touch a matter that concerns ourselves. When we

get to heaven, we shall see then much more than we do to-night that salvation is of the Lord. Mr. Bunyan represents his pilgrim as going through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and even while he was in the darkness and horror of that defile he knew that he needed the Lord to help him. He felt that he had a terrible walk of it that night, when there was a bog on this side, and a quagmire on that, and hobgoblins and all sorts of horrid creatures all around: he knew that he needed divine aid. He held on his way, with his sword in his hand, and grasping the weapon of All-prayer, till at last he quitted that horrible place; and then he knew better than before how great was his necessity. He looked back when the morning rose, and till then he had not fully known what a place he had been traversing, and how great was the power which upheld him in his night-march. When we get to heaven, and look back upon our life below, we shall then see the wonders of delivering grace which at this time we do not fully appreciate.

> "When I stand before the throne
> Dress'd in beauty not my own,
> When I see Thee as Thou art,
> Love Thee with unsinning heart,
> Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
> Not till then—how much I owe."

I believe that in the day of our deliverance we shall lift up, every one of us, such a song of praise as we are not capable of here. We shall sing with all our powers of heart and tongue at the sight of what we have been delivered from. Even then this will be the sum and substance of the song—"Salvation is of the Lord." He has wrought it all, and brought us safely through. The hymn of Miriam, and of all the children of Israel at the Red Sea, when they had passed through it, and all the Egyptians were drowned, was a very exultant song, but what will ours be when the gates of hell shall have been overthrown, and all our enemies destroyed, and we shall find ourselves before the eternal throne saved for ever! Shall we not exclaim, "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously?" Shall we not, each one, tell out his own experience, and bid our fellow-believers sing yet more and more rapturously unto the God of salvation? Will not some of you take up that note which Miriam dwelt upon when she could not see a single Egyptian? Pharaoh's chariots and horses were all sunk in the sea, his chosen captains also were drowned in the Red Sea; and so she struck her timbrel, and with all the maidens she danced right joyously as she sang, "The depths have covered them. There is not one, not one, not one of them left." Thus will we sing in heaven. "There is not one, not one of them left. Not one of all the sins, and all the trials, and all the temptations, and all the vexations of life: the Lord has removed them all. There is not one of them left. Salvation is of the Lord."

V. I close with one more remark, and it is this: this text gives us A COMFORTABLE GROUND OF HOPE. "*The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord.*" Then I believe He will save *me*. I trust myself with Him, and thus I become righteous by faith; and therefore He will save me from my trouble and care. Brother, draw the same conclusion. Sister, draw the same conclusion. You are in a terrible condition just now. Everything has been going wrong. You do not know what to do. But "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord." He will bring you through. You are in good hands. The Great Pilot knows the navigation of the river of life better than you do. You cannot see a channel for your boat: there are snags everywhere, or quicksands, or rocks, or shallows. He knows all about it. Rest. Trust. Wait. Commit your way unto the Lord. There is personal comfort in the fact that our salvation is of the Lord:

And there is comfort, next, with regard to all our tried brethren. It is my lot—my happy or unhappy lot—to be continually consulted by brothers and sisters in great trouble. They think I can help them, though I cannot. I hardly know what to say to them. I can only take their burden with my own unto the Lord. I often feel great pain in sympathizing with trials which I cannot remove; but then it is cheering to know that the Lord can help where we cannot, for "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord." He can help the helpless, the forlorn, the impoverished the dying. He will bring His people safely through floods and fires. Their straits are very great, and their burdens very heavy, but the Lord will put underneath them the everlasting arms. Pray for them; sympathize with them; help them as far as you can; and then, when you cast yourself on your Lord, cast them there also.

Next, this ought to give us hope about seekers. I see some brethren and sisters before me whose lives are spent in trying to encourage poor erring souls to return unto the Lord. Sometimes you are balked and defeated. Well, "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord." Surely, if the salvation of the righteous is to come from the Lord, much more must the salvation of poor seekers. Have hope about the vilest and worst of men. If there are any such here to-night, let them have hope, for if the Lord bids the righteous, in whom there is a measure of His grace, to look to Him for salvation, assuredly He bids you to do the same, for you have nothing of your own. If those who are righteous before God yet find their salvation in Him alone, where are you to look? You must look to the Lord also. Look to Jesus on the cross, and find salvation in Him; for the Lord Jesus redeemed with His precious blood all who trust in Him. O my dear hearer, come and cast yourself upon Him! "In due time Christ died for the ungodly": so runs the word. Look to that wondrous death of the Son of God which redeems such as you are, and in your case too it shall be found that your salvation is of the Lord! May God bless you, and cause you to rejoice in His salvation.

DESIRES TOWARDS GOD: A SERMON FOR THE WEAK

" Lord, all my desire is before Thee ; and my groaning is not hid from Thee."—Psalm xxxviii. 9.

IT is our earnest desire that all who are in Christ may be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. I could earnestly wish to see such spiritual life among us that every man had reached the very height of holy manhood, and was in possession of the utmost possible degree of spiritual vigour. It is a great calamity when there is a very large proportion of sick folk in any Christian community, for these must draw off the care and strength of the Church from aggressive movements. How favoured should we be if it could be said of us as of Israel when they came out of Egypt, " There was not one feeble person in all their tribes." Oh that the day would come when the word shall be fulfilled which saith : " He that is feeble among them shall be as David ; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them."

Let no man suppose that there is a necessity that he should always be weak in faith, always walk under a cloud, or that he should for ever be a Feeble-mind or Mr. Ready-to-Halt. Miracles of grace are for saints as well as sinners ; feeble minds can be strengthened and crutches thrown away. We ought to grow out of the feebleness of our spiritual childhood. We should cry to God for grace that we may get up " into the hill country " of holy confidence, and there, like Mary, sing, " My soul doth magnify the Lord." Oh that we might all attain to assurance, yea, to the full assurance of understanding, so that we should know why and wherefore we are thus assured, and so become rooted, grounded and settled in the faith, for then nothing would by any means remove us from the truth, or even move us in the truth. May the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. I would to God that you might each realise that promise of the twenty-fifth Psalm, " What man is he that feareth the Lord ? him shall He teach in the way that He shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease ; and his seed shall inherit the earth."

At the same time, we are most painfully conscious that all God's people are not in a vigorous condition, and we know that there is a large mixture in every church of those who are sickly, desponding, and faint. These we are bound to care for ; common humanity demands it, our sacred office binds us to it, and the example of the good Shepherd constrains us. We must feed the lambs. We must " lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees." The voice of God is heard in our heart saying, " Comfort ye, comfort ye My people," which voice we dare not disregard ; indeed, the sympathies aroused within us by a similar experience prompt us to be forward in compassionating the weak and the tried. Therefore, at this time I would seek out the weary and wounded and feeble ; not with a view of trying to multiply their number, but with the hope of diminishing their number by cheering them till they grow out of their low condition.

We would not pamper weakness till we seem to offer a premium to unbelief ; but yet we would feed the feeble in the King's meadows till they become strong in the Lord. I shall now look after those who cannot get beyond desires and groans, and let none blame me for this service. If the shepherd spends much of his time among the weakly sheep, if he gathers the lambs with his arm and carries them in his bosom, if he seems even to neglect the stronger sheep because they do not so urgently call for His care, no one will hence infer that he delights in feebleness. Far from it ; he is trying to remove it by his tenderness. You do not blame the humane for caring for the sick. If great efforts are put forth to build or endow a hospital, you do not say, " Sickness is a desirable thing, for all this money is spent upon comforting and helping those who feel it." Your feelings are quite the contrary : though these sick folk become the object of care, it is not as a reward to them, but as an act of compassion towards them. Let none, therefore, say that the preacher encourages a low state of grace ; he encourages it no more than the physician encourages disease when he tries by his care and skill to heal the sick. Whatever your judgments may be, I mean always to look after the downcast and the struggling, nor shall the babes be forgotten of my soul while I am able to be a nursing father to them. In a large family where there are little children there must always be arrangements for their feeding ; spoon victuals and milk must always be in the house, for if the cupboard contained nothing but joints and biscuits the tender ones would starve. If it should ever come to pass that a ministry consisted entirely of the higher doctrines and the deeper experiences it would leave many unsupplied, and it certainly would not be like the ministry of Christ, which had in it as much of simplicity as of mystery. A true steward cares for all the household, and provides milk for babes as well as meat for men. If he forgets anything, he had better forget the meat than the milk ; for though babes could not live on strong meat, men can live upon pure milk. Truth to tell, I have known the strong men come into such a condition at times that the milk for babes was all that they could take. Burly Samsons who can carry Gaza's gates may yet be so reduced that they can digest nothing but milk diet. Those whose confidence is at its very height to-day may be brought so low that they will prize beyond gold the smallest marks and evidences of grace, and will be delighted to take hold upon those elementary truths which belong to new-born believers. Even fathers in Christ are glad at times to seize upon those simple promises which aforetime they left to the most trembling of the saints, or perhaps to desponding sinners. If therefore at this present I speak to the very lowest form of Christian life, if I try to meet the weakest case, I shall not admit that I am neglecting the strong. My giant brother over yonder can have a drink of milk if he likes ; it will not hurt him. Come and try it my worthy friend. Receive again the simple doctrine by which little children live, and you will find wholesome fare. Delight yourself by all means in such

grand old doctrine as we were singing just now in Toplady's noble hymn, but do not disdain the plain truths which must ever remain the staple food of the household of faith.

Come we, then, to the text, "All my desire is before Thee; and my groaning is not hid from Thee." May the Holy Spirit be our instructor, and we shall learn aright.

I. Our first point is DESIRES TOWARDS GOD SHOULD BE MADE KNOWN TO HIM. You, it may be, my dear friend, cannot see any grace in yourself at all; all that you do perceive is a desire to have grace. You know that you desire to repent of sin, desire to be delivered from it, desire to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus, desire to be perfectly reconciled to God, but you fear that you have come no further. Now, it is true that many desires are of no avail whatever. "The sluggard desireth, and hath nothing." Mere wishes are sorry things. But the desires of our text are earnest desires, the movements of the heart, for they are accompanied by "groaning." The psalm evidently speaks of desires after God, not after temporal things; desires which are mainly expressed in the first verse of the psalm: "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath: neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure." It is of intense, earnest, agonising desires toward God for spiritual things that I am about to speak. Such desires ought to be made known unto God.

It may be said that God knows our desires, and that this is what the text itself asserts. I do not doubt the omniscience of God; but He bids us confess everything to Him quite as carefully as if He did not know it until we informed Him. We are to tell out our cases for ourselves just as David did, for it was not until after he had told out his sad story in the eight previous verses that he said, "All my desire is before Thee." We may expect the Lord to treat us as if He did not know our desires if we are negligent in declaring them. Does not the apostle say, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"? Mark the language: "Let them be made known." The Lord waits to be gracious, but He tarries till His people have pleaded for the blessing; He knows, but frequently He does not act upon the knowledge till we have laid bare our case before Him.

Make known, then, your requests; and do so, first, because *our whole life ought to be transparent before God.* What is the use of endeavouring to hide anything? "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." The life of every man should be unveiled before the eye of heaven: but as to those who are believers in Christ, even in the humblest degree, they desire no concealment; rather do they cry, "Search me, O God." We do not wish to hide anything; our hope lies in our heavenly Father's knowing all. There should be no wish to smuggle up even a stray desire, or to conceal the most doleful groan, all should be open and above-board between a sinner and his Saviour. What secrets can there be between a soul convinced of sin and a pardoning God? It would have an ill look if we still sewed fig leaves together, or hid among the trees of the garden. No, let us stand forth, and let our covering be such only as the Lord Himself provides. Take care, then, in prayer to set forth the secrets of your soul before God. Tell Him your sin, and spread it out in all its sorrowful detail. Tell Him your fears for the past, your anxieties for the present, and your dreads for the future; tell Him your suspicions of yourself, and your trembling lest you should be deceived. Tell Him what salvation you wish for, and what work of grace it is that your soul desireth: make all your heart known unto God, and keep back nothing, for much benefit will come to you from being honest with your best Friend.

Do this next, because, *it is commanded of God that we whould make our desires known to Him.* Prayer which is a constant duty and privilege, is practically "desire." It is desire with its garments on; desire booted and saddled for travelling the heavenly road. Prayer without desire is dead; its soul has fled, it is but the carcase of prayer. When desire is burning in the soul it sends up the flame of prayer, or the sparks of sighs and groans. Prayer is the fiery chariot, and desires are its horses of fire. Since, then, we are commanded to "pray without ceasing," we are really commanded to make known our desires continually. Give utterance to your desire in the best form you can, however difficult may be the task. I pray you do this, for God would have you confess all to Him. He says that "men ought always to pray and not to faint": and again, "in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God." Jesus said, "Watch and pray," and His apostle said, "I will that men pray everywhere." And what is this but to make your desires known to God?

It is a great benefit to a man to be able to express his desires, and this is an argument for making them known to God. You know your own desires better by trying to express them; they are indistinct till prayer sketches their likeness and fixes their image. Even should you fail to express your desires, their inexpressible character will better make known to you their greatness and their intensity. Sometimes a desire that is in the heart would at once be extinguished if you were to attempt to express it, for you would not dare to allow it to exist after you once saw its true nature. A glance at some desires would seal their doom, for we should feel them to be unworthy to be presented before the Lord. But when it is a holy and pure desire, tell it, for it will relieve your heart, it will heighten your estimate of the blessing sought, it will bring you to think over the promises made to such desires, it will thereby strengthen your hope that your desire will be fulfilled, and enable you by faith to obtain it. The prayerful expression of one desire will often quicken further desires, and make a thousand of them where there was but one. If you will make known your desire before your God it will gather strength, and soon obtain fulfilment. Desire should not be like a bird, shut in within the ark; it should be sent out as Noah sent forth his dove. There! let it fly towards heaven; it will come home, bearing the olive-leaf in its mouth. The return of prayer brings peace. Therefore send it on its profitable errand, and never attempt to hold it in the cage of silence. Though it hath lien among the pots and is begrimed with groans, let it mount towards heaven, and soon its wings will be covered with silver and its feather with yellow gold. By prayer shoot out the arrows of desire from the quiver of your heart, for every one of them shall smite your enemies.

Perhaps you feel that you cannot pray because you are under so dense a gloom, but then is the time to double your desires and your pleadings.

I am told that the flower, of which the ancients used to say so much, because it always turns toward the sun, is said to follow the great lord of day just as much in cloudy weather as when his bright beams gladden all things. What though the sun is not visible, yet he is still in his sphere, and the nature of the flower seems to tell it in what direction to turn. Be it ever so with our soul in gloomy hours. When we cannot see the Lord's face may we still look towards Him with strong desire. O soul, pray even when God does not appear to hear. When thine eye is blinded with tears, turn thy mournful face towards the mercy-seat, and look towards His holy hill. Remember where He was wont to manifest Himself to thee. If He meet thee not to-day at Zion's gates, yet remember Him from the Hermonites and the hill Mizar, where aforetime He revealed Himself to thee; and let thy desires follow hard after Him until thou find Him yet again. Let nothing stop thee from desiring and pouring out thy complaint, for herein is the way of health to thy soul.

A gracious expression of desire before God will often be to you a proof that those desires are right. A desire that you dare tell to God is sure to be of a godly sort. If I can say, "O Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and I wish it to be before Thee; I court Thine inspection because I hope Thou wilt fulfil the desire," then my wish is such as conscience approves, and is right and good. Is there not comfort in this for those of you who think you have nothing more than desires. If you have desires which you wish the Lord to know of they must be right; you would not dare to bring them before God if they were not good desires? When you are in God's house and with God's people, or reading God's word, or when you are drawing near to God in contemplation, then these desires are strongest; now, if they were bad desires they would not flourish in the best of atmospheres, they would not be watered and nourished by the best of influences, for such influences would tend to kill ill weeds of strange desire. So, then, there is some good thing in thee towards the Lord God of Israel after all: thou wouldst not have these heavings of soul, these strivings of heart, these pantings, these hungerings and thirstings, if it were not that there is somewhat in thee of the Spirit's working. God has dealt graciously with thee in giving thee these good desires. Sparks of everlasting life are alive within thy spirit so long as thou hast spiritual hunger and thirst. Thy desire must be a good thing, or thou wouldst not dare to make it known to God; and seeing that it is a good thing, take care thou nurture it well, and cause it to grow by expressing it with thy whole heart before God.

II. This leads up to my second head, which is this: DESIRES TOWARDS GOD ARE GRACIOUS THINGS. Intense groaning desires toward God are in themselves works of grace.

For certainly, first, *they are associated with other graces.* When a man can say, "All my desire is toward God, and my heart groans after Him, and yet I find little in myself but these desires," I think we can point him to some other good things which are in his heart. Surely humility is apparent enough. Thou takest a right view of thyself, O man of desires! A lowly esteem hast thou of thyself, and this is well. I would to God that some who are full of brags and boasts about their holiness could only be as safe as thou art with thy desires and groans, for there is in thee that broken and contrite heart which the Lord will not despise. God hath given thee this jewel among the rest—a meek and lowly spirit. Aye, and there is faith in thee, for no man heartily desires to believe unless he doth in some measure already believe. There is a measure of believing in every true desire after believing. If thou sayest, "I would trust Christ," why, soul, thou trustest Him already in some degree, since thou dost believe that He is the kind of Person whom it would be right to trust. Thy desire to cast thyself wholly upon Christ hath in it the beginnings of saving faith. Thou hast the grain of mustard seed within thee which will grow into a great tree. I can tell the mustard by its taste: the strength of thy desire, its pungency and heat, betray the genuine seed. And thou hast love, too; I am sure of it. Did ever a man desire to love that which he did not love already? Thou hast already some affection toward the Lord Jesus, some drawings of thy heart Christwards, or else thou wouldst not sigh and cry to be more filled with it. He who loves most is the very man who most passionately desires to love more. Love and desire keep pace in Christians, so that the more love the more desire to love; and so I gather that this desire of thine to love Jesus is a sure evidence that thou dost love Him already. Thy desire is the smoke which proves that there is fire in thy soul. A living flame lingers yet among the embers, and with a little fanning it will reveal itself. Thy desire to serve God is obedience, thy desire to pray is prayer, thy desire to praise is praise. I am sure, also, that thou hast some hope; for a man does not continue to groan out before his God, and to make his desire known, unless he has some hope that his desire will be satisfied, and that his grief will be assuaged. David lets out the secret of his own hope, for he says in the fifteenth verse, "In Thee, O Lord, do I hope." You, my downcast brother, do not hope anywhere else, do you? You know that every other door is shut, every other road is blocked up except that which leads from your soul to God. I know you have some hope, and therefore if you have no hope anywhere else I am persuaded that you have a hope in God. That thought of God which makes you cry, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him," has the seeds of hope, and the beginning of comfort, within it. I might go over many of the graces, but these will suffice: as a man is known by his company, so may our desires be known by their attendants; and as holy desires after God keep company with humility, and faith, and love, and hope, I am persuaded they are of like character, and are gracious themselves.

Another proof that they are gracious is that *they come from God.* Desires after God must come from some source or other. If you desire to be holy, where did that desire come from? From your own corrupt nature? Impossible. Certain believers in free-will may think so, but we are not agreed with them. We believe that none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, neither can thorns bring forth figs. If there is a desiring and a groaning of the heart after God in your bosom depend upon it human nature never originated it. Can sin desire holiness, or death pant for life? Holy desires are plants which are by no means native to the soil of human nature: their seed comes from a far country. Did the devil work these holy desires, think you? Hearken, brother, does the devil make you thirst after God? Does he make you sigh and cry after the light of your Father's countenance? Does he make you

pray to be delivered from temptation? Does he make you sigh to be conformed to the image of Christ? Then the devil has very greatly altered since I met him last, and since he was described in holy writ, or seen in the conflicts of good men. Who, then, has kindled these heavenly flames of desire? I earnestly avow my belief that every pure desire is as much the work of God as the grace which it desires. He who sincerely longs to be right with God has already somewhat of a work of divine grace within his soul creating those aspirations. Now, as God can say of all that He creates, "It is very good," I come to the conclusion that these groaning desires after God are very good. They are not great, nor strong, but they are gracious. There is water in a drop as well as in the sea, there is life in a gnat as well as in an elephant, there is light in a beam as well as in the sun, and so is there grace in a desire as truly as in complete santification.

Thirdly, *holy desires are a great test of character;* a test of eminent value. You enquire, "Can you judge a man's character by his desires?" I answer, yes. I will give you the other side of the question that you may see our own side all the more clearly. You may certainly judge a bad man by his desires. Here is a man who desires to be a thief. Well, he is a thief in heart and spirit. Who would trust him in his house now that he knows that he groans to rob and steal? Here is a man who desires to be an adulterer—is he not in God's sight already such? Did not Jesus tell us so? Here is a man who desires to be a Sabbath-breaker, but he is compelled by his situation to attend the house of God: he is really in God's sight a Sabbath-breaker, because he would follow his own works on God's holy day if he had the opportunity. The desire to commit a fraud, and especially the earnest desire to do it, would prove a man to be a villain at heart. If a man were to say, "I want to cut my enemy's throat, I am full of revenge, I am groaning to murder him," is he not a murderer already before God? Let us, then, measure out justice in our own case by the rule which we allow towards others. Let me help you to apply the principle. If you have a desire, an earnest, agonising desire towards that which is right, even though through the infirmity of the flesh and the corruption of your nature you do not reach to the height of your desire, yet that desire is a test of your character. The main set of the current determines its direction; the main bent of the desire is the test of the life. It is well with you even though you have to cry with Paul, "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which I would I find not." If you earnestly desire to love God you do love Him. If you desire to be purified, if with a strong, continual, agonising desire you pine for it, already the work of purification has begun, for your desire has been purified, your wish, your will, your heart have been purified already. Is there not proof enough that there is a measure of graciousness about true desires after God?

Note, further, that *our desires are a test very much superior to several other favourite modes of self-judging.* For instance, many people judge their religion by the regularity of their attention to its outward duties. "I was never absent on a Sunday morning, nor even from an evening service. I attend the communion at least once a month, I go to the prayer-meetings, I read a chapter or half a chapter every day, I bow my knees at my bedside every morning and evening; I have never omitted any part of my duty for years past." I am very glad to hear it, respected friend; but if you have no desires towards God, all your regularity of attendance does but liken you to the church clock, which is quite as punctual, or to the pulpit Bible, which never leaves its place. You may be a capital Pharisee, but you are not a true Christian unless your soul is full of living desires. If you cry out, "I am thirsting for God, the living God. My spirit groans after holiness! When I have bowed my knee, I groan before God because I cannot live as I would, or even pray as I desire to pray. I have come to the house of God longing to be fed with spiritual meat. I have always been a hungry soul towards divine things"; then I quote my Master's words, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Living desires are better than dead duties, as a living dog is better than a dead lion. The most regular outward performance of pious duties may be the revolution of heartless machinery; but desires mean life, and life is needful if we would please the living God.

Desires are a better test than the self-congratulation I have sometimes met with about the possession of gracious things: I say not, better than the possession of graces, but better than the supposed possession of them. Did you say, "I have faith, I can move mountains"? I had sooner hear you say, "Lord, increase our faith." Did you boast, "I have love, so that I shall never backslide or deny Christ"? I had rather thou shouldst say "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe." Do you say, "I have experience, and shall never be misled. I can hear heresy and be none the worse"! Ah, yes, I have heard that kind of talk, but I feel safer about a man who says, "Preserve me, O Lord, for in Thee do I put my trust." Remember that the chief of the apostles said: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." We feel surer as to the grace in a man's heart who groans after more grace, than we do of him who boasts,—"I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing." A man may be full and dead; but he who hungers is alive. Brother, if your soul is desiring, and crying, and groaning after God, do not condemn yourself because you cannot speak quite so positively as others as to your safety or your sanctity: desire on, and groan on; but at the same time get nearer to the cross, trust more completely, look out of self, and rest more fully in the covenant promises of God. Your state is not one to cause trouble; it is painful but it is not perilous.

I am sure that there is a graciousness about holy desires, because *they have been very prominent in the very best of men.* Look at David! See how his soul longs, yea even faints! Hear how he pants, like a hart for the water-brook, that he may draw near to God! His Psalms are very largely made up of desires: they abound with such passages as "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after"; "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul"; "My soul thirsteth for God." All his desires went heavenward, for he said, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" and in his last hours he exclaimed concerning the covenant of grace, "This is all my salvation

and all my desire." Nor must we forget Daniel. In the passage in which Daniel is spoken of as a "man greatly beloved," which is a very sweet translation, the words may be read, "a man of desires." I suppose that he obtained that name of the Lord because he much abounded in holy longings, and was accustomed to rise from one desire to another. There is a remarkable expression in the second of Daniel at the eighteenth verse: when the king had dreamed and none could interpret the dream: "Then Daniel went to his house and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret." In other books we should have found it stated that he asked his friends to pray, but Daniel went to the very soul of things, and begged them to desire. His prayers thrice a day were not formal; they were deeply and intensely sincere, and hence they were full of desire, which is the motive force, the life-blood of prayer. Daniel, then, was a man of great desires, and hence a desirable man with God: a man greatly beloved. As for Nehemiah, that faithful servant of God, he began his work by praying for a blessing on those who "desired" to fear God's name. If you turn to the New Testament what a man of desires Paul was; he was always desiring this and desiring that for other people, until he desired for himself that he might depart and be with Christ. A part of the inheritance of Israel of old lay on this side Jordan, but the major portion was on the further shore; and so the major part of a believer's portion for the present lieth in desires for things not yet attained. A man of devotion is always a man of desires. Among your acquaintances you will find the best people are fullest of longings to be better. They know that God has blessed them, they rejoice in every particle of grace they have ever received from Him, but they are always wanting more. They are in spiritual things as hard to satisfy as the king whom Du Chaillu met with in the centre of Africa. He gave him a huge present of goods, and his gracious majesty was overjoyed and held a great feast over the treasure; but before the week was over his black kingship said to Du Chaillu, "Truly, goods and money are like hunger; you are filled to-day, but to-morrow you are hungry again." In one sense he who has obtained grace never hungers, that is to say, he needs nothing beyond his God; but in another sense he always hungers more and more the more he obtains. Covetousness of goods is a crime, but covetousness of good is a virtue. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." He who has little grace can be content with little, he that hath more grace longs for more, and he who hath most is insatiable to a still larger degree. He hath the greatest esteem for the heavenly treasure who hath had the most acquaintance with it, and, therefore, he longeth to possess all that can be possessed. Time warns me to leave this point, only repeating the fact that desires towards God are gracious things.

III. Thirdly, DESIRES TOWARD GOD ARE CAREFULLY OBSERVED BY HIM. Was not that the first head? No, it was not; the first head was that we ought to make our desires known to God; the third head is that they are known. It is wonderful condescension that the Lord should observe so poor a creature as a sinful, mournful mortal. You heard me read the whole psalm just now; is it not a terrible description of a horrible sickness? I wonder how many of you would like to go and visit a man who was in the condition which David pictures, and watch over him, and nurse him? Here was a man who had no soundness in his flesh, and no rest in his bones, but was eaten up with a loathsome disease, and covered with wounds which corrupted till they stank. The Lord cannot look upon iniquity, He hates and loathes it infinitely, and yet He looks upon his poor servant when sin has wrought in him all this mischief. O, poor, broken-down believer, thy God still looks upon thee! Oh thou whose wounds gangrene, thou who seemest already to be rotting into the sepulchre of apostasy, still if there be any life and desire in thee, thy God is watching thee; with tender, loving eye He sees thee in thy misery and filthiness.

The best thought of all is that He sees the good points in us: for, while David does not say, "Lord, all my wounds are before Thee; Lord, all this stench and corruption are before Thee," he does say, "Lord, all my desire is before Thee." God has a quick eye to spy out anything that is good in His people; if there is but one speck of soundness, if there is a single mark of grace, if there is any remaining token of spiritual life, though it be only a faint desire, though it be only a dolorous groan, the Father sees it, and records it, casting the evil behind His back, and refusing to behold it.

Oh, is it not a blessed matter of fact that my desire is before God? Even when I cannot speak it out it is all before Him. I cannot explain it, but it is known to Him. It puzzles me to put my case, but it will not puzzle Him to solve it, and to deal with it, and to deliver me out of the evil of it. "All my desire is before Thee," as if he had just said, "There it is, Lord," I have not kept back anything. As far as I know I have put it all in Thy view; but, inasmuch as I do not know it all, I cannot express it all, but this is still my comfort, that Thine eye misses no point, Thy heart leaves nothing unperceived; Thou knowest all about me, and Thou wilt deal wisely with me.

IV. The last head is that EARNEST DESIRES TOWARDS GOD WILL BE FULFILLED. How do we know this? If men are sighing and crying to God they will be heard,—how know we that?

Why, first, because *these desires are of God's creation*, and you cannot imagine, at least I hope you cannot imagine, that God would create desires in us which He will not satisfy. Why, look even in nature, if He gives the beast hunger and thirst He provides for it the grass upon the mountains and the streams that flow among the valleys. There is not a fish in the sea nor an insect in the air but what God has made provision for gratifying its instincts and its desires. If, then, He Himself has put in you a desire after Himself, He will give you Himself. If He has made you long after pardon, He will give you pardon. If He has made you sigh after purity, after eternal salvation, He means to give you these. Do you think that God would act towards us wantonly, and torment us with the torments of Tantalus needlessly? Has He made His mercy flow all around you, and has He given you thirst, and will He never let you drink? If He did not mean that you should drink, why has He created the longing within you? You do not thirst after God by nature, and if He had let you alone you never would have so thirsted. You did not pine after His love until He made you pine for

it; why, then, this creation of a wish if it be not gratified? Has He made you long after faith, and yet, think you, will He deny it to you? Has He given you a groaning after His dear Son Jesus Christ, and will not Jesus yet be yours? Soul, He is yours. I have seen some treat children very unkindly when to make sport for themselves they have exhibited fruit or toys to the children which have excited great desire, and they have acted as if they were going to give them to the children, and then they have gone away and given them nothing, and laughed at them. They thought there was wit in such conduct, but it seemed to me meanness itself. God hath no such cruel ways with men; if He has taught them to desire His grace He will fulfil their desire, because He is ever a merciful and gracious God.

Remember, O desiring man, that *already you have a blessing.* When our divine Master was on the mountain side the benedictions which He pronounced were no word blessings, but they were full of weight and meaning, and among the rest of them is this—"Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness." Blessed while they hunger, blessed while they thirst. Yes, they are already blessed, and there is this at the back of it, "for they shall be filled." Thank God that you hunger. O, my friends, if we could make this city of London to be full of souls that hungered after Christ we might pray day and night for so blessed a consummation. If we could cause the multitudes of men who go up and down these streets, careless of God and of eternity, to thirst, and sigh, and cry after God, what a blessing that would be! Time was, perhaps, when you, too, were stony-hearted, and had no such desires; the change is a thing to be grateful for. Bless God for your grief, your agony, your anguish, for anything that is like spiritual feeling: it is better than to be left altogether alone. Here is something comforting for your distressed heart, a blessing is already pronounced upon you.

And we may be sure, dear friends, that God will hear the desires which He has Himself created, because *He loves to gratify right desires.* It is said of Him in nature, "Thou openeth Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Doth God care for sparrows in the bush, for minnows in the brook, for midges in the air, for tiny things in a drop of stagnant water, and will He fail to satisfy the longings of His own children: nothing gives us more pleasure, perhaps, as parents than to gratify the proper desires of a dear child. We like to see the pleasure that beams upon the little face when the desire is fulfilled. Do you not know that God loves to give us pleasure? It is His joy to do it. It is one of the joys of the great Father's heart to make His children glad. Be assured, my dear friend, it is no joy to God to see you with that dreary countenance. God delights in the delight of His people: He has made a promise to the happy which well fits in with my text: "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." He would have us rejoice in Him, for He rejoices over us; if you need proof, note well the names He gives us: "Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." If God delights to fulfil our desires let us not be slack in desiring.

If you want a sure proof that He will grant gracious desires let me remind you *of His promises.* Sometimes one promise may stick in the memory, and be better than quoting fifty. Here is the nineteenth verse of the one hundred and forty-fifth Psalm; take it home with you: "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them." If there is a holy awe of God in your soul, so that you fear Him, He will yet fulfil your desire, and your cry shall bring you salvation. The Lord will keep His promise; be you sure of that. Hath He said, and shall He not do it?

What a joy it will be when you get your desire satisfied, and how *you will praise the Lord!* It may not be very long before your soul's longing is before you. This prophecy I venture to make concerning you, that when the Lord has given you the desire of your heart, you will hardly know how to extol Him sufficiently. How you will bless and magnify His dear name! and what is more, others will begin to praise Him too. In the twenty-first Psalm, when the king had obtained a blessing from God, his subjects began to bless God for him. Read the second verse: "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips." Now, I should not wonder but what before long others will say the like of you;—"The Lord hath done great things for him." His wife, who lamented his deep dejection, will bless God, and say, "Lord, I thank Thee that Thou hast given him the desire of his heart, and that Thou hast not withholden the request of his lips." Godly friends will hear of his deliverance and rejoice, saying, "He who has long been cast down has found the light of God's countenance again," and they will also say, "Thou hast given him the desire of his heart." As you spread your new joy, and perfume the atmosphere with gladness, the saints will bless God that He has given you the desire of your heart. I am persuaded that you will obtain your desire, since it will glorify God for you to have it. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God," and you will praise Him and thus glorify Him. Go your way, and seek the Lord with confidence through Jesus Christ, and He will bless you evermore. Amen.

EARTH'S VANITIES, AND HEAVEN'S VERITIES

" Surely every man walketh in a vain shew : surely they are disquieted in vain : he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for ? my hope is in Thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions : make me not the reproach of the foolish."—Psalm xxxix. 6—8.

THESE are solemn words. Sometimes we have a more joyful theme than this ; but I believe that, spiritually, as well as naturally, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. A meditation of a quiet kind, on things not as they are in fiction, but as they prove to be in fact, is always salutary. There is a great mass of sorrow in the world ; and all of us meet with something every now and then to calm our spirit, and cool our blood. So, to-night, if we think a little of the fleeting character of this world, and of the real world where certainty alone is to be found, and if we school ourselves to learn facts and realities, by the blessing of God's Spirit, we may go away even more lastingly refreshed than if our hearts were made to leap for joy by meditation upon some transporting theme.

I will have no further preface ; there is too much in the text itself to allow time for a lengthy introduction. Therefore, notice, first, that *David records his view of human life* : " Surely every man walketh in a vain shew : surely they are disquieted in vain : he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." Then, next, *David expresses his own emotions in contemplation of these things* : " And now, Lord, what wait I for ? my hope is in Thee." And, then, in the third place, *David offers an appropriate and needful prayer*, for he cries, " Deliver me from all my transgressions : make me not the reproach of the foolish."

I. First, then, let us notice that in our text DAVID RECORDS HIS VIEW OF HUMAN LIFE.

You will notice that he puts " surely " twice over in this verse, and with the " verily " of the fifth verse, which has the same meaning, and might have been translated " surely," he has uttered the same word three times, " surely, surely, surely," or if you please, " verily, verily, verily," He half reminds us of his greater Son, the Son of David, whose speech was often emphasized with that sacred assuring word, " Verily, verily, I say unto you." David here seems to tell us that there is nothing sure except that nothing is sure. " Surely," says he, " nothing on earth is sure ; verily there is not verity anywhere here below." There is a land of verities, there is a home of surelies ; some of us are on the way thither, and have already the earnest of our inheritance ; but as for you who have your portion in this life, you have vanity not verity, change is written on everything earthly.

Having thus given us the keynote of certainty,—for the Psalmist did not write at haphazard, but he wrote what he knew, he wrote what he had experienced, and he wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God,—we should the more carefully look at what he has written. If it be so surely, let us be sure to know what it is.

And, first, he seems to me to speak of life as a walk ; and of that he says, " Surely every man walketh in vain shew." Then he speaks of life as a worry ; and of that he says, " Surely they are disquieted in vain." And then he speaks of life as a success, as men call it, and of that he says, " He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them."

David first speaks of *life as a walk*. He seems to have had in his mind the idea of a great procession : " Surely every man walketh in a vain shew." If you choose to go to the Lord Mayor's show next Saturday, you may see a vain show, and may know precisely what David meant. Such things were more common in Oriental countries than they are with us ; but whether it is the Lord Mayor's show or any other, it is a picture of what this mortal life is. The procession, if you see it, or if you do not see it, but only read and hear of it, may remind you of what life is ; what you see of it is all show. There are kings in the show, and princes in the show, and heroes of old time in the show ; but there are neither kings, nor princes, nor heroes there in reality. It is all show ; and such is this mortal life to a large extent. Among some classes of society, show is everything ; they must " keep up appearances." Just so ; and, all over the world, that is about all there is—" appearances "—a vain show. If you want reality, you cannot see it ; the unseen is real. If you want shadow, you can see it : " the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal." I wish we could get a hold of that idea as a practical thing, that everything we can see is shadow, but what we cannot see is the real substance. When we talk about faith men call us " visionary." Well, well, you may call us that if you like, for we have vision of a very high order ; but we beg to return the word to you in its ordinary meaning, for if you make your treasure of what you can see and handle, you are the visionaries, for this is but a vain show in which you rejoice, and that which you see with your eyes is but a vision, a dream that vanisheth when one awaketh. Earthly life is only a show. O, friends, I wish we really thought this ! We should not be so hot-brained as we are if we said to ourselves, " These are only shadows." We should not be so vexed and worried as we are if we often said to ourselves, " These are shadows ; I could not see them if they were not. If they were real, they would not be perceptible to my senses, they would only be perceptible by the higher faculty of faith." " Surely every man walketh in a vain shew." It is a show, and nothing more.

But it is a passing show, for David does not say, " Surely every man sits down in a vain shew, and remains in the same place," but " every man *walketh* in a vain shew." It is with life as with a procession which passes before your eyes. It comes ; hark to the shouts of the people ! It is here, in a few minutes there are the people crowding the streets ; but presently it has vanished, and it is gone. Does not life strike you as being just that ? I remember, O, I remember so many figures in the procession ! I have seemed to stand as at a window, though that itself has been but seeming, for I also have been in the procession. I recollect the great hearty men of my boyhood, whom I used to hear pray ; they are now singing up yonder. Then, when I think of you, dear friends,

I remember a long procession of saintly men and godly women who have all passed before me, and have gone into the glory. What a host of friends we have in the unseen world, "gone over to the majority"! As we get older, they really are the majority, and our friends on earth are outnumbered by our friends in heaven. Some of you will fondly remember dear ones who have passed away in the procession, but please recollect that you also are in the procession. Though they seem to have passed before you, you have been passing along with them, and you may reach the vanishing-point before long, and there will be this talk among the brotherhood you love, "He, too, has gone," or, "She has fallen asleep"; for we are all walking as in a procession, and passing away to the land of substance and reality.

A show which is passing away is, in itself, if it be measured by this mortal life, vain: "a vain shew." To a man who has no hope hereafter, it is all "vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Within the narrow compass of this poor globe, there is nothing that is worth a man's opening his mouth to ask for or to receive. Take the broader, larger circle of the heavens, and there, within that boundless circumference, there is something to be found that is worth finding. Dwell in God, and you have something substantial; dwell out of God, and you make "much ado about nothing." Life is a vain show when it is lived apart from God.

If you will only consider for a minute, you will see directly that it is so. Think of the armies of Babylon and Assyria, the palaces their kings built, the mighty cities that they piled; where are they now? Think of the Medes and Persians, with all their pomp of power; where are their glories now? And Greece,—her palaces and her temples are a desolation. Listen to the tramp of Roman armies up the *Via Sacra*, hark to the acclamations of the people as they climb the very chimney-tops to see the conquerors come home; where are they all gone? Fame did but blow one blast upon her brazen trumpet, and the echoes sounded for a while, and then there was silence. "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew." Get the idea of a procession, and you have caught the thought which David would convey to you. Such, too often, is the whole of a man's life, just the passing of a pageant, and nothing more.

The Psalmist then speaks of *life as a worry*, and he says, "Surely they are disquieted." So they are. How few people are so free from the spirit of the things of this world as to pass through this life quietly? If we could once live in the eternities, we should be calm, and still, and restful; but we live by the moment and the day, and we are all on the worry, and the fidget, and the fret, and the fume, and we know no real rest. The work of this world, if carried on only as for this world, is well described here: "Surely they are disquieted in vain." See how they begin life, eager for its joys, its honours, its wealth. Note how they plod, and toil, and labour. How much of brain-work is done by the light of the midnight oil! Many a man agitates his mind, and wearies his spirit, till his life is lost in finding a livelihood. They are trying to live, and lo! life is gone; and they wake up, and wonder how it is that they have let it go, and have not really lived at all. Some are all for getting, never for enjoying in any measure; when such men get a sufficiency, it is not sufficient for them. When they get twice that, they are still eager for more, and live on in a perpetual worry. Then one has more than another, and envy comes in, of all passions one of the most wearing; and when a man has at last all he thought he should ever want, then he is afraid of losing it. Now he is anxious about this, and worried about that, and fretting about the other. Believe me, there are no people who take the fret of life so much as those who ought to have sense enough to be quit of it; "having food and raiment" they are not "therewith content"; and having taken all that is good for them to carry, they are like a traveller who, having one good substantial staff to help him in his walking, must needs carry a bundle of sticks with him, and so load himself unnecessarily. Is it not so?

Did you ever stand in the Bourse at Paris, or did you ever, by any chance, hear the noise of our own Stock Exchange? The latter place is more difficult to see than the former; but when I have stood upstairs in the Bourse in Paris, and have looked down upon the raving multitude below, I have wondered whether, if Bedlam had been emptied out, there would be more noise, more uproar, more calling out, more pushing and rushing, first this way, and then that way. I could not understand what they were at; perhaps that made the scene appear the more maddening. Every man seemed all alive, and as though he would eat up every other man in the place; and I believe that the Bourse is but a picture of mercantile life everywhere,—competition, competition, everybody buying cheaply, and grinding down everybody that works, and then complaining that, in his turn, he is ground, too, his own measure being measured back to him. Ah me, what a life it is! Had David penned this Psalm to-day, he might have written in capital letters, "SURELY THEY ARE DISQUIETED IN VAIN." Oh, for a little quiet! Oh, for time to think! Oh, for opportunities to get near to God, and unbosom all your thoughts and all your cares before Him, and then to go away feeling patience mingled with joy, and joy with the expectation of unutterable bliss, helping us really to live, instead of being disquieted in vain!

Well, next, David passes on to speak of *life as a success*; and he mentions those who were supposed to have been successful in life; though, mark you, it is not success in life, after all, to accumulate riches. When you read in *The Illustrated London News* that somebody died "worth" so-and-so, do not believe it. A man is not worth what he has when he dies; a man may not be worth twopence, although he may possess a million, he himself is worth nothing, poor grabber of everything! But you say such and such a man died, and left £200,000. Yes, there are several of us who when we die, will *leave* much more than that. I shall leave all the world behind me, and there are many others here who will do the same, and leave all the millions that there are, and all the estates that ever were, and all the treasures of the world; and I suppose that every one of us, when he shall die, will leave everything behind him, for shrouds have no pockets, and men carry nothing with them into their graves.

But even when a man is successful in heaping up riches, see how David describes it: "He heapeth up riches." That is all, he does not partake of them, he does not use them, he merely heaps them up. He accumulates without enjoyment. When a man has food and raiment, and has what he needs for comfort, all that he has beyond, if counted by thousands, might as well be a thousand pins as a thousand pounds, so far as any good it is to him. But the bigger heap will not give more comfort, for there is the

additional anxiety of taking care of it. When riches are consecrated to God's glory; they assume quite another character; but I am now talking about this world and the mere possession of its treasures. David calls it the heaping up of riches, and that is all that it is, getting a big heap, like children do at the seaside; one gets a bigger heap of sand than another has, but what is the good of that?

The Psalmist also says that, when the man heaps up riches he "knoweth not who shall gather them." He hoards without security. This is probably an allusion to the husbandman, who has cut down his corn, and put the sheaves together; and then at night, before he can gather them into the garner, much less before he can thresh out the grain, and grind it, some marauder comes, and runs off with it all. The miser heaps up his gold, but he does not know who may gather it. Have we not seen the fruit of many year's toil vanish in an hour? The reaping of a lifetime has disappeared by a panic in a moment.

"He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." He leaves his wealth without pleasure. The Psalmist alludes to the fact that men cannot tell what will come of their possessions when they die. I am sure that there is many a man who would turn in his grave if he knew what was being done with his hard-earned wealth. To live wholly to enrich somebody about whose character you know so little, seems a poor object in life; and yet it is the only object which many are pursuing. Without chick or child, it may be, still men will go on scraping together riches for some unknown heir who, if they knew him, would be perhaps beneath their contempt; yet they go on working like slaves for one who will never be grateful to them when they are dead.

Now does not the whole of this put together make up a very sorry picture? Yet it is true of the worldling, of the man who has no hope hereafter, of the man who has never projected his soul by grace into the spiritual and the heavenly realm.

II. And now, glad to get away from this part of our subject, we notice how DAVID EXPRESSES HIS OWN EMOTIONS IN CONTEMPLATION OF THESE THINGS.

And first, *he has come to a decision.* Having turned these matters all over, he begins the expression of his own feelings thus, "And now, Lord," I like that mode of speech; it is a great thing to come to God with a "now." You know how the Lord comes to us; He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." I like a man sometimes to come close up to God, and sit down, and seem to say, "Now, Lord, Thou seest that I have realized the vanity of this world; I may well let it all go, for it melts away in my hand; it is a mere shadow which is not worth living for, and I have to live in eternity with Thee. I have to live in heaven or in hell. O, my God, bring me to my bearings! Bring me close up to Thee, and let us reason together, and have the question out. 'And now, Lord.'" Every moment is solemn if we would but make it so; but there are certain turning-points in life, when a man has had his eyes opened to see the fallacy of his former pursuits, when, stopping where the roads meet, he looks up to the signpost, and says, "And now, Lord, guide me; help me to take the right turn, to eschew the shadow, and to seek after that which is substantial. Now, Lord."

I also like this expression of David's emotions, because *he consults with God:* "Every man walketh in a vain shew:" but, saith he, "and now, Lord, there is no vanity with Thee, no deception, no delusion with Thee, behold, I turn away from this mirage, which just now deluded me, to Thee my God, the Rock of my salvation, and I look to Thee. And now, Lord." I would to God that somebody here would say, "I have to spend eternity somewhere. I will not waste this present time, and live as if this world were all; but I will lift up my prayer to-night, and say, 'Now, Lord, that I have passed my childhood, and am a young man, now that I have reached my twenty-first birthday, now that I am thirty, forty, fifty, now that my hair turns grey, it is time for me to be wise if ever, *now*, Lord.'" And if I am so unhappy as to have a person here who has advanced to the very end of his lease, and has become seventy, and yet still is living for a world that is slipping away from him, I would to God that the Holy Spirit would make him say to-night, "And now, Lord; now I seek Thee, now I turn to Thee."

You can see at once that *David feels that he is out of place,* for he says, "Lord, what wait I for?" He says, "What wait *I* for? I can see what these fools are waiting for; they are waiting to take their place in the show, they put on their masquerading garments, and go out there to take part in the pageant; but I will not go there. I do not belong to any of the classes that make up that show. What wait I for, then? I see the men disquieted in vain; but, Lord, I have learned to trust in Thee; then, what wait I for? And, O my God, I see how others clutch the treasure which they cannot keep, which is not worth the having, for they are soon to leave it, or it quickly leaves them; I am not after that kind of thing; now, Lord, what wait I for?" He is like a fish out of water, he is a man out of his native country, evidently a stranger and an exile, who is turning to his God, he is a fellow-stranger with his God, and he says to Him, "Now, Lord, what wait I for?"—a question only God Himself can fully answer.

You observe, also, that *he has his eye on the future.* He is a man who is waiting for something. Faith is a high virtue; and waiting upon God is a flower that grows out of it. "What wait I for? I have not found it yet; I am waiting for it, for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Our treasure is not here; it is away there, upon the eternal hills, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. The man described in our text is a waiting man, whose chief delight is now in a world that is to come.

And you observe, lastly, on this point, that *he is a man whose hope is in God:* "My hope is in Thee." I have no earthly expectations; but I say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him." "Hopes of ever finding anything here which can fill me, or content me, I have long ago abandoned; and now, Lord, my hope is in Thee. It is only Thee, my God, that I desire; and if I get Thee, if I am filled with Thee, if Thou abidest in me, if Thou dost transform me into Thine image, if Thou dost deign to use me for Thy glory, if Thou wilt take me home to dwell with Thee where Jesus is, this is what I wait for, and I wait for nothing else." We are expectant of good things to come. We are not inhabitants of this country, we are citizens of the New Jerusalem which is above; we are only shipwrecked here for a while, and exiled from home until the boat shall come to ferry us across the stream to the land where our true possessions lie, and where our best Beloved is gone. Life, and light, and love, and everything to us is He who has gone as our Forerunner to the place which He has prepared for them that love Him.

III. Now I close by noticing that DAVID OFFERS AN APPROPRIATE AND NEEDFUL PRAYER: "Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish." After all, we are here, brothers; we do not know how long we may have to stop here, and there are some things which we want while we are here. Well, what are they? Send in your requests; what do you want?

David puts down what he wants. "He wants first to be delivered from trouble," says somebody. No, he does not say anything about that; he prays, "Deliver me from all my transgressions." "He wants to be delivered from that headache, that heartache, that pain in the limbs, that depression of spirit." Nothing of the sort; the prayer of this godly man is, "Deliver me from all my transgressions."

That is, first, *he prayed for deliverance from sins committed.* "Lord, put all my sins away, so that I may be clean every whit from every sin that I have ever committed." Can that be? Oh, yes; it is so with many of us! We are washed in the blood of the Lamb; and that washing is perfect washing, it leaves no stain behind it. If thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ, He has taken thy sin upon Himself; He has put thy sin away by the great blood-shedding, it is not on thee any longer; it has even ceased to be, according to that wonderful text, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." What a blessed thing it is to live with no cloud whatever between your soul and your God, to know that every sin is blotted out by the atonement of Christ, and that your heavenly Father looks upon you with delight and favour, even as a child of God, and does not chide you! O happy, happy, happy man, who walks in the light, as God is in the light, and so has fellowship with God, while the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth him from all sin! David's first prayer is for deliverance from sins committed. If you get it answered in your case, you will not walk in any vain show, and you will not be disquieted at all, much less "disquieted in vain."

Next, *he prays to be delivered from the assaults of sin.* Who is there here that is not tempted? If anyone says, "I am above temptation, or beyond temptation," well, that person must have gone far in pride and carnal security; he is eaten up with the leprosy of self-deceit. We are all tempted, and every day we need to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." "Deliver me from all my transgressions. Lord, do not let me sin; let me not in heart, or thought, or word, or deed, offend against Thee." Oh, if we could but be perfect, so that we could never manifest an ugly temper, never speak a wry word, never have an evil thought! Oh, if we could but be perfect! Ah, sirs, these are the riches we covet, to be perfectly free from every tendency to sin! If we could but get to that, then we should have got to heaven, for that is heaven, to be perfectly delivered from sin. Well, well, we shall have that perfection, God will give it to us; but let us make this the subject of our daily prayer, "Deliver me from all my transgressions."

David also *prayed for deliverance from peculiarly dangerous sins.* Allow me to put an emphasis on one little word in my text, "Deliver me from *all* my transgressions." I am afraid that we all have some special sin that is our sin more than it is anybody else's, some tendency, hereditary perhaps, some liability to a particular form of sin. I do believe that, if some brethren were ever tempted to hilarity, they would not transgress in that direction, for they were born in November, and they have a fog in their very soul. There are some others, who, if they were tempted to great depression, would not transgress in that way, for they have sunlight in their souls, and their eyes always twinkle with a natural merriment. Some men are not tempted to be misers; it would be a mercy if they were, for they are such dreadful spendthrifts. Some men are never tempted to be lavish; I half wish that the devil or some one better would tempt them that way, for they are so mean, and it is so hard to get even a threepenny piece from them to help the best causes. Satan is pretty well acquainted with us, he sees the joints in our harness, he knows to what sins we are specially inclined; and if it be so in sinners, it is so in saints also. We all have need to pray, "Deliver me from *all* my transgressions; especially from the sins to which I am most liable. Lord, save me from them." I invite you, dear friend, to pray this prayer of David.

And then pray the other also: "Make me not the reproach of the foolish. If I am to be reproached, let me be reproached by wise men; but make me not the reproach of the foolish."

Thus, *David prayed for deliverance from deserved dishonour.* Oh, may God grant that none of you, whom He has called to a higher and better life, and made to long for glory and eternity, may ever make the enemy to blaspheme, or give them real reason for despising you! God keep us from falling! O Christian men, Christ has been more wounded by His friends than by His foes! We do not mind what the infidel has to say; at least, we should not mind it if you did not at times help him to say sad things by your inconsistency. We feel the point of the arrow, and the smart of the wound is acute; but keener far is it to feel that your own wrongdoing feathered the arrow which the enemy shot from his bow. God keep us from that evil! May we never lend a feather from our wings with which to furnish an arrow against Christ or His cause!

David also prayed to be preserved from undeserved defamation: "Make me not the reproach of the foolish." If you live the life of an angel, foolish persons will soon spread an ill story against you. Unless the Lord holds their tongues, they will not hold them. Pray, then, that you may be preserved from slander. If it comes, may it be real slander, with no truth in it; but may God preserve you even from that, for it is a cruel thing, and cuts even to the quick!

Again, *David prayed for deliverance from spiritual disappointment;* and may we also be preserved from all disappointments concerning our trust in God! If we trusted in God, and He did not deliver us, we should be indeed the reproach of the foolish. We come out boldly for the truth of God, and stand alone, and yet that truth never vindicates us, why? then we shall be the reproach of the foolish! We pray that we may not be put to shame, and that God's bare arm may defend His own cause, and we believe it will be so.

And last of all, in his prayer, "Make me not the reproach of the foolish," *David pleads for deliverance from dreadful taunts at the last.* May I never be lost, and then for ever have to bear this reproach! You know, the thought has sometimes come to me that, if I am not true, and if at the last great day the Master should say, "I never knew you, depart, ye cursed,"

how will those who have to depart with me turn round, and say, "And *you*, and *you?* You talked to us; you preached to us; and yet you are here yourself." This would be to suffer shame as did the king of Babylon when he went down to the pit, and the kings whom he had slain began to say to him, "Art thou become like one of us?" How they gloried over their conqueror, himself shut up in hell, conquered by the Almighty God! Professors, I beseech you to pray this prayer to-night, "Make me not the reproach of the foolish." Do be sincere, true men, lest on the last day you not only have the wrath of God to bear, but the shame and the everlasting contempt which your fellow-sinners will heap upon you while you lie there, after all your profession, a castaway.

The Lord grant His blessing to those who are to be baptized to-night! May they be faithful to the end; and may others of us, who have confessed Christ years ago, be kept from sin! May we all trust Christ to-night! If we never trusted Jesus before, let us begin at once, each one saying, "Now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee." May we all come to Jesus, and find eternal life in him! Amen, and Amen.

BROUGHT UP FROM THE HORRIBLE PIT

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."—Psalm xl. 1—3.

THIS passage has been used with great frequency as the expression of the experience of the people of God, and I think it has been very rightly so used. It is a very accurate picture of the way in which sinners are raised up from despair to hope and salvation, and of the way in which saints are brought out of deep troubles, and made to sing of divine love and power. Yet I am not certain that the first verse could be truthfully uttered by all of us; I question, indeed, whether any of us could thus speak. Could we say,—"I waited patiently for the Lord." Think ye, brethren, might it not read,—"I waited impatiently for the Lord," in the case of most of us? All the rest may stand true, but this would need to be modified. We could hardly speak in our own commendation if we considered our conduct in the matter of patience, for that is, alas, still a scarce virtue upon the face of the earth. If we read the psalm through we shall see that it was not written exclusively to describe the experience of God's people. Secondarily, we may regard it as David's language, but in the first instance a greater than David is here. The first person who uttered these words was the Messiah, and that is quite clear if you read the psalm through; for we fall upon such language as this: "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened; burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." We need not say with the Ethiopian, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other?" for we are led at once by the plainest indications to see that he is not speaking of himself, but of our Lord; and if we needed confirmation of this we get it in Hebrews x., where Paul expressly quotes this passage as referring to the Lord Jesus. To Him, indeed, alone of all men can it with accuracy be applied. So this morning I shall have to show that this text of ours is most fit to be the language of the Lord, our representative and covenant Head. When I have shown this, you will then see how we can use the self-same expressions, because we are in Him. Each believer becomes a mirror in which is reflected the experience of our Lord; but it would be ill for us to be so taken up with the mere reflection as to forget the express image by which this experience is formed in us.

I shall ask you, then, at this time, to observe our divine Lord when in His greatest trouble. Notice, first, *our Lord's behaviour*,—"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto Me, and heard My cry": then consider, secondly, *our Lord's deliverance*, expressed by the phrase, "He brought Me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay," and so forth: then let us think, thirdly, of *the Lord's reward* for it,—"many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord":—that is His great end and object, and in it He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. We shall close, fourthly, by perceiving *the Lord's likeness* in all His saved ones; for they also are brought up from the pit of destruction, and a new song is put into their mouths. He is not ashamed to call them brethren, since in each one of them His own experience is repeated though upon a smaller scale.

I. First, let us think of OUR LORD'S BEHAVIOUR. "I waited patiently for the Lord." Here we greatly need the teaching of the Holy Ghost; may it be given us abundantly. First, our Lord's conduct when He was under the smarting rod was that of *waiting*. He waited upon the Lord all His life, and this waiting became more conspicuous in His passion and death. He went down into Gethsemane, and there He prayed earnestly; but with sweet submission; for He said, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Complete submission was the essential spirit of His prayer. He rose up from prayer all crimson with His bloody sweat, and He went to meet His foes, delivering Himself up voluntarily to be led as a sheep to the slaughter. He did not unsheathe the sword as Peter did; much less did He flee, like His disciples, but He waited upon the will of the Most High, enduring all things till the Father should give Him deliverance. When they took Him before Annas and Caiaphas, and Pilate and Herod, hurrying Him from bar to bar, how patiently He kept silence, though false witnesses appeared against Him. Like a sheep before her shearers He was dumb, submitting Himself without a struggle. In the omnipotence of patience He held His peace even from good, because it was so written of Him. When they led Him away to crucifixion through the streets of Jerusalem He did not even encourage the lamentations of the sympathizing women who surrounded Him; but in His wondrous patience He said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me." He did not refuse to bear His cross, or to let the cross bear Him. He did

not complain of contempt and contumely, since these were appointed Him. When they nailed Him to the tree, and there He hung in the burning sun, tortured, fevered, agonizing, the words that escaped Him were not those of murmuring and repining, but those of pity, pain, patience, and submission. Till He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost, He bowed His whole being to His Father's will, waiting His time and pleasure. He steadily took a long draught at the appointed cup, and drained it to the bitter end. His eyes were unto the Lord as the eyes of servants are to the hands of their masters; He waited in service, in hope, in resignation, and in confidence. He knew that God would help Him and deliver Him, He knew that His head would be raised on high above the sons of men; but still He waited for the Father's time, and meanwhile made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and as a servant yielded all His strength to the work which was given Him to do. He was willing in the hour of His passion to be treated as the scum and scorn of all mankind, nor did He hurry the hour when all the shame and scorn should blossom into glory and honour. He went down in His waiting even to the utmost of self-denial, and truly proved that He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. Never man served and waited like this Man.

Our text adds to this word "waited" the word "patiently." I waited *patiently*. If you would see patience, look not at Job on the dunghill, but look at Jesus on the cross. Job, the most patient of men, was assuredly impatient at the same time; but this blessed Lord of ours gave Himself up completely, and showed not the slightest sign of repining. Not a speck of impatience can be detected in the crystal stream of our Lord's submission. His soul was all melted, and it all flowed into the mould of the Father's will: no dross was in or about Him, nothing which refused to melt and to run into the mould. One would have supposed that He would have spoken an angry word to Judas, who betrayed Him; instead of which He gently asked of him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" It would not have seemed wonderful if He had upbraided the Jews who so falsely accused Him, or the rulers who so unjustly treated Him; but here is the patience of the saintly One, He was perfect master of His own spirit. His answer to His murderers was the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So meek and lowly in heart was He that to men He gave no sharp replies: His answers were all steeped in gentleness; take for example His word to the high priest: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" They sat down around the cross and mocked Him, jeered at Him, insulted over Him, and made mirth even of His cries and prayers; but He did not utter a single word of rebuke, much less did He leap from the cross to dash His mockers in pieces, and prove by their destruction that He was indeed the mighty Son of God. "I waited patiently," saith He. No thought or word or deed of impatience can be charged upon Him; waiting, He waited, and waited still. We are in such a hurry when we are in trouble; we hasten to escape from it at once; every minute seems an hour, and every day an age. "Help me speedily, O my God!" is the natural cry of the child of God under the rod; but our Saviour was in no ill haste to get from the chastisement which came upon Him for our sakes: He was at leisure in His woe. So thoroughly was He resolved to do His Father's will that even on the morning of His resurrection He arose with deliberation, and quitted the grave in order, folding His grave-clothes and laying the napkin by itself. He steadily persevered in all His work of holiness and sorrow of sacrifice, never accepting deliverance till His work was done. Patiently He endured to have His ear bored to the door-post, to have His head encircled with thorns, His cheeks distained with spittle, His back furrowed with the lash, His hands and feet nailed to the wood, and His heart pierced with the spear. In His body on the tree patience was written out in crimson characters.

Now, this was needful for the completeness of His atonement. No expiation could have been made by an impatient Saviour. Only a perfect obedience could satisfy the law; only an unblemished sacrifice could put away our sins. There must not, therefore, be about our Substitute a trace of resistance to the Father's will, nor as a sacrifice must He struggle against the cords, or turn His head away from the sacrificial knife. In truth, His was a willing, patient doing and suffering of the Divine will. "He *gave* His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting." "I waited patiently for the Lord," saith He; and you know, brethren, how true was the declaration.

But while the Saviour thus waited, and waited patiently, we must not forget that He waited *prayerfully;* for the text speaks of a cry which He lifted up, and of God's inclining Himself to it. That patience which does not pray is obstinacy. A soul silent to God is apt to be sullen rather than submissive. A stoical patience hardens itself against grief, and asks no deliverance; but that is not the patience which God loves, it is not the patience of Christ. He used strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death. Let Gethsemane tell of that wrestling which infinitely excelled the wrestling of Jacob: Jabbok is outdone by Kedron. His was a wrestling, not to sweat alone, but unto sweat of blood: he sweats who works for bread, the staff of life; but He sweats blood who works for life itself. What prayers those must have been under such a fearful physical, mental, and spiritual agony which were so fervent that they brought an angel from the throne, and yet so submissive that they are the model of resignation. He agonised as earnestly as if He sought His own will, and yet He wholly resigned Himself to the Father, saying, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God." Our Lord was always praying: there never was a moment in His life in which He was not in full communion with God, unless we except the period when He cried, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He did often go aside to pray a more special prayer, but yet even when He spake to the people, even when He faced His foes, His soul was still in constant fellowship with His Father. But ah, when He came between the upper and the nether millstones, when this good olive was ground in the olive press, and all the oil of His life was extracted from Him, then it was that His strong crying and tears came up before the Lord His God, and He was heard in that He feared.

Now, brothers and sisters, look at your pattern, and see how far short you have come of it. At

least, I will remember with regret how far short I have come of it. Have we waited? Have we not been in too great a hurry? Has it not been too much our desire that the Lord might make His will like our will rather than make our will like His? Have you not had a will of your own sometimes, and a strong will too? Have you not been as the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke? Have you not kicked against the pricks? You have not waited, but you have worried. Can we say that we waited patiently? Oh, that patience! Every man thinks he has it until he needs it, but only let his tender point be touched, and you will see how little patience he possesses. It is the fire which tries our supposed resignation, and under that process much of our palace of patience burns like wood, hay, and stubble. Old crosses fit the shoulder, but let a new cross be laid upon us and we writhe under it. Suffering is the vocation of a Christian, but most of us come short of our high calling. Our Lord Jesus has joined together reigning and suffering, for we read of "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ"; He was the royal example of patience, but what are we? Remember, again, that Jesus prayed importunately while He waited: "being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly." Have we not at times restrained prayer? Have we not pleaded as an excuse for our feeble petitions the very facts which ought to have been a spur to our earnestness? "I felt too ill to pray." Couldst thou not pray for health with all the more fervency? "I felt too burdened to pray." Shouldst thou not pray for help to bear thy burden? Can we ever safely say to ourselves, "I may be excused from supplication now, for my sorrow is great." Talk not so. Here is thy balm and benediction, thy comfort and thy cordial: here is thy strength and succour, thy constancy and confidence. Even in the midnight of the soul let us arise and pour out our hearts like water before the Lord. O tried believer, get thee to thy knees, and from above the mercy-seat the glory of the Lord shall shine forth upon thee. Pray even as Jesus did, and as all His saints have done, so shall you in patience possess your soul. In due time the Lord inclined to the afflicted suppliant, listening to his moaning from the bottom of the pit: of this it is high time for us to speak. Yet let us not leave this first point till we learn from the example of our Lord that patience is seen in waiting as well as in suffering. To bear a great weight for an hour or two is nothing compared with carrying a load for many a day. Patience knows its letters, but waiting reads the page, and praying rehearses it in the ears of God. Let us add to our patience waiting, and to waiting prayer.

II. We come, secondly, to consider OUR LORD'S DELIVERANCE. In due time, when patience had had her perfect work, and prayer had at last prevailed, our suffering Lord was brought up again from the deeps of sorrow. His deliverance is set forth under two images.

First, it is represented as a *bringing up out of a horrible pit.* It is a terribly suggestive metaphor. I have been in the dungeon in Rome in which, according to tradition, Peter and Paul were confined (though, probably, they were never there at all). It was indeed a horrible pit, for originally it had no entrance but a round hole in the rock above; and when that round hole at the top was blocked with a stone, not a ray of light nor a particle of fresh air could possibly enter. The prisoners were let down into the cavern, and there they were left. When once the opening was closed they were cut off from all communication with their fellow men. No being has ever been so cruel to man as man. Man is the worst of monsters to his kind, and his cruel inventions are many. He has not been content to leave his fellows their natural liberty, but he built prisons and digged pits in which to shut up his victims. At first they would place a man in a dry well merely for custody and confinement, or they would drop him into some hollow cavern in the earth in which corn or treasure had been concealed; but afterwards with greater ingenuity of malice they covered over the top of these pits so that the prisoners could not be partakers of God's bountiful air, or the merciful light of the sun, or the silver sheen of the moon. Covered all over and shut in, the captives were buried alive. Even in modern times we have seen what they call *oubliettes*, or dungeons in which prisoners were immured, to be forgotten as dead men out of mind, buried so as never to come forth again. Such unfortunates as were doomed to enter these tombs of living men bade farewell to hope. They were inhabitants of oblivion, dwellers in the land of death-shade, to remain apart from their kind, cut off from memory. These worst of dungeons may illustrate our text,—"He brought me up also out of an horrible pit."

In the original we get the idea of a crash, as when some mailed warrior in the midst of the battle stumbles into a pit, and there he lies bruised and broken: and there is the thought of the fall of waters rushing strangely, furiously, mysteriously. The Hebrew hath it, "the pit of noises," or as some render it, "the pit of destruction." Such was the condition of our dear Redeemer when He was bearing our sin and suffering in our stead.

Just notice, first, that our Lord was like a man put into a pit, and so made to be *quite alone.* Imagine yourself now confined in one of those caverns, with the big stone rolled over the mouth of it. There would be neither hearing nor answering. Now will you know the dread solemnity of silence. You may speak, but no gentle whisper of sympathy will reach your ears in return; you may cry again and again and make the dungeon's dome echo to your voice, but you are speaking as to brass—no man cares for your soul. You are alone; alone in a fearful solitude. Thus it happened to our Saviour. All His disciples forsook Him and fled, and what was infinitely worse, His God forsook Him too. He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Can any man tell me all that was meant by that infinite lament?

Of course, a prisoner in such a pit as that was *in total darkness.* He could not see the walls which enclosed him, nor so much as his own hand. No beam of sunlight ever wandered into that stagnant air; the captive would have to grope for the pitcher of water and the morsel of bread which a cruel mercy would allot to him. Our Lord was in the dark; midnight brooded over His spirit. He said—"Now is My soul troubled." "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." His was a pit of gloom, the region of the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself.

When a man is shut up in a pit he is, of course, *full of distress.* If you were, any of you, to go into one of the solitary cells of our own jails, I warrant you a short sojourn in it would be quite enough. These cells some years ago were thought to be wonderful cures for all sorts of evil dispositions in

men, but probably they have oftener destroyed reason than conquered depravity. Go in, if you dare. Ask the warder to shut to the door, and leave you in the dark all alone, that you may try the solitary system for yourself. No, I should not advise you to try it even for five minutes, for you might even in that short space inflict such an injury upon your nervous system as you would never recover. I believe that many of the gentler ones here would be quite unable to bear total darkness and solitude even for the shortest space. In the grim gloom the soul is haunted with phantom fears, while horror peoples the place which is empty of human beings; the heart is worried with evil imaginations, and pierced with arrows of distress; grief takes hold of the spirit, and alarm conquers hope. In our Lord's case, the grief and sorrow which He felt can never be described, nor need it be conceived. It was something tantamount to the miseries of damned souls. The holy Jesus could not feel the exact misery which takes hold on abandoned rebels, but He did suffer what was tantamount to that at the judgment-seat of God. He gave a *quid pro quo*, a something which in God's esteem, reckoning the dignity of His mighty Person, stood instead of the sinner's eternal suffering. He felt woe upon woe, night blackening night. Do not try to realise His agony; He wills that you should not, for He has trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there were none with Him, as if to show that none could understand His sorrows, and that we can do no more than speak of His "unknown sufferings."

But I must add, to complete the figure, that shut up in such a pit there might be a great tumult above, like to the tramping of armed hosts, or there might be a rush of waters underneath the captive deep in earth's bowels. He could not tell what the noise was, nor whence it came; and hence he would often be in terrible fear while he sat alone in the thick darkness. Our Lord had His fears, for we read that He was heard in that He feared. Torrents of sin rushed near Him: floods of wrath were heard around Him, and cataracts of grief fell upon Him. Besides, there was a mystery about this anguish which intensified it,—a mystery not to be written or explained. Our Redeemer's spirit was cast down within Him far beyond anything that is common to men; in that horrible pit, that pit of destruction, He lay with none to pity or sustain.

But, oh, change the strain, and sing unto the Lord awhile, as we read the verse, "He brought me up out of an horrible pit." The Lord Jesus Christ was lifted up from all sorrow of spirit at that moment when He said so bravely, "It is finished," and though He died yet was He lifted up from death, as it is written, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." His spirit ascended to God, and by-and-by, when the third day had blushed with morning light, His body rose from the tomb, to ascend in due time to glory. He came up out of the pit of the grave, delivered from all fear of corruption, pain, or defeat. Now His sorrow is ended, and His brow is clear from care. His visage is marred no more: He bears the scars which do but illumine His hands and feet with splendour, but

> "No more the bloody spear,
> The cross and nails no more,
> For hell itself shakes at His name,
> And all the heavens adore."

Sing ye unto the Lord, ye saints of His, as ye behold your Master brought up again from among the sorrowful, the despised, the deserted, the dead.

A second figure is, however, used here to express our Lord's grief and deliverance from it,—"*Out of the miry clay.*" Travellers tell us that wherever pits are still used as dungeons they are damp, foul, and utterly loathsome; for they are never cleansed, however long the prisoner may have been there, or however great the number of victims shut up within them. You know what the prisons of Europe were in Howard's days, they were even worse in the East in periods further back. The imprisoned wretch often found himself sinking in mire; he found no rest, no hope of comfort, and when extricated he needed a hand to drag him out of the thick clay. Our blessed Lord and Master found Himself when He was suffering for us where everything appeared to give way beneath Him; His spirits sank, His friends failed Him, and His heart melted like wax. Every comfort was taken from Him. His blessed manhood found nothing upon this earth upon which it could stay itself, for He had been made sin for us, made a curse for us, and so every foundation of comfort departed from Him. He was deprived of visible support, and was reduced to a sad condition. As a man who has fallen into a slough cannot stir so as to recover himself, so was it with our Redeemer, who says in the Psalms,—"I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing." Some morasses are so destructive that, if a man should once fall into them, he might give up his life for lost unless some one came that way to drag him out. So did the Saviour sink in the miry clay of our sin and misery until the Lord Almighty lifted Him out. The clay of sorrow clung to Him; it held to Him while He was performing the great work of our redemption. But the Lord brought Him up out of it. There is no mire upon His garments now: His feet no longer sink, He is not held by the bands of death, He slides not into the grave again. He was dragged down, as it were, by bearing our sin, but that is over, and He hath ascended on high: He hath led captivity captive, and received gifts for men. All honour be unto Him, and to His Father who delivered Him.

As we read our text we pursue this story of our Master's deliverance, and we are told that *He was brought up* out of the lowest deeps. Say the words or sing them as you choose,—"He brought me up." God upraised His obedient Son from the depths into which He had descended on our account. He was brought up, like Jonah who went to the bottom of the mountains, and yet was landed safely on the shore. He was brought up like Joseph, who rose from a pit to a palace; like David, who was led up from the sheepfold to the kingdom. "The king, shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord; and in Thy salvation how greatly shall He rejoice! His glory is great in Thy salvation: honour and majesty hast Thou laid upon Him. For Thou hast made Him most blessed for ever: Thou hast made Him exceeding glad with Thy countenance."

Then we are told *He was set on a rock*, and oh, the glory of our blessed Lord in this matter, for now He stands on a firm foundation in all that He does for us. Judgment and truth confirm His ways, and the Judge of all the earth approves His doings. Christ has no sandy foundation for His work of mercy or His word of comfort. When He saves He has a right to save: when He puts away sin He does it

on indisputable grounds: when He helps and delivers His people He does it according to law, according to the will of the Highest. As Justifier, Preserver, and Perfecter of His people, He stands upon a rock. This day I delight to think of my Lord as settling His Church with Himself upon the immutable foundations of the covenant, on the decree of God, on the purpose of the Father, on His own work, and on the promise of God that He would reward Him in that work. Well may we say that His feet are upon a rock, for He is Himself, by another figure, the Rock of ages, the Rock of our salvation.

And now *the goings of our glorious Christ are established.* When He goes out to save a sinner, He knows that He can do it, and has a right to do it. When He goes up to His Father's throne to make intercession for sinners, His goings are established, and the desire of His heart is given Him. When He comes in among His Church, or marches forth with His people to the ends of the earth, His goings are established. "For the king trusteth in the Lord, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved." He shall surely come a second time without sin unto salvation, for so has the Father decreed: His glorious goings are as surely established as were those of His labour and suffering. We shall never be without a Saviour: we shall never have a fallen or a vanquished Saviour; for His goings are established for continuance, certainty and victory. Such honour have all His saints; for "the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord"; and again, "none of his steps shall slide."

Best of all, there is *a new song in the mouth of our Well-beloved.* It is grand to think of Jesus singing. Read the twenty-second Psalm, and you will find Him doing it, as also in the Hebrews: "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee." Toward the end of His earthly career you hear Him bursting into song. Was not that a grand occasion just before His passion, when He was going out to die; we read that "after supper they sang a hymn." If we had been bound to die that night, as He was, we should rather have wept or prayed than sang. Not so our Lord. I do not know what Psalm they sang: probably a part of the great Hallel, usually sung after the Passover, which consists of those Psalms at the end of the book which are so full of praise. I believe the Saviour Himself pitched the tune and led the strain. Think of Him singing when near His hour of agony! Going to scorn and mockery, singing! Going to the thorn-crown and the scourge, singing! Going to death, even the death of the cross, singing! For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame! But now, what must that new song be which He leads in heaven? "They sang, as it were, a new song before the throne"; but it is He that leads the heavenly orchestra. How greatly He excels Miriam, the sister of Moses, when she took her timbrel and led forth the women in their dances, saying, "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." This is called "the song of Moses, the servant of God and of the Lamb"; so I gather that the Lamb's new song is after the same triumphant fashion: it is the substance of that which Moses's song foreshadowed. In Christ Jesus the Lord our God has led captivity captive. Let us praise Him on the high sounding cymbals. Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously. The powers of darkness are destroyed; sin, death, and hell are drowned in the atoning blood: the depths have covered them: there is not one of them left. Oh, "sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously." "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God."

III. Such is the exalted condition of our Lord at this hour; let us turn and look upon THE LORD'S REWARD. The Lord's reward for having gone down into the horrible pit, and having sunk in the miry clay for us, is this,—that "many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord." "*Many!*" Not all mankind, but "many" shall look to Jesus and live. Alas! vast numbers continue in unbelief; but "many" shall believe and live; and the Lord's "many" means very many. As I was thinking over my text, I thought, "I hope there will be some at the Tabernacle this morning that belong to the 'many' who shall see and fear and trust in the Lord." "Many *shall*," for the Lord hath promised it. But, Lord they will not. "But they shall," says God. Oh, but many refuse. "But they shall," says God, and He hath the key of men's hearts, and power over their judgments and their wills. "Many shall." Do you, O ye unbelievers, think that Jesus shall die in vain? O sinners, if you will not have Christ, others will. You may despise Him, but He will be none the less glorious. You may reject His salvation but He shall be none the less mighty to save. He is a King, and ye cannot pluck a single jewel from His crown. If you are so foolish as to provoke His iron rod so that He shall break you in shivers with it, yet He will be glorious in the sight of God, and He will save His own. Notwithstanding your hardness of heart, be this known unto you, O House of Israel, that "many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord."

What shall the many do? They shall "*see.*" Their eyes shall be opened, and they shall see their Lord in the horrible pit, and in the miry clay; and as they look they shall see that He was there for them. What joy this will create in their spirits! If they do not see the Lord Jesus as their substitute they shall, at any rate, be made to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin. If when Jesus only takes imputed sin, and has no sin of His own, yet He must be cast into the horrible pit and sink in the miry clay; then what will become of men who have their own sins about them, provoking the fierce anger of the Lord? If God thus smites His Well-beloved, O sinner, how will He smite you! Beware, ye that forget Him, lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you. By the suffering Surety all covered with His own gore, I do beseech you, provoke not God; for if His Only-Begotten must suffer so, you must suffer yet more if you first break His law, and next reject His gospel.

"Many shall see." Do you wonder that it is added, "and shall *fear*"? It makes men fear to see a bleeding Christ, and to know that they crucified Him. It makes men fear, however, with a sweet filial fear that is akin to hope, when they see that Jesus died for sinners, the Just for the unjust, to bring them to God. Oh, when they see the Lord of love acting as a scapegoat, and bearing their sins away into the wilderness of forgetfulness, they begin to hate their evil ways, and to have a reverent fear of God; for so saith the Scripture, "there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared."

But best of all—and this is the chief point—they come to "*trust* in the Lord." They build their hope of salvation upon the righteousness of God as mani-

fested in Christ Jesus. Oh, I would to God that some of you would trust Him at once. Beloved friend, are you trying to be saved by your own works? This is a delusion. Are you hoping to be saved by your own feelings? That is a lie. But you can be saved, you shall be saved: if you will trust yourself with that blessed One who was alone in the dark pit of noises for the sake of sinners, and slipped in the miry clay for the ungodly, you shall assuredly be saved from wrath through Him. Trust Him, and as surely as He liveth you shall be saved; for he that trusteth in Him cannot perish. God's truthfulness were gone if the believer could be lost. Hath He not said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The throne of God must rock and reel before the cross of Christ shall lose its power to save those that believe.

IV. Fourthly, let us see THE LORD'S LIKENESS in His people. This whole passage, as I said in the beginning, has often been used by individual believers as a description of their own deliverance. It is a true picture, because we are made like unto our Head, and all the brethren are partakers of that which the Head has endured. Do I speak to any of my Master's servants in sore trouble? Dear friends, are you made to wait, though your trial is sharp and severe? Is it so that your prayer has not yet been answered? Then remember the waiter's place was once occupied by the Lord Jesus, for He says, "I waited patiently." If the Lord keeps you waiting for a certain blessing year after year do not despair. He will give it at length if it be truly for your good, for He hath said "no good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." He kept His Son waiting, and He may very well keep you in like posture, for how long did you delay, and cause the Lord of grace to wait on you! "Blessed are they that wait for Him." I have seen people very uppish when they have called on a public man and have had to wait a little; they feel that they ought not to be kept in the lobby; but suppose some young man said to them, "I am his own son, and yet I have been waiting an hour." Then they are more patient. So when God keeps you waiting do not be proud, and say, "Wherefore should I wait for the Lord any longer?" but remember "It is good for a man both to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God." Jesus waited —"waited patiently." Seek to be like Him, and in patience possess your soul. "I cannot see how I am to be delivered." Wait. "Ah, this is such a heavy burden." Wait. "But I am ready to die under this terrible load." Wait! Wait on! Though He tarry, wait for Him: He is worth waiting for. "Wait" is a short word, but it takes a deal of grace to spell out its full meaning, and still more grace to put it into practice. Wait: wait. "Oh, but I have been unfortunate." Wait. "But I have believed a promise, and it has not been fulfilled." Wait; for you wait in blessed company: you may hear Jesus saying, "I waited patiently." Blessed be His name, He is teaching us to do the same by His gracious Spirit.

Next, the Lord may send you, His dear child, a very heavy sorrow: you may fall into the horrible pit, and see no light, no comfort, and no one may be able to cheer you or help you. Some that have a touch of despondency in their nature have been brought so low as almost to despair of life. They have sat in darkness and seen no light: they have felt the walls of their prison and have not discovered a crack or cranny through which escape was possible: they have looked up, and even then they have seen nothing to console them. Ah, well, here is a word I commend to you,—the Saviour says it: "He brought Me up." The Lord God can and will bring up His troubled ones. You will have to write in your diary one of these days, "He brought me up." I was in the dark, I was in the dungeon, but "He brought me up." I can personally say this with gladsome gratitude, for "He hath brought me up," again and again. My heart is glad as I reflect upon my past deliverances. I have often wondered why I am so often shut up in prison, and bound as with fetters of steel; but I cease to wonder when I think of the many among you who are called to wear the like bonds. This is my portion, that I may be a witness-bearer for my God, and that I may be able to speak to the experiences of God's tempted people, and tell how graciously the Lord delivers His servants who trust in Him. Faith shall never be ashamed or confounded, world without end. God can and will hasten to the rescue of the faithful. I set to my seal also that "He brought me up"; and, beloved brother in tribulation, He will bring *you* up; only rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.

"Ah," say you, "but I do not know how to stand for I sink as in miry clay, through faintness of heart: I cannot find the slightest foothold for my hope." No, you are sinking in the miry clay like your Master; but in answer to prayer the Lord will bring you up out of your hopeless state, and He will set your feet upon a rock, and establish your goings, and give you joy, and peace, and delight. Wherefore see, and fear, and trust in God, and give glory to His blessed name.

Lastly, do I address any seeking one who finds no rest for the sole of his foot? Dear friend, are you sinking in the deep mire of your guilt? The Lord can pardon you, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Are you shut up by conscience in the prison-house under a just sense of deserved wrath? Jesus will give you immediate rest if you come to Him. Do you feel as if you cannot kneel to pray, for your very knees slip in the mire of doubt! Remember, Jesus makes intercession for the transgressors. Do you seem as if, every time you move, you are burying your hope, and slipping deeper and deeper into ruin? The Lord hath plenteous redemption. Do not despair. You cannot deliver yourself, but God can deliver you: you cannot stand of yourself, but God can make you to stand. You cannot go to Him nor go abroad among your fellow-men with comfort, but the Lord can make you to run in His ways. You shall yet go forth with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Only see Christ, and fear and trust your God, and you too shall sing unto Jehovah your Deliverer, and this shall be your song:—

"He raised me from a horrid pit,
Where mourning long I lay,
And from my bonds released my feet,
Deep bonds of miry clay.

Firm on a rock He made me stand,
And taught my cheerful tongue
To praise the wonders of His hand
In a new thankful song."

A SINGULAR PLEA IN PRAYER

" I said, Lord, be merciful unto me : heal my soul ; for I have sinned against Thee."—Psalm xli. 4.

THIS was one of David's sayings: " I said." It was a saying that was worth saying, and it is worth re-saying: " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me." How often he said it, we do not know ; the oftener, the better. There is no day too bright for saying it, and there is no night too dark for saying it. " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me." Every one of David's sayings was not worth repeating ; for he said some things that he had to retract. " I said in my haste," said he, on one occasion ; and, possibly, what he said in his haste he repented of at his leisure. But this saying in our text needs no retracting, it only needs repeating ; and, until we enter heaven, we may keep on saying it: " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me." I have never heard of Christ rebuking anybody for speaking thus. He who said, " God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are," received no commendation from the Lord Jesus Christ ; but he who said, " God, be merciful to me, a sinner," went down to his house justified rather than the other. This is a good saying, a true saying, a humble saying, and a gracious saying ; and I say again, the oftener it is repeated, the better: " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me."

Observe that this is a saying to the Lord: " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me." You hear people say, when they are talking and gossiping, I said to her, and she said to me," or, " He said to me, and I said to him,"—so-and-so and so-and-so. Well, what does it matter what you said or what they said ? Very likely it is not worth repeating, nor the answer that was made to it ; much of what is said may be summed up in the Dunottar Castle motto :—

" They say.
What do they say ?
Let them say."

It all comes to nothing ; it is only breath vainly spent, which would be far more wisely expended, if it were, as the poet Cowper said,—

" To heaven in supplication sent."

How much better it would be if each one of the parties concerned said, " Lord, be merciful unto me " ! If we would speak twice to God and only once to men, or if we even reached so happy a proportion as at least to say as much to God as we say to our fellow-men, how much healthier, and happier, and stronger, and more heavenly, and more holy should we become ! You need not try to recollect all that you have said to your fellow-men,—probably much of that is best forgotten ; but it is good to recollect what you have said to your God, if it be anything like this saying of the sweet psalmist of Israel, " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me."

Let this be one of our sayings as well as David's. As he said, " Lord, be merciful unto me," I am sure I ought to say it, and I think, dear friends, you ought to say it, too. If there is anybody here who thinks that he has grown so good that he does not need to pray, " Lord, be merciful unto me," I am very thankful for once that I am not as that man is, for he must be eaten up with pride. He cannot be right in his heart who will not pray for mercy, and surely, he has received no mercy who does not feel his need of more mercy. God can scarcely have begun to work in that man who thinks that he needs no longer make confession of sin, or seek mercy from God. David tells us, " I said, Lord be merciful unto me," and I advise you to make this one of your sayings also. People sometimes say, " It is an old saying," and that is supposed to be its commendation. Well, this also is an old saying. A young man says, " My father used to say so-and-so " ; and I have no doubt that, if you had a godly father, he used to say much that was worth remembering, and worth repeating, and you cannot do better than use your father's words, especially if they were like David's on this occasion. Let it be reported of you in your biography, if it is ever written, " This was one of his sayings ; he often said, ' Lord, be merciful unto me.' "

Notice, also, that this was the saying of a sick man, and of a sick saint. " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me." It is not written, " I said, Lord, Thou art unmerciful to me in chastening me ; Thou dealest too severely with me in placing me upon this sick-bed, and causing me to lie here till the bed grows hard as a rock beneath me." No, there is no complaining here, though there is petitioning ; there is no murmuring, though there is supplicating. " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me." When you get well again after an illness, it will be a great comfort if you can look back and feel, " I did not complain, but the chief cry from my sick-bed was, ' Lord, be merciful unto me.' "

I have thus briefly introduced to you one of the sayings of a sick saint,—a sick king, and that king was David, the man after God's own heart ; and I believe that this saying of his was after God's own heart, and that this prayer was pleasing in the ears of the Most High : " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me." So now I will try to show you that our text contains, first, *a prayer:* " Lord, be merciful unto me ;" next, *a confession :* ' I have sinned against Thee ;" and then, thirdly, *a plea,* and a very singular plea it is : " I said, Lord, be merciful unto me : heal my soul ; for I have sinned against Thee."

I. First, here is, A PRAYER: " Lord, be merciful unto me."

It may mean,—and I daresay it did mean, at least in part,—" *Mitigate my pains.*" Oh beloved, when you feel a heart throbbing and palpitating, or when the swollen limb seems as if it were laid upon an anvil, and beaten with red-hot hammers, when the pain goes through you again and again, till even the strong man is ready to cry out in his agony, and the tears start unwillingly to the eyes, this is a good prayer to present to God, " Lord, be merciful unto me." I have sometimes found that, where medicine has failed, and sleep has been chased away, and pain has become unbearable, it has been good to appeal to God directly, and to say, " O Lord, I am Thy child ; wilt Thou allow Thy child to be thus tortured with pain ? Is it not written, ' Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him ' ? Lord, be merciful unto me." I can solemnly assert that I have found immediate respite from paroxysms of

extreme pain in answer to a simple appeal to the fatherhood of God, and a casting myself upon His mercy; and I do not doubt that I am also describing the experience of many others of God's afflicted children. When grieved with sore physical pain, you will find, dear friends, that the quiet resignation, the holy patience, and the childlike submissiveness which enable you just to pray, "Lord, be merciful unto me," will often bring a better relief to you than anything that the most skilled physician can prescribe for you. You are permitted and encouraged to act thus; when the rod falls heavily upon you, look up into your Father's face, and say, "Lord, be merciful unto me."

But that is not all that David meant, I am quite sure, for, next, he must have meant, "*Forgive my sins.*" You can see, by his prayer, that his sins were the heaviest affliction from which he was suffering: "Be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee." And, believe me, there is no pain in the world that at all approximates to a sense of sin. I said to a dear friend, who is greatly depressed at this time, "I should like you to have a little rheumatic gout, just to take your thoughts off your mental anxiety." "Oh!" said she, "it would be a great pleasure to me to have that form of suffering rather than my present depression of spirit"; and I am sure that is so, and if that depression of spirit is mingled with the thought of sinfulness, and you are afraid—although, perhaps, in your case there may be no ground for fear because you really are God's child,—but if you get afraid that you are not pardoned and forgiven, that fear will cut into you worse than a wound from a sword. It will make your blood boil more than would the poison of a cobra in your veins, for there is nothing so venomous as sin. So David meant, "I said, when I felt my sin,—I said, when my spirit sank within me,—Lord, be merciful unto me. Be merciful unto me."

Sinners' prayers suit depressed saints. The prayer of the publican is, after all, my every-day prayer. I have what I may call a Sunday prayer, a prayer for high days and holidays; but my every-day prayer, the one that I can use all through the week, the one that I can pick up when I cannot pick up anything else, is the publican's prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That prayer is "the bairn's prayer," such as you would teach a child to pray; it is the prayer of the poor harlot, the prayer of the dying thief, "O God, be merciful to me!" It is a blessed, blessed prayer, and I charge you never to cease from using it in the sense that our Lord taught it to His disciples, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

But that is not all that there is in this prayer. I think that David, when he said, "Lord, be merciful unto me," also meant, "*Fulfil Thy promises.*" "Thou hast said of the man who considers the poor, 'The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.' Lord, be merciful unto me, and deliver me in the time of my trouble. Thou hast said, 'The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive.' Lord, be merciful unto me, preserve me, and keep me alive. Thou hast said that Thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies; Lord, be merciful unto me, and guard me from my foes. Thou wilt strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; Lord, be merciful unto me, and strengthen me, Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness; Lord, make my bed." It is a very difficult thing to make a sick man's bed easy; and I should think that it was still harder to make the kind of bed that David was accustomed to lie upon. We often have a soft bed with plenty of feathers in it, yet, after we have been lying upon it for a month, it gets very hard. No matter if it be a bed of down, it seems as if it were made of stone, and one is apt to think that it is made very badly when it is made exceedingly well. But I should think that the mattresses they used in the East must have been so hard that it needed God Himself to make soft beds for sick people then, so the Lord comes in with this gracious promise, "I will make all his bed"—bolster, pillow, covering, and all, —"I will make all his bed in his sickness. I will help him. I will comfort him. I will make him patient. I will enable him to bear all My will."

Now, then, you dear saints of God who are in trouble, here is a prayer that is suitable for every one of you: "Lord, be merciful unto me." Should you get very badly off, then plead the promise, "Thou hast said, 'Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure'; Lord, be merciful unto me." Are you going down in the world? Remember that it is written, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly," and cry, "Lord, be merciful unto me." This prayer comes in appropriately at the back of every promise.

I know that I am addressing some who are not yet saved, but I wish that this prayer might get into each one of their hearts: "Lord, be merciful unto me." Keep on praying it until you obtain the mercy. Every five minutes in the day, wherever you are, let your heart go beating,—beat, beat, beat, beat,—to this tune, "Lord, be merciful unto me. Be merciful unto me. Be merciful unto me." You cannot have a prayer that will better fit your lips.

So far I have spoken of only half the Psalmist's prayer; the other half of it is, "Heal my soul." David does not pray, "Heal my eye; heal my foot; heal my heart; heal me, whatever my disease may be"; but he goes at once to the root of the whole matter, and prays, "Heal my soul." O you sick men, be more anxious to have your soul healed than to have your body cured! What does David mean by this portion of his prayer?

He means, I think, first, "*Heal me, Lord, of the distress of my soul!* My soul is afflicted with an appalling disease, and is brought very low: 'Lord, heal my soul.' I am so sad, so sorely affrighted, such terrors pass before my eyes, my soul has got morbid, melancholic, despondent, hypochondriacal, 'Lord, heal my soul.'" The Lord is the great soul-healer; therefore go to Him with this prayer, "Lord, heal me of the distress of my soul."

But add also this meaning to the petition: "*Lord, heal my soul of the effect of sin.*" Every sin brings on another sin; and the continuance in sin makes the tendency to sin stronger. "'Heal my soul, Lord.' If I was once a drunkard, and I have given up the evil thing, yet the thirst will come; heal my soul of it. If I have been a man of the world, and have made unrighteous gains, the tendency to do so again will be strong upon me when the opportunity occurs; 'Heal my soul, Lord.' That I may forget the wanton songs I used to sing, the wanton sights I once delighted in, the wanton lusts that once ate up my life, 'Heal my soul, Lord.'" It is one thing to be forgiven, it is another thing to be delivered from the result of a long life of sin; yet God can do even that, so pray, "Lord, be merciful unto me, and pardon me. Heal my soul, and sanctify me."

I think that David also meant by this prayer, "*Heal me of my tendency to sin.*" He seemed to say, "Lord, I shall sin again if I am not healed. I have an evil tendency in me, and an old nature which is inclined to sin; if Thou dost not heal me of this disease, there will be another eruption upon the skin of my life, and I shall sin again." When a man sins outwardly, it is because he has sin inwardly. If there were no sin in us, no sin would come out of us; but there it lies, sometimes, concealed. I do not think it is ever a good thing to sin; that cannot be, but I have known a man to be tempted, and to fall into sin, who has discovered by his fall how much of sin there always was in him. It is something like the breaking out of a disease in the skin; it would not have broken out if it had not been there before; and the outbreak however grievous it is, may be useful by driving the sufferer to seek a cure, and so he becomes thoroughly healed. This is the meaning of David's prayer, "Heal my soul, for I have sinned. Heal me, that I may not sin again."

II. The second part of our subject is, A CONFESSION: "I have sinned against Thee." I do not want simply to have these words in my mouth, to tell them to you; I wish that I could put them into your mouths, O you unconverted ones, that you might say them to God! Let us briefly consider what is meant by this confession, "I have sinned against Thee."

First, it is a confession *without an excuse*. David does not say, "I have sinned against Thee, but I could not help it," or, "I was sorely tempted," or, "I was in trying circumstances." No; as long as a man can make an excuse for his sin, he will be a lost man; but when he dare not and cannot frame an excuse, there is hope for him. "I have sinned against Thee," is a confession without an excuse.

Further, it is a confession *without any qualification*. He does not say, "Lord, I have sinned to a certain extent; but, still, I have partly balanced my sins by my virtues, and I hope to wipe out my faults with my tears." No; he says, "I have sinned against Thee," as if that were a full description of his whole life. He bows his knee, and just confesses unto God, "Lord, I give up everything in the way of self-defence or self-justification; 'I have sinned against Thee.'"

But notice, also, that this confession is *without affectation*. When some people say, "We have sinned,' you can tell by their manner that they think they are by their confession complimenting God. You talk with them, and they say, "Oh, yes, sir; we are all sinners!" Yes, they are all sinners, like the monk who said that he had broken all the commandments, and was the wickedest man in the world. So one of his companions asked him if he had broken the first commandment, another asked about the second, then the third, the fourth, the fifth, and all the rest, and to each one he kept saying, "No, I never broke that in my life." They enquired about the whole ten, and he declared that he had never broken one of them; yet this was the man who had confessed that he had broken all ten, and there are men who say that they are sinners, yet they do not mean it; and a sham sinner will only have a sham saviour; that is to say, a man who only pretends to be a sinner, and does not realise his guilt in the sight of God, will not have a Saviour. Christ died for nobody but real sinners, those who feel that their sin is truly sin.

> "A sinner is a sacred thing,
> The Holy Ghost has made him so";

and if I am happy enough to meet with a man who puts himself down with real sinners, I bid him believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and expect that, by so doing, he will find a real Saviour who will cleanse him from sin by His precious blood.

I wanted you to notice that there was no affectation about David's confession of sin, for, in the next verse, he says, "Mine enemies speak evil of me." He was not going to confess sin which he had not committed; and when men spoke against him, he said, "They speak evil of me." Well, but, David, how can they speak evil of you when you confess that you are so bad? "Aye!" says he, "but I have not done that with which they charge me; I confess that I have sinned against God, but I have not sinned against Him in the way they say I have. So far as their charges are concerned, I am innocent and pure. What I confess is that I have sinned against God." I like a man, when he makes a confession of sin, not to be carried away into the use of proud expressions without meaning, but to speak with judgment, and to acknowledge and confess only what is true. This is the excellence of David's confession, that he owns to what no sinner will ever admit till the grace of God makes him do it: "I have sinned *against Thee.*" Hear him again in the fifty-first Psalm: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." Hear the prodigal: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." The essence of sin is that it is sin against God. It is wrong to do any harm to your neighbour; but, after all, you and he are only two subjects of the great King and Lord of all. It is high treason to sin against God; and, often, that sin, of which men think the least, God thinks the most. That spiritual sin, of which, some say, "Oh, that is a mere trifle!"—that forgetting of the Creator, that ignoring of the only Redeemer, this is the sin of sins, the damning sin which kindles the flames of hell; and it is a good thing, and a right thing, when a man's confession of sin has David's confession as the very core of it, "Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee."

III. Now I close by noticing A PLEA, and a very singular plea it is. The Psalmist's prayer is followed by a confession, and, strangely enough, the confession is the argument of the prayer. Listen to the text again: "I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul." Why? "*For I have sinned against Thee.*"

That is a very startling and remarkable way of pleading, but it is the only right one. It is *such a plea as no self-righteous man would urge*. The Pharisee keeps to this strain, "Lord, be merciful unto me, for I have been obedient, I have kept Thy law." O foolish, self-righteous man, do you not see that you are shutting the door in your own face? You say, in effect, "Be merciful unto me, for I do not need any mercy." That is what it practically comes to, and therefore you are contradicting your own prayer. If you have kept the law from your youth up, and you have been so good and so obedient, you do not need any mercy from God; why, therefore, do you ask for it? No man who thinks himself better than his neighbours, strictly upright, honourable, and worthy of reward, will ever bow his knee, and cry to God, "Have mercy upon me, for I have sinned against Thee." He pleads, on the contrary, "Have

mercy upon me, for I am a most respectable man; I pay everybody twenty shillings in the pound; I have brought up my family most admirably; have mercy upon me." I say again, he asks for charity, and then says, "I do not want it; give me of Thy charity, O God; but I am not one of the poor beggars that crawl about the street, I am as well-to-do as anybody." None but the poor will value the charity of men, and none but the guilty will value the charity of God. If you are not a sinner, Christ as a Saviour has nothing to do with you. He came into the world to save sinners; and as for you who count yourselves righteous, this is what He says about you, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." As Mary sang, "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away." Let them feed themselves if they have such an abundance as they say. This, then, is the sort of plea that a self-righteous man would not urge.

This is, further, *such a plea as a carnal reasoner could not urge*, for he could not spy out any reason or argument in it. "Am I to appeal to my God for mercy, and for soul-healing, on the ground that I have sinned? Why!" says he, "there is no plea in that." But he who has been to Christ's school, and learnt the logic of the cross, will know that there is no argument equal in force to this: "Lord, I have sinned, I need mercy; give it me, Lord. I have sinned, and therefore I have no right whatever to expect anything of Thee; therefore, glorify Thyself by the freeness and spontaneity of Thine abounding grace. Lord, I have sinned, and this sinning has destroyed me; therefore, have pity upon me. This sinning is like a deadly disease within my soul; therefore, Great Physician, come and heal me. This sinning has killed me; therefore, make me alive. This sinning has damned me; therefore, come and save me." That is the best pleading in all the world; and, after all, it is the common pleading that men make use of with their fellow-men. When one comes begging of me, what does he say? In nine cases out of ten, he tells me what is not true; that I can vouch for, but I always notice that he never pleads thus: "Now, sir, I want you to give me help because I do not need it very much; I am not at all badly off, I have about as much already as I want; but I thought that I would take to begging because it is a genteel kind of occupation." You never hear him talk like that. I remember giving a man who came begging of me with bare feet, a pair of patent leather boots. They were nearly done with, but I thought that he might make some use of them, and he put them on; but he was not so foolish as to go begging in them. At the first gateway he came to, he pulled them off, and I met him, ten minutes afterwards, without the boots, except that he had them slung over his back, ready to sell to the first likely customer. He knew that rags are the best livery for a beggar; if he would succeed in his calling, then the fouler and the more ragged he looks the better for him, for so he appeals to our sense of pity. At any rate, that is the way to beg of God. Do not go and smarten yourself up, and say, "Lord, I am pretty decent as I am; be merciful unto me." No; but go in your rags, go just as you are, in all your sin, and filthiness, and weakness, and poverty, and insignificance, and so appeal to the pity and the mercy of God. This is sound common sense that I am talking. Suppose there had been a battle, and I were a soldier who had been wounded, and lay upon the plain, and the surgeon and the men with the ambulance were going round to see who needed their help; if they came to me, I do not think I should say, "Well, doctor, I have got a bullet in here somewhere; but it has not gone in very far, I daresay it will be all right; you can leave me here." Oh, no! I should say, "I am afraid, doctor, that this bullet is very near my heart; you had better let your men pick me up, and attend to me quickly, or I may be dead very soon." I certainly would not try to make myself out to be better than I was, and I would be glad to be attended to at once; and what folly it is when a man tries to comfort himself, as a sinner, by looking up all his filthy rags of self-righteousness, and saying, "Lord, I do not think there is very much the matter with me." O soul, if you did but know it, the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint, from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet you are covered with wounds, and bruises and putrefying sores. There is but a step between you and death,—between you and hell, if you have never been washed in Jesu's precious blood. Therefore, do not set up your lying pretences; do not paint yourself up, like Jezebel, for you cannot in that way make yourself beautiful in the sight of God. You must go to Him with all your wrinkles, and all your foulness, and everything else that is hideous, and say, "Lord, I have no beauty, I have no merits, nothing to plead, nothing to urge, but my guilt. 'Heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee.'" Then you shall be saved. When a man cannot pay to God a penny in the pound of all his debts, then he will be frankly forgiven all; but as long as he promises that he will make a composition, and do his best to pay what he owes to Divine justice in the hope that Jesus Christ will make up the rest, there is no hope for him. The Lord Jesus Christ will not be a mere makeweight for you. Do you think that you are to get into the scale, with your beautiful righteousness, and that you are to be accounted somebody of great importance, and that Christ is to do the little that you cannot do; that it is to be "Christ & Co.," or rather, "Self & Co.," and that you are to be the head of the firm, and Christ to be a kind of sleeping partner? He will not do it; it would be a disgrace to Christ to yoke you with Him in such a fashion. You might as soon yoke a gnat with an archangel as think of your going in to help Christ to save you. To join a filthy rag from off a dunghill with the golden garments of a king or a queen, cannot be permitted. Christ will be everything, or else He will be nothing; you must be saved wholly by mercy, or else not at all. There must not be even a trace of the fingers of self-righteousness upon the acts and documents of Divine grace. It must be all of grace; "and if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace." There can be no more mingling of the two together as the ground of hope than oil will mix with water, or fire will burn beneath the sea. You cannot be saved by your own merits. Oh, then, I implore you, breathe this prayer to God, "Lord be merciful unto me; pardon me, for Thou dost have mercy upon sinners, and here is one. Thou dost heal the sick, and here is one. Lord, I trust Thee; I lay my sins on Jesus, I lay my soul-sickness at His dear feet. Lord, save me." It is all done if you trust Jesus; you are a saved man. Just before I came in to this service, I saw a young brother whom I mean to propose to the church, and who last Sunday came to me, after the morning sermon, and said, "Sir I am saved, and I know I am"; and as I spoke to him, I thought

that I knew it, too. Why should there not be many others in the same blessed condition? What is the use of preaching, what is the use of this crowd coming together, and going away again, unless men believe in Christ? Look unto Jesus, and be ye saved. If you look, you shall be saved now. The Lord lead you to look at this very moment, and unto Him be praise for ever and ever! Amen.

THE PANTING HEART

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God."—Psalm xlii. 1.

THERE is something to be lamented in this state of mind, for if the Psalmist had maintained unbroken communion with his God, he would not have been so much panting after Him as enjoying Him. It is deeply to be deplored that we who sometimes bask in the sunshine of God's countenance cannot live so as always to enjoy it. Wherefore do we wander? Why do we grieve His Holy Spirit? Why do we turn aside from God, our exceeding joy? Wherefore do we provoke Him to jealousy, and cause Him to make us grope in darkness, and sigh out of a lonely and desolate heart? There is much of an evil heart of unbelief in these departings from the living God; if, therefore, we can join in the language of the text, we must not too much congratulate ourselves, for though it be a sign of grace to pant after God as the hart pants for the water brooks, yet it is an equally certain sign of a want of more grace, and the loss of a privilege which we should strive always to possess. We are yet but poor in spiritual things when we might be rich; we are thirsting when we might put flagons to our lips. At the same time there is very much which is commendable in the desire expressed in the text; the insatiable desire which burned in the Psalmist's heart is a heavenly flame enkindled from above. If I have not my Lord in near and dear communion, it is at least the next best thing to be unutterably wretched until I find Him. If I do not sit at His banquets, yet blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness. If my beloved be not in mine embrace, yet so long as I am not contented without Him, so long as I sigh, and cry, and follow hard after Him, I may be assured that I am in the possession of His love, and that ere long I shall find Him to the joy of my soul. Our text, then, has a warp and a woof of differing colours, sin and grace are mingled: the wine is mixed with water, yet it is wine; there is some alloy in the silver, yet silver it assuredly is. David sighs as none but a saint can do, and yet if he had not been a sinner too, such sighs had not been necessary. Brother, such good and such evil are in thee; search and look, and pray the great Spirit to remove the ill and nourish the good.

Coming straight to the text, we shall notice, in the first place, THE OBJECT OF THE DESIRE which the Psalmist here describes.

The hart pants after the waterbrooks, and David pants after his God, the living God. I do not find him expressing a single word of regret as to his absence from his throne. Probably he wrote this psalm when he had been expelled from his country by his ungrateful son, Absalom; but he does not say, 'My soul panteth after my royalties and the splendour of the kingdom of Judah"; no, not a word of it; he lets the baubles go, he gives up these uneasy pomps, content to let all go for ever if he may but find his God. Well may we let the chaff go if we retain the wheat. I do not find him even mentioning his home, and yet he was a man of a loving spirit, who delighted to bless his household, but here I read not a word concerning his palace, his gardens, or his treasuries; not even for his children can he spare a sigh: let him be banished from his own house, and it will not displease him if he be not banished from the house of God also. To him his dwelling-place was the Lord, and dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, his joys were all complete. Nor is there even a word about his much-loved country. David was a very prince of patriots, yet he sighs not for Jerusalem, he pines not for the well of Bethlehem; neither the roses of Sharon nor the lilies of the valley command his lamentations; for the excellency of Carmel or the glory of Lebanon he utters no cry of desire; but his one sigh is for his God, the God of his life, his exceeding joy. When shall he come and appear before God? When shall he join in the assembly and keep holyday? This one grief, like a huge mountain-torrent, swept away all minor streams, absorbing themselves into its own rush and volume; like an avalanche which binds the snow-masses to itself as it descends, so his one desire concentrated all the vehemence and force of his nature. His God, his God—he cannot live without his God. He cries for Him as a lost child for its father; as a bleating lamb he will not be content till he finds his parent.

David pined for permission to enjoy again the means of grace; he longed to go up to the tabernacle once again; he desired to see the priests offering the sacrifices, and himself to go unto the altar of God; but, observe, beloved, that he does not dwell upon the outward worship, nor dilate upon its symbolic pomp and sacred splendour; he passes right through them all, as the priest of old passed through the outer court; only the innermost court will satisfy him. He penetrates within the shell and desires the inward kernel; the carnal ordinance cannot content him, he must have the spiritual life and substance. He does not so much pine for the sacrifices as for his God; neither for the priest, nor for the altar, nor for the tabernacle doth he cry, but for his God; for he had learned what modern professors have not learned, that the outward is as nothing; and the inward is as everything. "The kingdom of God is within you"; it is not meat, nor drink, nor outward worship; and the God whom you adore is not pleased with your words and your genuflections, and your outward forms of speech and observance, but He is only pleased when you press through all this and come to Him, come into fellowship with Him, and speak to Him as a spirit speaking with a spirit, as one possessing a secret life speaking in the

power of that life to the invisible and ever-living God. This is what David longed after then; neither his throne, nor his house, nor his country, nor even the outward means of grace by themselves alone, but his God he panted after, his God alone; and this was his cry, "When shall I come and appear before God?"

I suppose the longing of the Psalmist to have consisted of the following particulars. He longed to appear before his God, that is to say, *heartily to unite in the worship of the assembled crowd.* He could have worshipped alone; but sympathy has great power over the human mind, and to join with our brethren of one faith is very helpful to our devotion; besides, in that age of types there was one spot sacred above all others, and every devout Israelite was bound to go up to the sacred shrine. David recollected when the great shout went up at the tabernacle-gate to Him "whose mercy endureth for ever." In his loneliness his fancy brought to his ears the song of the multitude as they chanted the glorious hallelujah, and he pined to be there to swell the strain. Not, however, because the merely being there would satisfy him, but because he felt, if he could join the throng, he was in such a state of soul that he could throw his whole heart into the worship. And, O my brethren and sisters, you and I, when we lose for awhile the freshness of our spirituality, how we desire to get it back again, that we may once more, in vitality of godliness, worship God with His people! Oh, it is blessed to be here when we can stand and sing unto our Well-beloved a song; when we can kneel with the congregation, and join in the common supplication, ourselves getting a grip of the angel, and holding him fast, and not letting him go until he blesses us! Is it not delightful to listen to the word preached in the great congregation, when the morsel is dipped in the honey for me in particular; when I can glean among the sheaves for myself, and gather the handfuls that are let fall on purpose for me, and can carry home my part of the day's provision with humble gratitude! Is it not so, beloved? And if you have fallen into such a state of mind that you do not now enjoy the services of God's house as you once did, I would persuade you to ask the Lord to give you the strong desire of David, that you may again in spirit in very truth appear before God; for, I beseech you, never let the mere coming together content you, but let your panting be, like that of the stag, after the water brook and nothing else—for God, for God, for God Himself, and nothing short of Him. It is right to pine for the outward services when we feel that they are profitable to us, and when we have been banished from the Church of God for awhile, or have been confined by sickness, or have been compelled to sit under an unprofitable ministry, we may well sigh for the very walls which enclose the people whom we love. Often in France, and Switzerland, and Italy, have I felt the power of this text, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God," and I have sung—

> "Might I enjoy the meanest place
> Within Thine house, O God of grace!
> Not tents of ease, nor thrones of power,
> Should tempt my feet to leave Thy door."

Further than this, David's desire comprehended a longing after *a restored confidence as to his interest in the love of God.* He knew that God loved him. Three or four times over in his psalm he speaks like a man whose faith holds its own, "For I shall yet praise Him," saith he, "who is the health of my countenance and my God." A man may know his interest in Christ, and yet it may be a matter of some dispute with him—he may derive but little present comfort from it; but oh! how delightful it is when we know whom we have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him. When the Lord's everlasting, unbounded, unchangeable love to us is no more a matter of question than our own existence; when we can say, "My Father, God," with an unfaltering tongue, this is the cream of life; and as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so ought we to pant after this, that we may always know by the infallible witness of the Holy Spirit, that assuredly we are in the love of God, our names written in the Book of Life, ourselves for ever dear to the Eternal Father, and registered in the rolls of the family that He hath begotten. Oh! happy they who possess this! Dear friend, if you do not at this hour enjoy it, seek it, seek it ravenously, beyond all bounds of intensity; seek it until you find it in sweet dependence upon Jesus.

But David wanted more than this; not merely, as we have said, to worship God heartily and to have a confidence in the divine love, but he longed really to have that love shed abroad in his heart. You know, beloved, what this means, this outpouring of divine love, when it is not merely a belief with you that God loves you, but you even feel that love of God shed abroad within you by the Holy Ghost which is given unto you. Oh! what joy this is; when it is at its full it is ravishing, so that whether in the body or out of the body we can sometimes scarcely tell. The love of God often overpowers the believer with its delight, he is faint with glory, sick of love! Have you never felt as if you were dwelling in the suburbs of heaven, standing in the border-land between the glory-life and the life that now is, tasting the clusters of Eshcol, and drinking from the crystal cups of the marriage supper? Beloved, under these rolling skies there is no bliss like the earnest of the Spirit, that antepast of celestial feasts, that pledge of joys to come. Oh! yes, beloved, when we have actual fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, our joy is divinely crowned with a coronet of loving-kindness; there is a floodtide of the river of life in our spirit—every thought is active, every power is inspired, every passion is elevated, and the whole man is filled with all the fulness of God.

> "Plung'd in the Godhead's deepest sea,
> And lost in its immensity."

Now, abiding fellowship with God ought to be our daily life. The enjoyment of God's love ought not to be a thing of yesterday, nor of to-day, but of all days: for evermore should we walk with God as Enoch did; and if for awhile this holy joy is broken or withdrawn from us, then ought we with incessant importunity to take up the language of the text, and declare that "as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth our soul after Thee, O God."

Beloved, it may be this morning that I am speaking to some of you, who at one time were very lively and active Christians, making great advances in the divine life; but, alas! at the present moment you feel yourselves to be very dull and heavy, and

you are uneasy that it should be so. I thank God for that uneasiness. May these waves rise higher within you until they drive you back to your first moorings, and drift you to the place where once you had so much of joy and peace. I think I know what your experience is—know it, alas! too well, by having experienced it myself.

> "What peaceful hours we once enjoyed!
> How sweet their memory still!
> But they have left an aching void
> The world can never fill."

We had just found Jesus, and we did not know how to think enough of Him or speak well enough of His dear name. Now, alas! day will pass after day, and we scarcely say a word to His honour, or try to bring one poor heart to be enamoured of Him. Then the services of God's house were inexpressibly delightful; we wished that Sabbaths were never over, and when they ended we looked forward to the next occasion when we should meet with the saints of God. But now we come and we go like the door on the hinges, and find no water in the well of ordinances. Time was when we worked much for our Lord, and in all we did, we did it with our might, throwing heart and soul into every labour. We felt His sweet presence in all our service, and indeed at all times. If we walked by the way, we walked with Him; if we awoke in the night, our soul was still with Him; if we were busy during the day, yet ejaculations were darted up in the little intervals between our business. But now, alas! it is not so as it once was. We can go day after day—not without prayer, thank God, not without praise, not without the assembling of ourselves together at ordinary times, but, alas! without the life, without the energy, without the joy, without the peace, without the holy anointing which we then knew. Oh! then, beloved, let us not settle upon our lees; let us tremble, for chastisement is near, the rod will surely come upon us. God will not leave His children unchastened when they thus decline from His love. Grey hairs are coming upon us here and there, and now that we are made to see them, let us return unto Him from whom we have backslidden. He gently this morning saith to us by a brother's voice, "Return, ye backsliding children." Let it be our business to return. Meanwhile let our spirits be filled with the earnest desire of the text, for it will give us wings with which to return. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God."

II. We will now change the subject by considering THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DESIRE which we have tried to describe.

These characteristics are brought out by a metaphor. David compares himself to a stag when tormented with thirst. The comparison brings out, in the first place, as the characteristic of this desire, *directness*. The hart panteth—what for? You need not repeat the question or pause for a reply. Everybody can see by its smoking flanks, uplifted head, its palpitating heart, its rolling eye, its thrust-out tongue, that it is panting for the water brooks. So with David—he is ill at ease, but it is no question with him what he needs to give him rest of heart; "So panteth my soul after Thee, O God," saith he, and so he goes at once to the point. He knew what he was at; here is no beating about the bush, no tacking to and fro; he directs his arrow straight at the centre of the target. "My soul thirsteth for God—for the living God." Beloved, it is a great mercy when you and I know what we want, for ungodly men do not know. They thirst, but like petulant children, they know not what they are crying for. They long, and they pant, and their question is, "Who will show us any good?" But you and I know that our great need is the light of God's countenance, and we have come to this, and we will stand to this, and hold to this, that we will never cease pleading, till we really see that face which makes the heaven of angels, and is all the heaven we desire.

Now, dear brother in Christ, is your desire as distinct and direct towards God as was the desire of David in the text? If not, chide yourself; chide yourself that you should be hovering circles where the straight line is so much better. Bring out in plain words your soul's desire, let it well up from the lowest depths of your spirit, "I want—I want my God. I do not languish for that which others are fascinated with; I do not crave what others are ambitious for; but my God, my God, let me serve Thee, and enjoy Thee evermore! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Return unto me now! Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation! Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation! Reveal Thy Son in me, and be Thyself my ever-present friend."

Notice next in the text, *the unity* of the saint's desire. The hart longs after nothing else but water brooks. There may have been other times when the poor stag had other natural desires; it may have desired the grassy plains or the shady woods, but now, hunted, wearied, steaming, it must drink or die; it has but one only thought—the water brooks, the cool rippling rills, the refreshing pools. Now, beloved brother or sister, if you are about to get a blessing from the Lord, you will have but one desire—your God, your God. You will have gathered up all your affections into one affection, and they will all be ascending towards your Lord; you will make no conditions, no stipulations with Him; if He will but come, even though He bring a rod with Him, you will be contented if He will but come. If you may but have His company, you will accept poverty, or the weary bed of sickness, or bereavement, or anything and everything which He may allot to you, if you may but have fellowship with Jesus. Let others ask for the bursting wine vat, or the barn that is filled with corn; for you it will be enough if you find your Beloved, and may but hold Him and not let Him go, for this is the one only all-absorbing longing of your hungering and thirsting spirit, that you may find your God, and be comforted with His eternal consolation. Have you never seen a little child that has lost its way crying in the streets for "Mother"? Now, you shall give that child what you will, but it will not stay its crying for "Mother." It has lost her, and cannot be content. Take the little wanderer into your house, show it many toys, give it many sweetmeats, but all are of no avail, it wants "Mother," and its little heart will burst unless it finds her. Now just show the little one its mother, let it fly into her bosom, and what more does it want? How perfectly content it is to be there! So have I felt, that if I might but sob myself to sleep on the bosom of my dear God, if I must have all else taken away from me, if so it should please Him, if I could but be with Him, no other desire or longing could ever cross my soul. I know it is so with all the

family of the Lord our God; their love to Him makes His presence their all in all. See that dove just taken from the cage to be set free. Tempt it to remain with you, cast down the seeds it loves to feed upon; no, it will not dwell with you, it mounts, it makes a few circles in the air, and then having turned its eye to the dear familiar dovecote, it is all wing for home. What can stay its flight? Call to it, allure it as you will, straight as an arrow from a bow it flies to its own beloved home, and rests not its weary wing till it rests in the house of its love. Even so is it with the believer's soul, let him but go free and have his desire, unbind him of his corruptions, strip him of his cares, liberate him from his unbelief, let him have his freedom, and he will fly at once to his Lord Jesus, nor will anything tempt him to linger or find solace save in that blessed bosom of infinite love. A saint must have Christ to abide with him, as the one thing needful to him, for this, like Mary, he leaves all Martha's cares to sit at Jesus' feet.

Observe next *the intensity* of this desire. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee." The panting of a thirsty hart is something terrible to see. It appears to thirst all over; every pore of its body is thirsting. It is not alone that heated tongue, those snorting nostrils, that glaring eye, but the creature in every part, in every hair, thirsts and pants. And so with the believer when he is without his God; if his soul be in a right state, he longs with all the force of his being to get back into his former happy condition. There is no staying him, there is no making him pause. Surely the Psalmist chose thirst for this reason, because it is a longing not to be appeased. Men have gone for days without food, but they could not during the same length of time abstain from drink. In a long and weary march soldiers have been able to endure much absence of solids, but we find in cases like the marches of Alexander, that soldiers have died by hundreds from want of drink. It has been said hunger you can palliate for awhile, but thirst is awful. You cannot reason with it; thirst has no ears; you cannot forget it—the more thirsty the man becomes the more does the want thrust itself before him. O my God, painful as is such a spiritual thirst, yet would I desire to be always in this state when I am not in immediate fellowship with Thee. I would be so thirsty as never to find a moment's peace, nor ease, nor comfort, except when I am near to Thee. "Tears have been my meat," says David, "day and night"; as though he could get nothing from himself by way of comfort, for his soul flowed over at his eyes in briny tears, which made him thirstier still. Still his cry went up at morn and midnight "My God, my God, I must behold Thee, I must approach Thee, I must enjoy Thy love. Shut me not up in this dungeon, cast me not from Thy presence, take not Thy Holy Spirit from me, bring me to Thyself again, for I long, I groan, I faint, I die, for Thee. Oh come to me and manifest Thy favour." Such is the strong desire of the text: such let ours be.

Further, we ought to say that the text manifests, as one characteristic of this longing, *a vitality*. As we have already said, thirst is connected with the very springs of life: men must drink or die. So the Christian comes to feel that it is not a luxury to walk with God—a luxury with which he may perhaps dispense, but it is an absolute necessity for his spirit. Consider, my brethren, what danger we are in when we live at a distance from God! what danger of backsliding further and further; what danger of being tempted to gross sin! Consider how we are grieving the Holy Spirit! Consider what comforts and mercies we are losing! Consider what dishonour we are likely to bring upon the holy name we profess! Consider how unkind we are to the Husband of our souls, to that dear heavenly Lover, who did not spare His heart's blood that He might buy us to Himself, that He might have all our heart's love! Consider all this, and we shall make it a vital point to return unto our God. It will not seem to us as though it might be or might not be, but we shall feel that it must be; we cannot be content without the light of Jehovah's countenance. O God, as the hart must die without the water, so must my soul die without a sense of Thy love again restored to me.

It would not appear in our version, but it appears in the Scotch Psalter, and it appears in the margin of our old Bibles, that the text describes *an expressive* desire. Note the Scotch version—

> "Like as the hart for waterbrooks
> In thirst doth pant *and bray*.

In the margin of your Bibles you have, "As the hart brayeth after the water brooks"; it lifts up its voice; it is usually so silent, so all but dumb, but it now begins to bray in awful agony after the water brooks. So the believer hath a desire which forceth itself into expression. That expression may often be inarticulate, he may have groanings which cannot be uttered, and they are all the deeper for being unutterable; they are all the more sincere and deep, because language may not be able to describe them. In the psalm before us, you find that David expressed his desire in prayers, and then, if these did not suffice, in tears, and then he turned to prayers again. The child of God will so continue to cry, and pray, and seek, and weep; nor will he be satisfied till by all manner of ways he has expressed before his God the insatiable longing of his thirsty spirit. I do therefore, dearly beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, speak to you now this morning, and say, if you have lost the presence of God, if the light of Jehovah's countenance has been withdrawn from you, and you are desiring to return, cultivate that desire, and bring it to the highest pitch of fervour. If it be but like one live coal, put another to it; pile your desires together till they glow like coals of juniper, which have a most vehement heat. Pray God the Holy Ghost to fill your heart with all-consuming flames, till your heart is hot within you with longings after God. Take care that you express your growing desires day by day and hour by hour, in perpetual solicitations that Jesus would come to you and manifest Himself to you as He doth not to the world. It is a blessed thing not to need thus to plead because you already rejoice in the smile of the blessed Lover of your souls, but the next best thing is to sigh and cry until your head is once again on the Master's bosom, and the kisses of His lips are yours. Do you know there is a sweetness about this bitter longing; for when the desire is strong the veil is thin, and the longing soul feels some gleamings of love even while panting for it. Oh! it is sweet to pant and hunger after Jesus. It is a sort of heaven to pine after Jesus. The sweet smell which He leaves behind Him makes it sweet to follow Him. To

meditate on Him is precious; to admire Him at a distance is delightful, but oh, to have Him! Angels cannot describe this joy. Yes, beloved in the Lord, it is a blessed thing to pine after Jesus, and even if the mountains of Bether rise between, it is precious to wait till, like a roe or a young hart, He comes leaping over the hills to reveal Himself to His languishing ones.

III. We will now, in the third place, turn to another point, THE EXCITING CAUSES of this desire after God.

These exciting causes are, first, *something inward.* When a man pants after God, it is a secret life within which makes him do it: he would not long after God by nature. No man thirsts after God while he is left in his carnal state. The unrenewed man pants after anything sooner than God; he longs to escape from the presence of the Lord, for to him it is a dreadful thought that there should be a God at all; he would be glad enough if some one could prove beyond a doubt that there was no God. It proves a renewed nature when you long after God; it is a work of grace in your soul, and you may be thankful for it. It proves, however, that this renewed nature is not an independent thing which can live on its own resources. A camel does not pant after water brooks, because it carries its own water within it; but the hart does, because it has no inward resources. After being hunted on a hot day, it has no inward supplies; it is drained of its moisture. So are we. We do not carry a store of grace within of our own upon which we can rely; we need to come again, and again, and again, to the divine fountain, and drink again from the eternal spring. Hence it is because we have a new life, and that life is dependent upon God, and has all its fresh springs in Him, that therefore we pant and thirst after Him. O Christian, if you had a sacred life which could be maintained by its own energies within, you might do without your God, but since you are naked, and poor, and miserable, apart from Him, you must come and drink day by day of the living springs, or else you faint and die.

But the causes of the thirst were also *outward.* The stag pants for the water brooks not only from within, but because of the heat of the sun, of the distance it has travelled, because also of the dogs that have hunted it so far. So the believer: so David in the text. Enemies said to him, "Where is thy God?" They were barking at his heels. His troubles had been multiplied—"All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me"; and this made him turn to his God. I believe a man's enemies are often his best friends. To be pierced with sharp troubles now and then will serve for our enlivening if grace so sanctify the pain. Any outward affliction which drives us nearer to our God is a God-send for which we should be devoutly grateful.

Moreover, the source of David's longings lay partly in *the past.* The hart panteth after the water brooks because it has a recollection of the coolness of the streams from which it has drunk before, and therefore it longs to drink again. So David said, "I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the Hill Mizar." He remembered when he went with the assembly to the house of God, with the multitude who kept holyday. So do we long after God because we have a cheerful recollection of the comforts we have had in years gone by, when we have been in His fellowship. Did you ever have such delightful seasons as when you lived near to God? Were you ever so happy and so blessed as when the Holy Spirit like a sacred dove brooded over your spirit? You know that these were the best of your days; then I pray you, recollecting these sweet things, pant after them again, and so let the past quicken your desires.

Further, the desire which David had, sprung from *the present* as well as the past. He was at that present moment in a position of eminent distress. "All Thy waves and Thy billows," saith he, "have gone over me." And this also should make us fly to God, for what distress is there which He cannot alleviate? What wound is there which the presence of God cannot heal? Our God is the cordial of our care, the balm of our woe—He is our all in all. Do but get to God, and you are like the mariner who has reached his port; the storms are over now for him; little cares he how the winds howl, or the waves roar. Believer, rest in your God, and you have obtained all your capacious powers can wish, and your troubles, and your wants, and your needs, will be forgotten in your overflowing joy.

Moreover, there was a fourth spring, namely, *the future.* "Hope thou in God," saith he, "for I shall yet praise Him." He panted after his God, because he had a keen perception that peaceful times would yet return to him. When a man is despairing, and fancies that the sun will never rise, it is hard to cheer him; but once indoctrinate him with the belief that there are happier seasons yet in store, predestinated periods when the light of God's countenance shall shine full in his face, and the man plucks up courage. O beloved, no child of God has any reason to despair. God will appear to His people; He cannot forsake them. "Can a woman forsake her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I never forget thee." It is not possible that He who counts the stars, and calls them all by names, should pass over one of His elect, His called, His adopted people. Be of good cheer, then, thou shipwrecked one; though each billow should be angrier than the former, and drown thee deeper in distress, yet the arm of God is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear. Look thou forward to better times, and looking forward, let thy pantings and thy longings increase. May God give thee a hunger because there is a banquet; may He give thee a thirst because there are flagons of which thou mayst drink. May He give thee great desires, for if thou openest thy mouth ever so wide He will certainly fill it.

I have thus tried to unveil the springs, the inward and outward, the future, the present, and the past, from which our desires come, and before I now conclude I would ask every deserted believer whether he does at this time feel such vehement pantings? If not, I do think it is a subject for most solemn anxiety. We ought to bestir ourselves lest we sleep ourselves into death. There are certain conditions of the human frame in which sleep becomes absolutely deadly: the poor patient must be kept in motion, must be wounded with needles, roughly treated lest he should sleep; and there are times when, if we are permitted to sleep spiritually, it must end in our eternal ruin. At such times, when we feel the slumbering tendency coming over us, we ought to be alarmed lest we should turn out to be as others who sleep themselves into hell. May God awaken us,

though it may be by thunderbolts; may He shake us, even though it be with His roughest hand, and break us with His fiercest tempest, sooner than suffer as quietly and calmly to glide down the stream of indifference until we are dashed over the precipice of apostasy and are lost. Of course, the true child of God cannot be cast away, but how if I should have been a deceiver, and after having preached to others, or united in church-fellowship with others, I should come to be myself a castaway. Oh that such thoughts may possess our minds till we are racked therewith, and driven with the insatiable desire of the text to long after the presence of our God.

IV. Lastly, these words suggest, in concluding, a few COMFORTABLE ENCOURAGEMENTS.

I do not like myself to be in the condition of merely longing after God; I trust I can say I have walked with God, and enjoyed the sense of His love for many a day; but ah! there is no thirst like the thirst of the man who has once known what the sweetness of the wine of heaven is. He that has never eaten manna may be satisfied with the gritty brown bread of earth, but heavenly manna is a hunger-making thing; if you once get the flavour in your mouth, you will never be content unless you have it always there. It would be an awful thing for a man who has once known spiritual life if he could be eternally cast away, because in hell no others would have known the joy which he has known, and consequently they could not know the misery which he feels in having lost it. Amongst all the miserable poor in this world, none are so wretched as those who once were rich, because they have acquired habits which make poverty unendurable. A poor king must be poor indeed. And what would it be for a child of God, if he once had been able to roll under his tongue the sweet morsel, and once had leaned on Jesus' bosom, if he could after all be tormented in the flames of Tophet; after having drunk of the wines on the lees well refined, should be doomed to cry for a drop of water, like Dives; and after having eaten of fat things full of marrow, should be cast into the land of drought and famine. Thank God, it cannot be—it shall not be while God lives, for the strong hand of Christ and of the Father will protect the chosen people. This shall not be, but still to lose a sense of the Lord's love, even for an hour, is dreadful enough. Yet there are one or two comforts which arise out of a longing and panting for the Lord. They are these; in the first place, if thou hast a longing after thy God, *where does it come from?* Certainly it is not rooted in the dunghill of human nature. This is too fair a flower to have been blown here, by the winds of chance, or to have sprung up naturally from thine own corruptions. The Eternal Spirit gave thee that desire, thank Him for it; He has not quite given thee up, then. This desire is a gift from God, accept it gratefully, and see the Father's love reflected from the jewel.

Secondly, *if God has given me this desire, will He not fulfil it?* Is it after the manner of men to excite a desire and not fulfil it? And if we, being evil, could not be so unkind, much less shall our God. He will not tantalize His child; He will not make him hungry and refuse to feed him. Oh, no! my God, if Thou hast made me thus to thirst and pant, I may rest assured Thou wilt give me the water brooks to drink from, and I shall be refreshed with Thy love.

For let me recollect, in the next place, that if I have wandered from my God, *He is very willing to forgive.*

Oh, how ready is our Father to receive His wandering children! It is a part of the consequences of our sin that we think hardly of Him whom we have grieved. We offend our loving Husband, the Lord Jesus, and then we think He will not take us back again into those dear arms, but He will—"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him." He tells us that if our brother offend us seventy times seven, we are yet to forgive him, and will not He forgive us? Recollect how often He forgave His people in the wilderness. Remember, to come closer home, how often He has borne with us! how often when He might have swept us away with the besom of destruction, He has said, "They are My children," and He has again been a Father to us. Nevertheless, He has saved us for His name's sake, and when we have been foolish and ignorant, and have been as beasts before Him, nevertheless we have been continually with Him, and He has held us with His right hand. Let us return to Him, then, since He is so ready and so willing to forgive; let us return to Him this morning, and let us recollect that when we return out of the sadness and sorrow of our present estate, we shall very soon be uplifted into the light. It does not take the Lord long to make summer time in a wintry heart. One glance of His love turns the darkness of the soul's night into the brightest day. Come to Him, Christian, and before you are aware of it, your soul shall be like the chariots of Ammi-nadib; He will strike down Dagon in the temple of your heart, and set up the ark of the covenant in his place. He will turn your captivity as the streams in the south; you who were bound with chains shall be emancipated; you who were clothed with sackcloth shall wear fine linen and beauteous apparel; you shall anoint your faces with fresh oil, and you shall go forth in the dance with them that make merry in the Lord. For remember, time is not a thing to be taken into consideration with God; in an instant He wills it, and it is done; He commandeth, and it stands fast. To the dark earth He said, "Let there be light," and light flashed forth at once; and this very afternoon you may become amongst the very happiest of His people, though you came here this morning heavily burdened. I have been crying to-day, Lord, Thou knowest what a dry, parched-up plant my soul is, like yonder poor brown grass, which has only a little root-life left, and no more, for it is all burnt up. Lord, there seems to be no dew nor rain these months for my soul, and therefore, O Lord, Thy poor, pining plant is ready to die. Hast Thou forgotten it? Will Thy loving mercy never return? Beloved, the rain will come upon us. Perhaps even during this sermon the dew has fallen, and you who were like the heath in the desert are beginning to blossom and bring forth fruit unto His name. Oh may it be so, and may you who thought that the Lord had forgotten you, find that He remembers you in the fulness of His loving-kindness and in the plentitude of His grace. So may God do to each one of us, for His name's sake. Amen.

DEEP CALLETH UNTO DEEP

" Deep calleth unto deep."—Psalm xlii. 7.

IN the grandeur of nature there are awful harmonies. When the storm agitates the ocean below, the heavens above hear the tumult and answer to the clamour. Down comes a deluge of sonorous hail or swift-descending rain, attended with peals of thunder and flashes of flame. Frequently the water-spout of which David speaks in the next sentence, evidences the sympathy of the two great waters, above and beneath the firmament; the great deep above stretches out its hand to the great deep below, and in voice of thunder their old relationship is recognised; as though the twin seas remembered how once they lay together in the same cradle of confusion, till the decree of the Eternal appointed each his bounds and place. " Deep calleth unto deep "—one splendour of creation holds fellowship with another. Amazed and overwhelmed by the spectacle of some tremendous tempest upon land, you have yet been able to observe how the clouds appear to be emptying themselves each into each, and the successive volleys of heaven's artillery are answered by rival clamours, the whole chorus of sublimities lifting up their voices. It has seemed to me that a strange wild joy was moving all the elements, and that the angels of wind and tempest were clapping their awful hands in glorious glee. Among the Alps, in the day of tempest the solemnly silent peaks break through their sacred quiet, and speak to each other in that dread language which is echoing the voice of God—

> " Far along,
> From peak to peak the rattling crags among,
> Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,
> But every mountain now hath found a tongue,
> And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,
> Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud."

Height calleth unto height even as " deep calleth unto deep." David perceiving these solemn harmonies, uses the metaphor to describe his own unhappy experience. I suppose that when he wrote this psalm he was an exile from his throne and country, driven out by the rebellion of his favourite son. He crossed the brook Jabbok in fear, and hastened by night over Jordan, and withdrew to a dry and thirsty land where no water was; saddened most of all at the remembrance of the sacred shrine to which he had so often gone with the multitude that kept holy day, because he was now unable to join with that hallowed throng in worship, aforetime so refreshing to his soul. Everything around the Psalmist was like an ocean tossed with tempest; his outlook was unmingled trouble; his sorrows like Job's messengers followed on one another's heels; his griefs came wave upon wave. There was no intermission to his woe. At the same time his heart sank within him. The deep without called to the deep within. Conscience, as with a lightning flash, lit up the abyss of the sufferer's inward depravity, made him see the darkness of the sin into which he had fallen with the wife of Uriah in days gone by, and filled him with despondencies and sad forebodings. While outside everything was comfortless, within him there was nothing to cheer him. Bitterly did he enquire, " Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me? " Externally and internally rest was removed far from him. Without were fightings, within were fears. Deep called unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts; all the waves and billows of God's providence had gone over him.

But now no longer confining so grand a thought to the mere manner in which David employed it, namely, to the double trouble of many of God's saints when two seas meet, and when internal and external sorrows combine, I purpose to use the general principle in other directions, and to show that everywhere where there is one deep it calls to another, and that especially in the moral and spiritual world every vast and sublime truth has its correspondent, which, like another deep, calleth to it responsively.

I. First, we shall consider this fact in connection with THE ETERNAL PURPOSES OF GOD AND THEIR FULFILMENT IN FACT.

The eternal purpose—what a deep! He who pretends to understand predestination, misunderstands himself. We have no unit for measurement when we strive to fathom the decrees of God. We are like the astonomers in attempting to measure the distances of those stars which are as remote from the ordinary fixed stars as the fixed stars are from us; they fail from want of a measuring-line which may serve as a unit: scarcely does the diameter of the earth's orbit suffice for a basis of numeration; they have no unit by which to estimate. What know you and I of infinity, omnipresence, and self-existence? We are far beyond our depth when we come to the ocean of divine purposes. We may gaze into the mystery with awe, but to profess to comprehend it is vanity itself.

What a depth! What an inscrutable mystery, that the infinitely pure and Holy God should have determined to allow the intrusion of sin into His universe; that He should suffer evil to drag down an angel and debase him into a devil; that the adoring hosts of heaven should be thinned by sinful desertion from a loyalty so well deserved! How came it that moral evil was suffered to come into this fair world, to spoil Eden, to pollute mankind, to fill the grave, and populate hell? Why was it that after sin had broken out in the universe, it was permitted to remain in existence? Why not shut up the first devil as in a plague ward, build a lazar-house in Tophet, environ it with walls of flame, and never let the demon wander forth? Why should the evil one be permitted like a roaring lion to roam abroad seeking whom he may devour? When sin infected the race of men. why not destroy them all and stamp out the disease, as we did lately when the disease came among our cattle? Why not purge with fire till the last speck of the leprosy was burned out? What mattered the destruction of a race if sin were but destroyed with them? Strange decree that sin should be tolerated; permitted first to enter, and then allowed afterwards to *spread* its mischievous poison.

What a depth, my brethren, is revealed in the divine decree of election, that there should be vessels unto honour, fitted for the Master's use, men chosen

to show forth the riches of His grace, not for any good thing in them, but because the Lord will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. And what a depth more solemn still, is revealed in those whom He passed by; that there should be vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, men permitted to continue in sin and to harden themselves against the gospel, and so to illustrate the awful wrath of God throughout eternity. Brethren, I cannot contemplate the doctrines connected with predestination, true as they are, without a shudder of reverential awe. Read that ninth chapter of the Romans, and while you are silenced by the voice of Paul, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" Yet, a thrill of awe passes through your souls, and you whisper—

> "Great God, how infinite art Thou,
> What worthless worms are we!"

If we could turn over those awful pages in which every event has been recorded, if it were permitted to us to see that book of fate chained to the throne of God, in which every angel's form and size is drawn by the eternal pen, in which everything is written down from the falling of a sere leaf from an oak to the tumbling of an avalanche from its Alp, in which God has as much arranged the course of yonder dust blown in the wind as of the planet which He steers in its mighty orbit; if we could see it all, we should exclaim, "O wondrous depth, how can I measure thee? My plummet utterly fails. I will adore, for I cannot comprehend."

Beloved friends, we need not allow ourselves to be depressed by the mystery of the doctrine of eternal decrees, for even if these decrees were not in existence, there would still remain the other deep, the mystery of fact. It is a fact that sin is in the world; it is a fact that sorrow is there; it is a fact that death is there; and how can you understand these things? Shut your eye to the depth above the firmament if you will, but here is a depth nearer home which will still amaze you. Remember that all men are not saved. It is a dreadful truth that multitudes tread the broad road, and reach eternal destruction. Why is this when God is good and omnipotent? Can you understand providence? Is not providence, as we see it, quite as mysterious as predestination? Are not the mysteries rather in the facts themselves than in the purpose which ordained them? Are they not, both the facts and the decrees, mysteries and equal mysteries? But what a wonderful harmony there is between the two depths! and to this it is I call your attention. Observe how deep has called unto deep. Whatsoever God ordained has been accomplished; His will has been done. You will tell me that this is nothing wonderful, since God is omnipotent. I reply, yes; but you will remember that He was pleased to create beings who should be free agents, and to that extent actors independent of Himself. Therefore, it is not to the solitary attribute of omnipotence that you can refer the fact that providence coincides with predestination. Here were angels free in their will, and yet they sinned. Here are men upon this stage of action wilful and resolute, and yet fulfilling the unknown fore-ordination. Herein lies the marvel, that with voluntary agents, who do as they will, yet the eternal purpose in every jot and tittle has to this moment been fulfilled; and as the impression answers to the die, so has the history of the universe answered to the eternal purpose, and to the solemn decree of the Most High. My brethren, in solemn awe listen to the voices of these twin depths as they call to one another. Famine, plague, pestilence, devastated nations, fallen empires, wars and bloodsheds, who shall understand why these are permitted? How shall we reconcile our souls to them at all, until we look up to the great Father sitting on the throne of wisdom and love, and say, "Thou knowest what the end will be. Thou hast ordained all things, and from the seeming evil Thou wilt bring forth good, and from the good a something better, and from the better something better still, in infinite progression, to the praise and glory of Thy name?" "Deep calleth unto deep." The deep of predestination answers to the deep of providence, and both together magnify the name of God.

II. Come we now to another case somewhat akin to this, more nearly concerning ourselves, and perhaps more practical. Brethren, SOME OF YOU ARE ENDURING DEEP AFFLICTION. All are not tried alike. God has not been pleased to deal out the wormwood and the gall to all in a cup of the same fashion and the same measure. There are some whose pathway to the skies is comparatively smooth; others go through fire and through water—men do ride over their heads.

My brethren who have done business in the great waters, I speak to you; yours has been a stormy and tried life. Well, I can sympathize with you, for with all the mercy of God, the preacher has not been free from trials many and severe, and, oh! it is a deep indeed, when a depressed spirit unites with our outward afflictions, when church troubles, family troubles, personal troubles, and the world's troubles, all aided and abetted by Satanic temptation, and by an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Do not, however, think yourselves hardly dealt with, my dear brethren, in being singled out as a special target for the arrows of grief. Do not wish that you could be the obscurest of all the saints, to find some quiet nook in which you might be let alone to rest in forgetfulness; the rather let me remind you that if in your experience there is a deep of extraordinary trial, there is most surely another deep answering to it. Open now your ears and your hearts, to hear the calling of this deep unto its brother deep. Hearken while I translate the echoes of truth. Inasmuch as you have many trials, remember the depth of the divine faithfulness. You have not been able to comprehend the reason of your trials, but I beseech you believe in the firmness and stability of the divined affection towards you. In proportion to your tribulations shall be your consolations. If you have shallow sorrows, you shall receive but shallow graces; but if you have deep afflictions, you shall obtain the deeper proofs of the faithfulness of God. I could fain lay me down and die when I think of the trials of this life, but I recover myself and laugh at them all, even as the daughter of Zion shook her head and laughed at her foes, when I remember that the mighty God of Jacob is our refuge, and that He will not fail us, nor take away His hand till He hath effected His purpose concerning us.

Great deeps of trial bring with them great deeps of promise. For you, much afflicted ones, there are great words and mighty, which are not meant for other saints of easier experience. You shall drink from deep golden goblets, reserved for those giants

who can drink great potions of wormwood, and are men of capacity enough to quaff deep draughts of the wines on the lees well refined. Trials are mighty enlargers to the soul. We are contracted, narrowed, pent up, and we rightly pray, "Lord, enlarge my heart." Aye, but the opening of capacious reservoirs within us can only be effected by the spade of daily tribulation, and then, being digged out by pain and trouble, there becomes room for the overflowing promise. A great adversity will to the believer bring with it great grace. Whenever the Lord sets His servants to do extraordinary work He always gives them extraordinary strength; or if He puts them to unusual suffering He will give them unusual patience. When we enter upon war with some petty New Zealand chief, our troops expect to have their charges defrayed, and accordingly we pay them gold by thousands, as their expenses may require; but when an army marches against a grim monarch, in an unknown country, who has insulted the British flag, we pay, as we know to our cost, not by thousands but by millions. There is a difference in the payment of an attack upon petty chieftains, and a war against an emperor. And so, my brethren, if God calls you to common and ordinary trials, He will pay the charges of your warfare by thousands, but if He commands you to an unusual struggle with some tremendous foe, he will discharge the liabilities of your war by millions, according to the riches of His grace in which He has abounded towards us through Christ Jesus. I would not then, in my better mind, if I could, escape great labours or great trials, since they involve great graces; if one deep calleth to the other deep, let the Lord lay on the strokes, and let Him add to the burden. If as my days so shall my strength be, then let the days be long and dark, for so the strength shall be mighty, God shall be glorified, and His servants shall be blessed. I would earnestly urge every tried Christian to dwell upon this truth, for it may be of great comfort to him. You may perhaps have had a comparatively easy life until just lately, but you have reached a turning point where disaster has befallen you. You are fallen into poverty, or else that time for the break up of your family has lately come upon you. Your father is gone; your mother is on the verge of the grave; your friends have one by one been taken from you; you feel the loneliness of life. Here is a dreadful deep for you to sail on, and a tempestuous deep much to be feared, for your little bark may easily be wrecked; but forget not that there is another deep, whose remembrance will remove from you the bitterness of your present sorrow—there is love in heaven towards you which will never grow chill, immortal and unchanging love; and besides, there is a royal oath which never can be broken, a covenant ratified with blood that never can be dishonoured. You must be helped through; you cannot be left. God might sooner cease to be than cease to be faithful. You must be upborne amid the billows and safely landed. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart this day.

III. We have not time to linger: we must pass on to a third point. "Deep calleth unto deep." HUMAN WRETCHEDNESS IS PARALLELED BY DIVINE GRACE.

Brethren, into what an awful state our race fell. We were attainted for high treason through the sin of our father Adam; the dignity and honour of our race were forfeited; we were each one of us born in sin and shapen in iniquity; with a natural tendency towards evil we came into this world, and since we have been in this world, we have wickedly and wilfully rebelled against God. We have rendered ourselves obnoxious to the divine justice, we deserve to be driven from the glory of His presence by the power of His wrath; and besides all this, we are desperately set upon rejecting any offers of mercy on the part of God. Our will has become stubborn, our heart is hard. There are no known human means which can bring a soul to God. Man is such an enemy to God that he will not be reconciled to Him. Human eloquence and human sympathy are alike powerless against human depravity. This leviathan laughs at our sword and spear. Oh, sad, sad, sad case is that of fallen man! Sinner, sad, sad is your case—lost, utterly, hopelessly, everlastingly lost are you by nature! As in yourselves considered, there is no remedy for the disease which rages within you; there is no escape from that eternal fire which must consume you. I would never for a moment attempt to make out the abyss of the fall to be less deep than it is—it is bottomless. The miseries of mankind cannot be exaggerated. Could our tears for ever flow, could we be turned each one into a Jeremiah, yet could we never weep enough for the slain of the daughter of our people. Human misery is deep beyond expression. But what shall I say? How shall I speak? Where shall I find words to express the delight of my soul, that I have such a truth to tell you? There is a deep which answers to the deep of human ruin, and it is the deep of divine grace. There can be no evil in man which the infinite mercy of God cannot overcome. Behold God Himself incarnate in the person of the Nazarene! Behold the Son of God spending on earth a life of service and of condescension! Behold Him dying a death of ignominy and pain! The atonement of Christ is such a Red Sea that all the Egyptians of a believer's sins shall be drowned therein. There is such virtue in the redemption offered up by Christ, that it meets the full extent of the guilt which any sinner who seeks Him may have incurred. Moreover, to meet the obstinacy and depravity of our hearts, behold how deep calleth unto deep! God's eternal Spirit has deigned to dwell in these hearts of ours. He quickens death into life; He fills the thirsty soul with rivers of divine grace; He turns the stone to flesh, and makes the adamant palpitate with tenderness. Blessed be His name, He has done wonders in our souls. He has brought Christ home to our hearts, and made us willing to rejoice in Christ, and to be saved by Him. Myriads of spirits now before the throne attest the fact that the grace of God is deeper than the depths of our sin, higher than the heights of our rebellion, broader and longer than the breadths and lengths of our depravity. Oh, the exceeding riches of the grace of God! "Oh! the depth," saith the apostle; and we may well say the same. My hearer, ought not this to encourage thee? Art thou a burdened, conscience-striken sinner, brought so low as to be all but a damned sinner? You are only just this side of hell-gate; you almost smoke like a brand in the fire, yet is there mercy enough to rescue you, and to give you a place among them that are glorified at the right hand of God. The deep of your misery calls to the deep of sacred mercy, and faith shall hear a favourable answer.

IV. Fourthly, and with brevity, THE DEPTH OF DIVINE LOVE TO THE SAINTS CALLS FOR A DEEP OF CONSECRATION IN EVERY BELIEVING HEART.

Study, my dear brethren, for a minute quietly

the depth of the love of God to you His people. He loved you without a cause.

> " What was there in you that could merit esteem,
> Or give the Creator delight ?
> ' 'Twas even so, Father,' you ever must sing,
> ' For so it seemed good in Thy sight.' "

He loved you without beginning. Before years, and centuries, and millenniums began to be counted, your name was on His heart. Eternal thoughts of love have been in God's bosom towards you. He has loved you without a pause ; there never was a minute in which He did not love you. Your name once engraved upon His hands has never been erased, nor has He ever blotted it out of the Book of Life. Since you have been in this world He has loved you most patiently. You have often provoked Him ; you have rebelled against Him times without number, yet He has never stayed the outflow of His heart towards you ; and, blessed be His name, He never will. You are His, and you always shall be His. Jesus saith, " Because I live, ye shall live also." God's love to you is without boundary. He could not love you more, for He loves you like a God ; and He never will love you less. All His heart belongs to you. " As the Father hath loved me." saith Jesus, " even so have I loved you."

Contemplate for a moment what you have received as the result of this love. You have received, first of all, the gift of the only begotten Son. He left the throne of honour for the cross of shame, the brightness of glory for the darkness of the tomb. Oh, the depths of the love which is revealed in Calvary ! You will never, never be able to fathom the depth of the love of God towards you in the gift of His dear Son to be your Redeemer. Bethink you, now, the Holy Spirit brought Jesus Christ to you. And what were you then ? It is a shame to speak of some of the things which you then loved ; but you are washed, you are cleansed and sanctified. Oh, that blessed bath filled with blood ! Oh, the depth of love there is in the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ? What a work of grace was that which changed your nature, to make you love what once you hated ! And what a work it has been to keep the helm of your vessel right ; oftentimes the current would have drifted you back again to the old rock, and wrecked you ; but a strong hand has kept the head of the vessel heavenward ; a blessed wind has filled the sail ; and though you have made but slow progress, still you are on the way to the fair haven. The love of God which has been manifested in you is a very heaven of love. I cannot measure the love which God has shown towards me, poor me, though I am only one of His family. I feel as if it were deeper than hell, and higher than heaven ; long as eternity, and wide as immensity. I cannot understand it. But what does this love say to me and to you but this—it calleth to another deep ; oh, how ought I to love my God who has so loved me ! oh, how I ought to hate the sin which made my Saviour bleed ! Deeps of the Saviour's grief, ye call to deeps of spiritual repentance. The agonies of Christ call us to the slaughter of our sins. Brethren, if God so loved us, it calls to another deep—we ought also so to love one another. If God forgave us, behold another deep of obligation to forgive all those who have offended against us. How can I love the saints of God enough who are the brethren of Him who loved me even to the death ? As for poor sinners, if God saved me, how I ought to lay out my life to try and save them. If I have, indeed, found peace with God through the blood of the cross, how I ought to seek the lost sheep, still lost and wandering, as I also once was ! If Jesus has so loved me, how I ought to love Him ! Brethren, I dare not, at this hour, say a word against other Christian people, though I might fairly do so ; but I will accuse myself, and own that I have hardly caught so much as an idea of what a consecrated man ought to be. I have read the lives of those of God's servants whose enthusiasm has been fervent, and whose consecration has been complete, and I have felt that they were like a huge Colossus, and I a dwarf walking under their huge legs. Oh, but to serve Christ as He ought to be served does not mean giving Him a trifle now and then out of our estate, and never knowing that we have given it. It means pinching ourselves right cheerfully to serve His cause. It does not mean saying a good word sometimes for Him when it would be shameful to be silent, but it means making our whole life a testimony to His dear love. It does not mean giving Him the candle-ends and cheese-parings of our soul, niggardly doling out to Him what we would give a beggar at the door ; but it means the rendering up of body, soul, and spirit—the surrender of our entire nature to be offered in sacrifice. As the bullock was brought to the altar, bound to the horns thereof, killed, and offered up, with the fat thereof and the inwards, so must we be entirely given up to our Lord. Oh for more real consecration ! Jesus has done so much for us, let us endeavour to do more for Him ; and this morning let the deeps of divine love call to the deeps within our grateful souls, and let those deeps cry to the deeps of the eternal Spirit, as we ask to be perfectly given up to the cause and honour of our Lord.

V. Time fails me, therefore I must notice another deep. There is a depth in this world, A DEPTH OF DIVINE FORBEARANCE towards impenitent and graceless men, and depend upon it, it answers to another deep, A DEEP OF IMMEASURABLE AND NEVER-ENDING WRATH IN THE WORLD TO COME.

It is a very solemn subject, and I desire to speak most solemnly ; therefore, I entreat you to hear most earnestly, especially you unconverted ones. It is a very great mystery that God permits the ungodly to go on as they do. Walk down some of our streets, if you dare, at night, and mark what you shall see. You inwardly exclaim, " I wonder God permits it. Here is a reeking Sodom in the heart of a so-called Christian city." Step into some of the dens of infamy and you will feel, " God could, if He would, suppress this in a minute : why does He not ? " Hearken for a moment to the talk of blasphemers : what atrocious insults they perpetrate upon the Majesty of Heaven ! They go out of their way to imprecate curses upon themselves, their limbs, their eyes, their souls. What are they at ? If they will not obey God, could they not at least let Him alone, and not insult Him to His face ? We have heard in these days a blasphemer stand upon a public platform, and say, " There is no God, and if there be a God," taking out his watch, "let Him strike me dead in five minutes." When he still found himself alive, he argued that there was no God. The fact was, God was much too great to be put out of patience by such an insignificant wretch as he. Had God been less than God He would have struck him dead, but being God He passed him

by with sublime indifference, as a hero would pass by the chirping of a grasshopper. Yet the divine forbearance is certainly very wonderful, very marvellous. I have heard say that when Mr. John Ryland was present at a certain meeting when the slave-trade question was first agitated, a story was told in that meeting of atrocities perpetrated in the middle passage between Africa and the States, and those atrocities were so enormous that John Ryland in the exuberance of his wrath knelt down and said to God, "Lift up Thy thunderbolt and damn these wretches, O righteous God." I know that in the sight of oppression and cruelty I have felt a longing for speedy vengeance on the tyrant, and have been very thankful to think that I had not the handling of the thunderbolts. But God has looked on, calmly looked on, and suffered infamies which were nothing less that infernal to be perpetrated again and again. He appears to wink at men's sins. Ah! my brethren, can you think for a minute what you and I would do if some cruel wretches should take our children and torture them, and burn them alive; how would our wrath be up, and how would we strike in their defence! But remember that from the days of Christ until now the dear children of God, dearer to Him than our children are to us, have been shut up in prison to rot, have been sawn asunder, have wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, have been burned at Smithfield and a thousand other places, and have crimsoned the snows of the Alps with their blood; and yet God, in the great deeps of His forbearance, has been still. There has been, it is true, a vengeance in providence in the long run: the reader of history knows how God has avenged every persecution; still the recompense was slow. There were no fiery arrows to piece Bishop Bonner, when he condemned Anne Askew; there were no immediate lightning flashes to wither Domitian or Nero when they insultingly put the people of God to death. No, the Lord bears long with them, and His longsuffering is a deep, a great deep.

In this house, to come back to ourselves, what deeps of forbearance have been shown in the cases of some of you! You have often heard of Jesus Christ, my dear hearers, but you have not received Him. You have known the way of salvation, but you have not run in it. I have pleaded with you, I hope with all honesty and earnestness, and you have been awakened too, and aroused, but you have stifled your convictions; you have deliberately elected your sins, and you have presumptuously turned away from the blood of Christ. O my unconverted hearers those of you especially who still continue regularly to come to these seats, until I almost wonder to see you here, because I cannot imagine what pleasure you can derive from having your consciences continually whipped up. I beg you to consider. Men and women too, among you have chosen the lusts of the flesh, and ungodly gain, or drunkenness, when you know better, know much better; when you have had a degree of divine light shed across your souls, and yet deliberately you have chosen to rebel against God. I fear you have some of you done so to the hardening of your hearts even to final impenitence. Listen, now, I pray you. As surely as God has shown towards you a great deep of forbearance, He will show an equal depth of justice. He may pay slowly, but He will pay in full. God's mill grinds slowly, but it grinds most surely and thoroughly even to powder. The feet of the avenging angels are shod with wool, but they never turn aside from their path. According to this Book there is a hell into which those who reject Christ will be cast, the misery of which is dimly to be guessed at, but can never be fully described; a misery of which it is said, "Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched"—a misery which will last as long as the enjoyments of heaven shall last; for while the saints shall go away into everlasting joy, the punishment of the ungodly hath, according to the testimony of Jesus, the same eternal duration. Do not deceive yourselves by any dream of annihilation; do not imagine there shall come a period to your woe. If there were the shadow of a ground for that statement, hell would cease to be hell, for hopelessness is of the essence of hell. Oh, by the boundless love treasured up in Christ Jesus, remember there is equal terror in His wrath! The hand that is mighty to save is equally mighty to destroy. All omnipotence has been put out to save, but this rejected, an equal omnipotence shall be put out to crush. Tempt not the Lord. The deeps of your sin are already challenging the deeps of His justice. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Awaken not the fury which ye cannot endure, overcome, or avoid. Kindle not the fire which, like flame among stubble, will burn furiously, and cannot be stayed. Oh dash not your souls upon the bosses of Jehovah's buckler; cast not yourselves upon the point of His glittering spear. God grant of His eternal mercy that you may not tempt those deeps.

VI. Now to close with a more cheerful theme. There is, brethren, A BLESSED DEEP OF HOLY HAPPINESS AND BLISS FOR THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN, AND TO-DAY IT CALLS TO THE DEEP OF JOY AND THANKFULNESS WITHIN SAINTLY HEARTS who are lingering here below.

Yes, the day is coming, and all the wings of time are bringing it nearer, when we shall be emancipated from the body of this death. We are not for ever to be sickly, sinful, and sorrowing. We shall soon be set free from everything that encumbers us. If Christ come not in our lifetime to take us to Himself, we shall go to Him to dwell with Him where He is. And what are the delights of being in heaven! To be with Christ! The spouse for ever with the Bridegroom; the child for ever in His Father's bosom! What must it be to dwell above! For ever pure! for ever beyond the danger of temptation! Safe and blessed! Shielded from all fear, enriched with all blessedness! Christian, you shall soon be like Jesus as well as with Him. You shall be crowned as He is, and blessed as He is. Oh, how satisfied shall you be when you wake up in His likeness! I could not go further, for though I were to talk of the harps of gold, of the streets that shine with unearthly light, of gates of pearl, of the never-ending song, and of the gentle flowing river of the water of life amidst the trees that yield their twelve manner of fruits, yet all would be less than what I have said already. You shall be with Christ, and you shall be like Him. Indeed, heaven is a great deep. The glorious history of the Church of God in years to come is a great deep, too. That reigning of Christ on the earth, that judging of the angels, that being caught up together with the Lord in the air, that resurrection of the body in the likeness of His glorious body, that being for ever with the Lord, why, these are things which eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard. Heaven is a blessed deep. I see it as a sea of glass mingled with fire, and almost hear the harpers who stand for ever harping on that glassy sea. Oh let the thought of it awaken the deeps of your souls! Heaven is yours, for He hath

said, " I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself ; that where I am, there ye may be also." " For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands." I blush to think that I should ever be downcast ; I am ashamed to think that I should dare to be sad. Oh ! it is blessed work to anticipate that joy, yet it makes one ashamed of the depression which our present light afflictions so easily cause to our feeble minds. O ye mourning saints, ye have been putting on your sackcloth to-day, and you arranged it so carefully, for there is a kind of foppery about grief that makes it strew its ashes with deliberation. Oh sirs, could you not have spent some of your time at another wardrobe, and in putting on another dress ? Come, thou afflicted one, array yourself for a minute with the robe of whiteness, without spot or blemish ! How well it will become you ! How soon you will wear it ! Now, put that unfading crown upon your head. You are a poor servant or a working man ; and, ah, that head has often ached with weariness and woe, but put on the crown now ! How royally it adorns your brow ! It would not fit any other head, it was made for you ; and you will soon have it. In a few days, or a few months, you will go by the way of the sepulchre, or else by the way of the second coming, up to your throne and your kingdom. Now hold that palm-branch in your hand ! How delightful it looks ! How your eye gleams at the thought of the victory which it betokens ! Arise, I say, and put the silver sandals upon those weary feet ! Bedeck yourself with the jewels and ornaments prepared for your wedding. Take down the harp, and try your fingers amongst its celestial strings. " Wake up, My glory ! wake, psaltery and harp ! I myself will awake right early." Blessed be the Lord who hath prepared for His people rivers of pleasure at His right hand for evermore. Our souls anticipate the day of enjoyment ; and at this hour, by faith, we eat the fruit of the trees of life, and drink from the living fountains of waters. Oh clap your hands, ye righteous. Sound the cymbals, even the high-sounding cymbals, and give praise unto your God even for ever, who hath prepared for you the rest that knoweth no end. Thus " deep calleth unto deep."

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, abide with you for ever. Amen and Amen.

THE SECRET OF HEALTH

" I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God."—Psalm xlii. 11.

ANOTHER verse in this psalm so attracts me that, though it is not my text, I cannot pass it by without a moment's notice. In the fifth verse the Psalmist says, " I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance," and then follows the expression of the text, " who is the health of my countenance and my God." God's countenance is our help, and He Himself is the health of our countenance. The best help a man can have in time of trouble is the countenance of God. If he feels that he enjoys the divine love, and that he is acceptable with the Lord, he becomes at once strong to bear, or dare, or do. Ask the presence of God with thee, child of God, and thou mayest then descend into a lion's den, traverse a fiery furnace, or pass through the iron gates of death. A look from the Lord is life and strength to His people. So far the fifth verse : now let us weave our text with it. This help of God's countenance usually comes to believers by their obtaining health for their countenances. It may not please God to lessen the burden, but it comes to the same thing if He strengthens the back. He may not recall the soldier from the battle, but if He gives Him a greater stomach for the fight, and increased strength for its toils, it may be better still for him. " The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear ? " Give a man health in his countenance, and he laughs at that which would have crushed him had he been in another mood. There are times when the grasshopper becomes a burden, and there are other seasons when with undaunted spirit we can say, " Who art thou, O great mountain ? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Everything depends upon the man's personal condition ; for the diseased eye beauty does not exist, for the disordered palate sweetness is no longer to be found, and to a deaf ear harmony is silent. Our happiness depends more upon our own personal condition than upon our surroundings. The great thing to be desired by all of us is that we may, in spirit, soul, and body, be whole, that is to say holy, for holiness is in very truth the wholeness of our entire manhood. Sin is disease, righteousness is health. We all need to be healed, that being healed we may be healthy, that receiving the divine restoration our nature may arrive at perfect soundness. Through the fall and our own sins we have become the prey of manifold maladies, and need the exercise of divine power to bring us back into that sacred sanity of nature in which God first of all created man, when He made him in His own image, and saw concerning him and the world in which He had placed him, that it was very good. Of our complete manhood's health I shall speak this morning, and while I speak of it may the Lord be pleased to make all of us see that He is the health of our countenance and our God.

I. Our first remark is one which naturally grows out of the text, though it may seem a very trite one, namely, that PERFECT HEALTH IS A GREAT BLESSING. Do not misunderstand me by narrowing my words in their application. I am not speaking alone of the health of the body ; for to say that bodily health is a blessing were but to assert what no one disputes. Man, however, is something more than a body, he is also a living soul ; yea more, there is in the regenerate man a triple nature, consisting of body, soul and spirit. Even in you, who are unregenerate, there is a double nature of body and soul ; I would you had been born again, and had reached the triple nature,

and possessed that higher principle which is born of God, but even you are not all comprised in mere flesh, and when I speak of your health I mean the health of your entire being. Perfect health lies in the right condition of spirit, soul, and body. Complete health in heaven will be ours when, our bodies having been raised from the dead incorruptible, our souls having been cleansed from all defilement, and our new-born spirit having come to its full development, our entire manhood shall be glorified.

This universal health of our manhood is invaluable, for *it was that which made our first Paradise.* Man was not happy in Eden merely because luscious were the fruits, and delicious were the odours of the flowers which grew in the garden of delights, but because no disease of sin had tainted any part of his nature. His bodily appetites had not gained predominance over his mental faculties, neither had he suffered any one of his mental powers to over-ride the rest, or permitted the pride of knowledge to stay the childlike spirit which adored the great Father. His being was well balanced, and all its powers were in a perfect condition. Adam was in all respects such as God would have man to be, for he was such as God had actually made him. As in a perfect machine, which comes fresh from the maker's hand, every wheel acts upon its fellow, and the whole is obedient to the central mainspring, so was Adam's nature in complete order. Alas for us that ever it became otherwise.

As perfect health was our first happiness, so it will be our last and eternal happiness, for heaven is not merely streets of gold and harps of melodious music, and winged creatures strangely bright, but it is perfection realised, the slough of depravity cast off; the soul shall be herself again, and of manhood it shall be said, "his flesh is fresher than a child's, and he has returned to the days of his youth." Spiritual health then was the first paradise, and we can never reach the second except by its recovery. No forgiveness of sin, no imputation of righteousness, no justification by faith, if such could be apart from an inward change, could make a man happy so long as he is sick of soul. Health must reign within, or a throne in heaven would be a mockery.

To-day a measure of health is essential to our happiness. If any man here burns with the fever of lust he cannot be a happy man. In the fierce heat of passion he may think himself blessed, but he dares not deny that, in those intervals of chill remorse which alternate with the heat of passion, woe and anguish are his portion. Anger, envy, revenge, covetousness, discontent, pride, and self-will, are all diseases fatal to happiness. Perhaps some man before me is utterly given up to worldliness, and lethargy has seized upon him, and in the deadness of that lethargy he complains of no pain whatsoever, but finds a happiness in the numbness of spiritual death. May God deliver you from this hideous peace, this horrible stupefaction, for it is not true happiness, but the herald of eternal death. Absolute happiness, that which will bear the looking at, real joy, peace, felicity, can never come to a man while one part of his nature jars with the other; he must be right with himself. The little universe of our nature cannot sing in harmony till its central sun of faith, its planetary affections, and even those imaginations which are comparable to the comets, are each and all in their fit spheres and orbits; then as they all, like the heavens, declare the glory of God, all will be well. We must be spiritually healthy or we cannot be happy.

The want of this health is the cause of a thousand ills. This world we complain of full often, but it were no longer the prison-house of sorrow if it ceased to be the theatre of sin. If man were man as God made him, the earth would soon regain her excellency, and her deserts would blossom as the rose. If men were not sinners, neither would they be sufferers. Thorns and thistles would be no longer a curse, but would be counted among flowers if men had not thorns within their bosoms, and thistles in their hearts. On the way of holiness no lion or ravenous beast could go up, for of the perfect man it is written, "Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be in peace with thee." Cast out sin, and you have cast out the serpent whose slime has made this world so foul. Cut down this upas tree, and griefs and torments numberless will no more drip upon mankind.

We may judge of the value of health, when we recollect that *it cannot be purchased.* You cannot buy deliverance from bodily disease. What would we not give if we could? We would seek out at any expense the physician whose fee is heaviest, and we would not refuse to fill his hand with gold could he but give us ease. But no; when God chastens, the rod will not be quiet. As for the health of the soul and spirit, the miser's bags if they were emptied out could not purchase it for a moment; nay, the very fact that he hoped so to win it, would be in itself a disease; for what are trust in riches and reliance upon self-righteousness but forms of pride, which is one of the most deadly of our sicknesses. Ye cannot buy health for your nature; your tears cannot procure it; your works, your repentances, your prayers cannot find it apart from God. He is the health of your countenance. Bless Him that He is so. Were it not for this your whole head would continue sick, and your whole heart faint. There is no balm in Gilead, there is no physician there; God alone is the Healer of the soul, and freely does He bestow what India with its gems and California with its gold could not procure.

If we are without this health *nothing can compensate us for the loss of it.* You who have been sick know that nothing can make up for the agony of pain or the misery of inability to move your limbs; those weary nights and dolorous days of anguish could not be recompensed by gold and silver. So, unless you become right in soul and spirit with your God, nothing can avail in lieu thereof. You may put on the garb of religion, you may learn the tones and mannerisms of Christians, you may sing the songs of saints, you may think that you could play the music of angels, but "ye must be born again," ye must be recovered from sin's mortal malady; ye must be purged from the foul leprosy of evil, for ye are polluted, and until ye are recovered ye cannot come into the tabernacles of the Lord, nor stand in His holy place. Without holiness, which is another word for wholeness or health, no man can see the Lord.

If this health of ours be not found let us be warned *that it will be eternal hell;* for what is hell? Is it not consummated sin? What are the fetters of the condemned but their own tyrant passions? The fires that burn and yet do not consume, will they not be ungratified desires? The worm that never

dies, will it not be a tormenting conscience? The man himself is his own hell. True there may be, over and above this, penalties from the hand of the Lord, for what are we that we should pretend to know the secrets of the dreadful prison-house? There may be inflictions positive from the divine hand, but without these there is misery enough in despair, and torment abundant in remorse. If a man were taken up to heaven itself, and were surrounded with all the circumstances which assist the blessed to express their joy, yet there he would burn, and there would he gnash his teeth, and there he would weep and wail, if still his breast was cankered with enmity to God, and his heart palpitated with passions fierce and strong. Within ourselves must ever be the essential heaven, or the actual hell. There lies the main business. Sir, you are sick and must be cured, or you are damned, for your sickness is incipient damnation. Sir, you were born with a cancer in your bosom, which will one day flood your whole nature with its horrible loathsomeness, and then will come the time of your misery: you must be cured, or else a doom awaits you which language cannot describe.

Assuredly I have said enough to show that manhood's perfect health is the greatest of blessings, and I proceed to the next point.

II. Our text joyfully asserts, secondly, that GOD IS OUR HEALTH.

"Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God." God is our health. He is so in these senses, that, first of all, He is *the originator of health*, which once was enjoyed by manhood. There was in the primeval days one perfect man, nay, there was one perfect pair, upon the face of the earth, and these possessed a total sanity, because God who is Himself holy had made them whole or holy, and they were perfect in their ways from the day they were created till iniquity was found in them. They were made a little lower than the angels, but they wore a glory and honour about them which made all the lower creatures obedient to their command; that beauty of holiness was the work of God who made man upright, and caused his countenance to beam with health. He who made the first man pure must make us pure, or pure we shall never be.

But again, God is the health of our countenance because *our relation to Him is the test of our health.* Just what you are to God, that you really are. It is good to stand well with your fellow men; to love your neighbour as yourself is right and just, but He who made us has the first claim upon us. Our Creator should first of all have the love and loyalty of our hearts. If He is not the chief object of our thoughts depend upon it we are wrong. Whatever we may be in our relation to others, we are sadly wrong if we are disarranged towards God. If you do not love God, you do not love Him who is the holiest, and the purest, and the best. If you do not love God it is certain that you do not love essential goodness, truth, justice, and purity. You complain that the character of God is so much above you: then how low you must be. You assert that you cannot think of Him as your Father: but we would have you remember that when a child cannot think of its father as its father its heart must be alienated indeed. Do you ever judge yourselves in relation to God? Men seldom do so, and when they use expressions which concern this relationship they generally misuse them. I have noted in this place before, that if we call a man a sinner he is not offended with us, for that only means that he disobeys the law of God; but if we call him a criminal he is indignant, because that means that he has broken the laws of man. Alas! that our relation to man should seem to be so much more important than our connection with God. To set man before God is unrighteous, and shows the essential injustice of unrenewed hearts; for when their hearts are set right, men feel that they would sooner a thousand times offend their fellow men than once offend their God. So that you may judge of your spiritual health by your relation to God. Do you love Him? Do you trust Him? Do you speak with Him? Do you pray to Him? Is He your friend? Is He your delight? Is His will your will? Do you take pleasure in that which pleases Him? Does your life run parallel with the life of God? It is well with you if things are so: it is on the way to being well with you if you desire to have them so; but if, on the contrary, God's will draws one way, and you the other, the Lord cannot be wrong, and you are clearly proven to be in an ill case. The Lord is holy, "Holy, holy, holy," say the angels; and if you are not like Him you are unholy, that is you are not whole, you are not spiritually in health; your nature is diseased. God is our health, then, because our relation to Him is the test of it.

Remember again, that *the Lord is the very model of health.* All perfections meet in Him. In God's nature no single attribute ever intrudes upon another. You cannot find in God's character any one point of which you can say—"He is this alone, to the exclusion or overshadowing of other excellencies." God is love, but God is also a consuming fire. God is merciful, but God is true. God is great, but God is good. All excellencies are in Him in perfection. See whether you are like God, then, for if you are not, you are not like the model of health. If the symptoms of your condition differ from the characteristics of God, you are unhealthy, for God is the standard of perfect holiness.

The text intends to teach us that *God must be to each one of us the Restorer of our spiritual health.* If ever we recover soundness, He must restore us. The Sun of Righteousness must bring us healing, the heavenly wind of the Holy Spirit must drive away the pestilence of sin, the water of life must work our cure, the plant of renown must yield us balm. Man's malady demands a divine physician. Only an omnipotent wisdom can make a man healthy, or keep him so. This body of ours is so complex, and contains so many bones, cells, muscles, nerves, tissues, and blood vessels, that perhaps it is the greatest miracle on the face of the earth that we live, or if there be a greater, it must be that we live at all in health. Dr. Watts well said—

> "Strange that a harp of thousand strings,
> Should keep in tune so long."

But when I think of the soul, it is so much more mysterious than the body, that to put a soul into proper conformity to God, and keep it right, would appear to be a greater wonder than anything which can be discovered by the physiologist in the anatomy of the body. O God, Thou alone madest man, and Thou alone canst deliver him from the evils which have unmade him, and bring him back to be what Thou wouldst have him be. No hand but Thine must venture upon the task. They do but blunder who boast of regenerating with water. Blunder, nay,

they lie. God alone can regenerate a soul, and His Spirit must do it by that same mighty power which raised the Redeemer from the dead. Nothing short of omnipotence at its full can raise us from our natural sickness to spiritual health.

Spiritual health is produced by God's coming to us, for the medicine of a sick soul is not something out of God, but God Himself. He could not cure us till He gave us His Son, and His Son could not heal us till He gave us Himself. To-day the food of a spiritual health is the flesh and blood of Jesus, and nothing keeps us from relapsing into sin but the indwelling of the Eternal Spirit. Our health is our God, our God incarnate, our God indwelling, our God looking down from the throne of glory, and saying, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people." Jehovah Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee, this is Thy name, O Lord, and by it we adore Thee.

III. But I must pass on to the third matter, namely, that THIS HEALTH HAS VISIBLE SIGNS. "He is the health *of my countenance.*" The health of a man is mainly judged of by his face. Truly you can tell something of it by his gait, and every limb of the body more or less evidences his condition, but the countenance is the window of the soul, the looking-glass which reflects the nature. True sanity towards God, or at any rate, the beginning of it in the work of grace, can be seen: it is not a close secret hidden from observation, it displays itself. A notion is abroad that perhaps a man may be saved and not know it, alive unto God unconsciously, washed in the blood of Jesus without knowing it, so that he may live without discovering his own salvation and only find it out by the help of a priest as he is dying. There is nothing like that in the Word of God, nothing of the kind. That may be the version of the Vatican; it is not the version of the New Jerusalem. Read the scriptures, and you find men talk about "us who are saved"; you find them declaring that being justified by faith they have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

When the Lord Jesus Christ takes a man in hand to heal him He makes a difference in his countenance, by which of course I do not mean the countenance of the body merely, but that countenance which David meant, that part of our nature which is visible to others. The Lord gives outward evidences of His inward work. And what sort of signs are those? He takes away from the countenance of our manhood the blotches of sin. I look into a man's spiritual face, and I discover that he is a drunkard, that he is a man of lust, that he is a man of anger, that he is a hard, cruel man, a mean, miserly man: these are so many blotches; and when the grace of God enters the heart it takes away these disfigurements, and beautifies the character. When the Lord Jesus begins to heal us, He removes from our countenance the blankness of despair. Did you ever see it? I have seen it in the actual bodily visage, and a dreadful sight it is. But oh, when those charming bells are heard to ring, the bells of "free grace and dying love," and the man knows that his sin is forgiven, and that he is accepted in Christ Jesus, then despair flies away, the shadow of the dragon's wing is taken from the face, and the dove of peace passes by and casts a brightness as of silver upon the countenance. When the great Physician heals men He removes the paleness of fear, for men are pallid when they dread the wrath to come, and tremble lest they die in their sins. Once pardoned that pallor is gone, and the ruddiness of confidence comes back to the cheek. The gloom of sorrow also goes from the man whom Christ makes whole.

> "Why should I sorrow more?
> I trust a Saviour slain,
> And safe beneath His sheltering cross,
> Unmoved I shall remain."

And when the Lord goes on working the cures of grace it is wonderful how He removes from the countenance the lines and furrows of want. The lantern jaws of hunger are seen in many who are pining after Christ and grace, and cannot find either; but when Christ comes He satiates the soul, and makes fat the bones, and the countenance of the heart is glad.

Let me tell you, though I am afraid some Christians do not prove it, that the Lord Jesus smoothes out the wrinkles of care from the foreheads of His patients. When Christians are under the influence of divine grace they know no care; they cast their care on Him who careth for them. They do the little they can do and leave the rest with their Lord, and all goes well, and their life is peace. O happy man who has been thus healed. "Well," says one, "I trust I am healed of sin, but I am not so healed as that." Brother, the good Physician is proceeding with His operations, and if you have not yet all the cure, it is your fault and not His; for it is in His power, if you trust Him, to take away sorrow, fear, despair, doubt, and even care, so that you shall say as our hymn puts it:—

> "All that remains for me
> Is but to love and sing,
> And wait until the angels come
> To bear me to their King."

It will not be long before they will come if you are in that condition. Only bad farmers leave their wheat out in the field too long, but my Lord never did so yet. Whenever His sheaves are ready for the garner He is sure to reap them. A perfect man is on the threshold of heaven. When you are spiritually healthy, and have undergone your spiritual quarantine, and there is no more sickness in you, do you think your Lord will keep you out of heaven? Not He, He is too desirous to have you with Him where He is.

The health which our Lord Jesus works in us is seen in the spiritual countenance in many ways. First, it makes the *eyes* bright. A man full of doubts and fears, or vexed with ambition or love of the world, has no bright transporting hopes, but the man who believes in Jesus has a hope that when days and years are past he shall be in heaven where Jesus is. I must confess that sometimes when I try to realise that hope my physical eye grows dim, because the tears begin to flow, and almost blind me. Shall I, shall I ever see His face and cast a crown at His feet? I shall, I know I shall; but oh, it does seem too good to be true. While the physical eye is thus dimmed how bright the spiritual eye becomes with such a hope to cheer it.

Spiritual health imparts a beauty to the entire visage. Think how the spouse describes her beauty. She says, "I am black"—she could not help saying that, for she was sunburnt with exposure to the world; but she adds, "I am comely." Her Lord

looked at her in such a way that she felt He could see her comeliness though she could not.

> " Though in ourselves defiled we are.
> And black as Kedar's tents appear,
> Yet, when we put Thy beauty on,
> Fair as the courts of Solomon."

There is no more beautiful object in the world to Christ than His own Church. What a passage that is in the song, where the king exclaims, " Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." He sees with eyes of love indeed, who sees such beauty. Yet fair beyond conception will grace make the Christian, altogether lovely will glory make the Christian. We shall bear neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, but be without fault before the throne of God.

What a difference grace makes to the spiritual *forehead* when it works with power. By nature our forehead is as brass, hard, bold, presumptuous, but see what grace makes it. " Thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks." Now, the pomegranate when you open it is red and white, and the Christian's brow is full of the blushes of a sacred shamefacedness. " Within thy locks," says the Song, as though concealed with holy fear, but what you did see of her brow was red and white with blushing with bashfulness and holy love in the presence of her Lord. I pray that all of you who are converted in these days may know what holy shamefacedness means. Confidence in Christ is admirable, but not effrontery and self-confidence. I am afraid of those people who are so very sure, and so very confident all on a sudden, and yet have never felt the burden of sin. Be ashamed and be confounded while you lay hold on Christ, for the more He does for you the less you must think of yourself. You may very accurately measure the reality of your grace by the reality of your self-loathing. The bridegroom also describes *the lips* of His beloved, " Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely." Before her health returned her lips were livid, before she had received comfort they were white with fear, but now they wear a healthy redness, and are lovely to her Lord. How about your lips, beloved friends ? Are they praying lips, singing lips, confessing lips ? Do you speak well of the Redeemer and rejoice whenever you tell what His love has done for you ? Well is it with us when to our Lord our " *cheeks* are comely with rows of jewels, and our neck with chains of gold," while our whole countenance shines with holiness.

When God is our health, our whole countenance becomes bright, according to the words of the Song, " Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." The believer's countenance becomes bright with clearness, as far as he himself is concerned, he is saved and he knows it. It becomes fair as far as others are concerned, for they see the excellence of his character and wonder at it ; and then it becomes dazzling to his adversaries, as the sun vanquishes rash gazers by its effulgence. Holiness is to opposers " terrible as an army with banners."

I desire that those of you who have been under the Great Physician's hand of late may shine forth and proclaim the power of Jesus. Your Beloved cries, " Let Me see thy face, for sweet is thy face, and thy countenance is comely." If Christ has cured you, why do you conceal His work ? I feel inclined to do with you as the watchman did with the spouse in the Song : " They smote me and took away my veil from me." I would not smite you severely, but I would fain remove the veil from some of you, that you might be seen, that the church may see you, and the saints may rejoice in what the Saviour has done for you. David says, " He is the health of my countenance." He does not say, " the health of my heart merely,"—" the health of my inward parts," though that were true, but " of my countenance." Therefore, if the Lord has done great things for you, proclaim it abroad, and make the streets of Jerusalem ring with grateful song.

IV. The last observation is this. THIS PASSAGE ENTITLES THE MOST SICK SOUL AMONG US TO HOPE. " Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance." Look at the source of spiritual health. If David had said, " I shall yet recover, for I have a splendid constitution, my stamina is such that it will throw off this sickness, such boasting would not encourage you, would it ? because in your case the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. You have no stamina except for evil. The disease has smitten you to the very core, and your heart has melted like wax in the midst of your bowels. Then bless God that your healing does not depend on any constitutional strength in yourself.

Next notice, David does not expect healing from anything he can do. He does not say, " Certain actions of mine will yet recover me of my disease." Not at all. If it were so, you, my friend, would be in despair, for you cannot do anything. What good work could you do ? Why, you have smutty fingers, and if you were to try and produce a piece of fair white linen you would blacken it in the weaving of it. You cannot achieve your own salvation, nor need you do it. The health of David's countenance lay where yours must lie, not in your doings, but in the salvation of God.

And mark, he does not speak of undergoing a long process. " I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance." Here is nothing about waiting, and tarrying, and lingering, and loitering, as some preachers seem to make out. No, David understood, as I trust we understand, the doctrine of " Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ receives by that look of faith the principle of health, which will begin at once to work, and will ultimately cast out all spiritual disease. Blessed is it to know that our hope lies in God and not in ourselves.

I want you just for a moment, especially you who wish to be healed, to think who He is, and what there is in Him, which you have to look to as your spiritual health. Sin is your disease, and here is *mercy without limit* to meet it. You have done evil in all ways, and what is worse, your very nature is evil ; but here is God who delights to forgive, infinitely gracious, finding a happiness in passing by transgression and sin : look to Him then. Here shall all your sins be drowned, for God's love in Christ Jesus is a sea without a bottom, and without a shore. Here is assured healing for your sickness, for infinite mercy cannot be baffled in its design.

Again, here is *infinite atonement* also. God is not only willing to pardon, but He can do it consistently with justice, for His dear Son has bled and died. When I turn my eyes to the Son of God bleeding upon the cross, so glorious is His sacrifice in my eyes that I conclude that if there were ten

thousand thousand worlds full of sinners there must be merit enough in the death of Christ to save them all, if God had so willed it; for we cannot conceive any bound to the merit of the dying Son of God. Incarnate Deity smarts beneath the lash of justice, is pierced to the heart, is slain, is laid for three days in the grave! Why, there must be a splendour of power about that majestic sacrifice, illimitable, inconceivable. Come, soul, if this be thy healing no disease can stand against it. Infinite mercy armed with an infinite atonement can accomplish all things. O God, Thou art indeed the health of my countenance, by Thee I am brought back from my death in sin.

Then remember that *divine energy* is ready to work our healing, and omnipotence worketh all things. "Can these dry bones live?" said one of old; but live they did. The dead have been raised; and even at this hour things impossible with men are possible with God, and the Eternal Spirit waiteth to work His miracles of love even now. No propensity of depraved nature is too strong for the Almighty. Man, have you a lion of anger within you? This Samson can tear this lion as though it were a kid. Have you a host of evil passions within you, and fears, and strong, like the Midianites of old? Behold, this sacred torrent of divine love, mightier than Kishon of old, can sweep them all away. Has Satan himself entered you and brought a legion of devils with him? Has hell vomited forth all its spawn to hold a horrid carnival in your nature? There was one out of whom Jesus cast seven devils—nay, another out of whom He drove a legion: come to Jesus, man, for devils still tremble at His power. Jesus can chase away the enemy from you. All God's energy waits to heal you. "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the earth; the Lord is His name," for nothing can stand against the mighty arm of His irresistible grace.

To complete this I must add, there is in God, who is the health of our countenance, *immutable love*. If God begins to heal you He will never give up the work till He has achieved it. There is not recorded in the life of Christ a solitary half cure. I read of none into whom the devils returned after Jesus drove them out, nor of any lepers who had the leprosy again. I have not to preach to you a salvation loseable and dependent upon your good behaviour; but lo, I preach a pardon never to be reversed, acceptance in the Beloved never to be cancelled, adoption which makes you sons for ever. Give yourselves up to Jesus, and He will give you garments of mercy that will never wear out, treasures of love which neither moth nor rust shall consume, and health which will introduce you into a city wherein the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick," for the people that dwell therein have been forgiven their iniquity.

Healing by God Himself presents a ground of hope to the worst among us, and blessed be God many of us have realized it as David had. Now if we, as honest men, tell you that God in Christ Jesus is the health of our countenance, we trust you will believe us, and that you will seek the Lord for yourselves. The healing which God gives in Jesus Christ is available to every sin-sick soul. Whoever you may be, if you are sick to-day God is able and willing to heal you through Jesus Christ His Son. I pray you linger not through any fear of His ability or His willingness, but come and welcome, come and welcome, come just now.

It is of no use my preaching about healing to those who are not sick. Jesus came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance: but to those who are sick this will be a gladsome message. I would like to put it in such an unmistakable shape that they must comprehend it, the Holy Spirit instructing them. You have a deadly disease in your nature, every one of you. In some of you it has taken a very hideous form, but the disease is at the heart of everyone of you ladies and gentlemen, even the same which festers in the bosom of the harlot and the thief. True it has come out differently in them; circumstances have helped to bring it out; perhaps if you had been in their circumstances it might have been as foully developed as in them. Now, if to-day you feel the terrible ravages of this disease I am glad of it, for it is a hopeful sign. When the high priest examined men who were suspected of being lepers, I can suppose that one would say, "I have a very bad spot on my forehead, but there is just near my breast a piece of clean flesh where there are no white scales: I am right at heart, though bad elsewhere." "Ah!" the priest would say, "you are unclean and I must put you away." Another would say, "It is true I have a whiteness upon my lips, but if you examine me you will find half my body quite free from the disease." "Ah, I must shut you out of the camp," said the priest. But last of all, there came one who said tremblingly to the priest, "I am leprous altogether, I cannot point to a spot as big as a pin's head that is clean, I am a leper from the sole of my foot to the crown of my head." The priest would put his hands on that man and say, "thou art clean." How astonished he must have been! Be you also astonished, O despairing soul. If ye are a sinner and nothing but a sinner, condemned, lost, ruined, and you will stand to that, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, you are clean every whit. Whenever we are brought to perfect soul poverty and absolute bankruptcy of spirit, so that we turn our purses inside out, and cannot find one rusty farthing left, then Christ and all the treasures of His grace are ours. Oh, to be brought down to the lowest depth of self-despair, for that is the door of hope. While your cup is half full, Christ will not pour His wine into it. You bring your cups and say, "Lord there is a little good at the bottom; does not that recommend me?" No, no, no; He will never pour in the new wine of the kingdom until you are turned bottom upwards, and wiped out as a man wipeth a dish; but when you are quite emptied then He will pour in the stream of His love until, it brims the vessel of your nature. The Lord make you to feel sick, even unto death, and then you will find Jesus to be the resurrection and the life.

THE OIL OF GLADNESS

" Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness : therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows."—Psalm xlv. 7.

WE know that the anointing received by our Lord Jesus Christ was the resting of the Spirit of God upon Him without measure. We are not left to any guesswork about this, for in Isaiah lxi. we are told, " The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me." Our Lord appropriated these very words to Himself when He went into the synagogue at Nazareth and opened the book at the place wherein these words are written, and said, " This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." The Apostle Peter also, in Acts x. 38, speaks of " How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power " : so that we know both on Old and New Testament authority that the anointing which rested upon the Lord Jesus Christ was the unction of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, by the " oil of gladness " which we have before us in the text is intended the Holy Spirit Himself, or one of the gracious results of His sacred presence. The divine Spirit has many attributes, and His benign influences operate in divers ways, bestowing upon us benefits of various kinds, too numerous for us to attempt to catalogue them. Amongst these is His comforting and cheering influence. " The fruit of the Spirit is joy." In Acts xiii. 52 we read, " The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." Wherever He comes as an anointing, whether upon the Lord or upon His people, upon the Christ or the Christians, upon the Anointed or upon those whom He anoints, in every case the ultimate result is joy and peace. On the head of our great High Priest He is joy, and this oil of gladness flows down to the skirts of His garments. To the Comforter, therefore, we ascribe " the oil of gladness."

From this great truth we learn another, namely, the perfect co-operation of the three persons of the blessed Trinity in the work of our redemption. The Father sends the Son, the Son with alacrity comes to redeem us, and the Spirit of God is upon Him ; so that Father, Son, and Spirit have each a part in the saving work, and the one God of heaven and earth is the God of salvation. A very interesting subject is the work of the Spirit upon the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see the Holy Ghost mysteriously operating in the formation and birth of the holy child Jesus, for by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost was He born of a woman. This work of the Holy Spirit was manifested to all believing eyes when the Lord Jesus came out of the waters of the Jordan after His baptism, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and rested upon Him. Before He was said to " wax strong in spirit," but afterwards He is described as " full of the Holy Ghost." Then was He led of the Spirit, and inspired by His divine energy, and this was shown throughout the whole of His life, for the Spirit was with Him in innumerable miracles and in the demonstration and power which followed His words, so that He spoke as one having authority, and not as the Scribes. In Him was abundantly fulfilled the prophecy which saith, " And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord ; And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord : and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears : But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." The Holy Spirit had also a peculiar interest in His resurrection, for He was " declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead." He was " put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." That same Spirit wrought even more fully when the Lord ascended up on high, and led captivity captive ; then, succeeding His ascension, the gifts of the cloven tongues of fire and the rushing mighty wind were witnessed by His disciples, for the Spirit of God was given abundantly to the Church in connection with the ascension of the Redeemer. Oh, how sweetly doth the Spirit co-operate with Christ at this very day ; for it is He that takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us. He is the abiding witness in the Church to the truth of the gospel, and the worker of all our gifts and graces. Jesus gives repentance, but the Spirit works it ; faith fixes upon Christ, but the Spirit of God first creates faith and opens the eye which looks to Jesus. The whole of this dispensation through it is the peculiar office of the Spirit of God to be revealing Christ to His people, and Christ in His people, and Christ in the midst of an ungodly and gainsaying generation, for a testimony against them. Blessed be the name of the Holy Spirit, that He is the divine anointing, and so proves His hearty assent to the great plan of redemption.

We now come, however, more closely to the test. The Spirit of God is here considered in one of His influences or operations as " the oil of gladness " : we shall speak of this in the following way. First, *the Saviour's anointing with gladness ;* secondly, *the reason for the bestowal of this oil of joy upon Him ;* and, thirdly, *the manner of the operation of this sacred anointing upon ourselves.*

I. Let us carefully consider THE SAVIOUR'S ANOINTING WITH GLADNESS. We are, perhaps, surprised to read of our Lord in connection with gladness. Truly He was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, yet this sorrowful aspect was that which He presented to the superficial outside observer ; and those who look within the veil of His flesh know well that a mystic glory shone within His soul. Did not David say of Him as the King of Israel—" His glory is great in Thy salvation : honour and majesty hast Thou laid upon Him. For Thou hast made Him most blessed for ever : Thou hast made Him exceeding glad with Thy countenance." I fully believe that there was never on the face of the earth a man who knew so profound and true a gladness as our blessed Lord. Did He not desire that His joy might be in His people that their joy might be full ? Does not benevolence beget joy, and who so kind as He ? Is it not a great joy to suffer self-sacrifice for beloved ones ? And who so disinterested as He ?

Is there not sure to be happiness in the heart where the noblest motives are paramount and the sweetest graces bear sway? And was not this pre-eminently the case with our Lord? Let us see.

The gladness of our Lord Jesus may be viewed, first, as *the gladness which He had* IN *His work.* The Son of God delighted in the work which His Father had given Him to do. This delight He declared as God, in the old eternity! "Lo I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O God." This delight He had shown as man even before His great public anointing, for when He was yet a child He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" Evidently, even while yet a youth, He anticipated with delight the great business which He had to do for His Father, and commencing in a measure to do it amongst the doctors in the temple at Jerusalem. But the day came in which He had reached the appointed age, and He at once went forth to John to be baptized by him in Jordan, being eager to fulfil all righteousness. Then the Spirit of God came down upon Him, and He was openly and visibly anointed, and you see from the moment when He began to stand before the public eye, with what alacrity He pursued His life work. We find Him fasting, but He has been speaking to a woman by the well's brink, and the joy which He has felt while blessing her has made Him quite forget the necessity for food, and He tells His disciples "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He felt great gladness in that woman's joy, as she believed in Him, and in the expectation of yet more numerous converts from those who were flocking from Samaria, of whom He said "Lift up now your eyes, for behold the fields are white already unto the harvest." That joy in His work made Him abhor all idea of turning from its awful consummation, and led Him to say to Peter's suggestion "Get thee behind Me, Satan." We see it also in such expressions as this, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." We read that when the time came that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. His frequent allusions to His own decease by a shameful death, all showed that He viewed with intense satisfaction the great object after which He was reaching. Once, indeed, His joy flowed over so that others could see it, when He said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." "At that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit." Let it never be forgotten that we must not expect to see in the life of Christ great ebullitions of manifest exultation, because He was sent on purpose to bear our sicknesses, and to be "stricken of God and afflicted." His deep joy was concealed by His many griefs, even as the inner glory of the Tabernacle of old was hidden beneath coverings of badgers' skins. He was the sun under a cloud, but He was the sun still. If you have a small burden to carry, you may have an excess of strength which you can display in leaping or running, but if you have an enormous load to sustain, your steady bearing of it may be an equally sure proof of your strength: so also, if your trials are light, your joyous spirits may vent themselves in smiles and songs, but if you are severely afflicted it will need all your joyfulness to keep you from sinking. Our blessed Lord had a load upon Him infinitely transcending any weight of sorrow ever borne by the most burdened of His people, and it needed the wonderful joy which I feel sure we are justified in ascribing to Him to balance the marvellous grief which he had to endure. The uplifting influence of this joy sufficed to bring Him into a condition of calm, quiet, serene majesty of spirit. Nothing strikes you more in the Saviour than the quiet peacefulness with which He pursues the even tenor of His way. Now, if He had not possessed great stores of secret joy His spirit would have been famished for want of sustenance. You would have found Him constantly sighing and weeping; His words and tones would have become a terror to those around Him, and His whole appearance would have appeared melancholy and depressing to the last degree, whereas His manner was cheerful and attractive—let the little children who thronged around Him bear witness to that. He was a Man of Sorrows, but He was not a preacher of sorrows, neither do His life or His discourses leave an unhappy impression upon the mind. The fact, probably, is, that He was both the greatest rejoicer and the greatest mourner that ever lived, and between these two there was an equilibrium of mind kept up, so that wherever you meet Him, with the exception of His agony in the garden, He is peaceful and serene. You neither see Him dancing like David before the ark, nor yet like David bewailing the loss of one he loved with a "Would God I had died for thee." He does not, like Elijah, run before the king's chariot, nor lie down under the juniper to die. He neither strives nor cries, nor causes His voice to be heard in the streets; His peace is like a river, and His heart abides in the Sabbath of God.

We see, then, that *in* his work our great High Priest was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows, but we also note that those who are His fellows do in their degree partake in this oil of gladness, and are enabled to feel joy in the work which is appointed them of the Lord. While our King is anointed with the oil of gladness it is also written of the virgin souls who wait upon His Church, "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought, they shall enter into the King's palace." If any professing Christian man here is engaged in a work which he does not feel glad to do, I question if he is in his right place. Occasional fits of depression there may be, but these are not because we do not love the work, but because we cannot do it so well as we would desire. We are tired in the work, but not tired of it. The Lord loves to employ willing workmen. His army is not made up of pressed men, but of those whom grace has made volunteers. "Serve the Lord with gladness." Our Lord does not set us task work, and treat us like prisoners in gaol, or slaves under the lash. I sometimes hear our life-work called a task. Well, the expression may be tolerated, but I confess I do not like it to be applied to Christian men. It is no task to me at any rate to preach my Master's gospel, or to serve Him in any way. I thank God every day that "to me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." You teachers in the school, I hope your labour of love is not a bondage to you! An unwilling teacher will soon make unwilling scholars. Yea, I know that those of you who serve the Lord find a reward in the work itself, and gladly pursue it. I am sure you will not prosper in it if it be not so. If you follow your work unwillingly, and regret that you ever undertook it, and feel encumbered by it, you will do no good.

No man wins a race who has no heart in the running. In this respect the joy of the Lord is your strength, and as your Master was anointed with the oil of gladness in His work, so must you be. Yet, beloved fellow-labourer, you will never be so glad in your work as *He* was in His, nor will you ever be able to prove that gladness by such self-denials, by such agonies, and such a death. He has proved how glad He was to save sinners, because "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." Blessed Emanuel, Thou art justly anointed with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.

We further note that our Lord had this oil of gladness FROM *His work*. Even while He was engaged in it He derived some joy from it, though it was but as the gleanings of the vintage compared with the after results. He did reap in joy as well as sow in tears, for many became His disciples, and over each one of these He rejoiced. It was impossible that the Good Shepherd should have saved so many sheep as He did without rejoicing when He threw them on His shoulders to bear them to the fold. Assuredly He rejoiced that He had found the sheep which He had lost. But the fulness of His joy was left till after He had ascended on high, then indeed was He anointed with the oil of gladness, and the voice was heard, "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." My brethren, the joy of our Lord Jesus Christ now that He knows His beloved are securely His, and no longer the slaves of sin and heirs of wrath, is too great to be measured. He has redeemed unto Himself a people in whom His soul delights. For them the price is fully paid, for them the penalty has been completely endured, for them all chains are broken, and for them the prison house is razed to its foundation: for them hath He bruised the serpent's head, for them hath He by death destroyed death, and led captive him that had the power of death, even the devil.

> "All His work and warfare done,
> He into His heaven is gone,
> And before His Father's throne,
> Now is pleading for His own."

He now continues to receive into His joy the multitudes whom the Spirit brings to Him, for whom of old He shed His precious blood. You cannot conceive the gladness of Christ. If you have ever brought one soul to Christ you have had a drop of it, but His gladness lies not only in receiving them, but in actually being the Author of salvation to every one of them. The Saviour looks upon the redeemed with an unspeakable delight, thinks of what they used to be, thinks of what they would have been but for His interposition, thinks of what they now are, thinks of what He means to make them in that great day when they shall rise from the dead; and as His heart is full of love to them He joys in their joy, and exults in their exultation. Their heavens swell their Mediator's heaven, and their myriad embodiments of bliss, each one reflects His own felicity, and so (speaking after the manner of men) increases it, for He lives ten thousand lives by living in them, and joys unnumbered joys in their joys. I speak with humblest fear lest in any word I should speak amiss, for He is God as well as man, but this is certain, that there is a joy of our Lord into which He will give His faithful ones to enter, a joy which He has won by passing through the shame and grief by which He has redeemed mankind. The oil of gladness is abundantly poured on that head which once was crowned with thorns.

Now, brethren, you, also, can be partakers in this joy. When He makes you in your little measure to be instrumentally saviours of others, then you also partake of His gladness; but as I have said before, you cannot know its fulness, for He is in this respect anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me." Returning from the battle and the spoil He has a joy with which none can intermeddle, for His own right hand and His holy arm hath gotten unto Him the victory.

Again, our Lord Jesus has the oil of gladness poured upon Him in another sense, namely, because *His person and His work are the cause of ineffable gladness in others*. Oh, I wish I had a week in which to talk upon this point—a week—one could scarcely enter upon the theme in that time! We sang just now—

> "Jesus, *the very thought* of Thee
> With sweetness fills my breast."

The oil of gladness upon Him is so sweet that we have only to think upon it and it fills us with delight. There is gladness in His very name.

> "Exult all hearts with gladness
> At sound of Jesu's name;
> What other hath such sweetness,
> Or such delight can claim?"

What gladness He created when here below. His birth set the skies ringing with heavenly music, and made the hearts of expectant saints to leap for joy. In after days a touch of the hem of His garment made a woman's heart glad when she felt the issue of her blood staunched, and a word from His lips made the tongue of the dumb to sing. For Him to lay His hand upon the sick was to raise them from their beds of sickness, and deliver them from pain and disease. His touch was gladness then, and a spiritual touch is the same now. To-day to preach of Him is gladness, to sing of Him is gladness, to trust Him is gladness, to work for Him is gladness, to have communion with Him is gladness. To come to His table, and there to feast with Him, is gladness; to see His image in the eyes of His saints is gladness; to see that image only as yet begun to form in the heart of a young convert is gladness. Everything about Him is gladness. All His garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Nothing comes within a mile of Him but what it makes you glad to think that He has been so near it. The very print of His foot has comfort in it, and the wounds in His hands are windows of hope. I have known some who have had to carry a cross for His dear sake, and they have kissed and hugged that cross, and gloried in their tribulations because they were borne for Him. Fellowship with Him has turned the bitterest potion into generous wine. Beloved, if these distant glimpses are so precious, what must it be to see Him face to face? I have tried to conceive it, and I protest that even in attempting the conception my spirit seems to swoon at the prospect of such supreme delight.

Only to hear the music of His footfall on the other side the partition wall raises longings in my heart too strong, too eager to be long endured. What, death, art thou all that divides me from seeing my Lord? I would gladly die a million deaths to see Him as He is and to be like Him. What, a slumber in the grave for this poor body! Is that all I have to dread? Then let it slumber, and let the worms consume it, for "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Oh, what will it be to see *Him?* To see HIM that loved us so, to mark the wounds with which He purchased our redemption, to behold His glory, to listen to that dear voice of His, and to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." To lie in His bosom for ever, truly neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard the like of this bliss. More than the bride longs for the marriage day do we expect the bridal feast of heaven, but of all the dainties on that royal table there will not be one that will be equal to Himself, for to see Him will be all the heaven we desire. He is better than heaven's harp or angels, and the cause of greater gladness than streets of gold or walls of jasper.

Brethren, can we share this power to distribute joy? Assuredly we can. If the Lord Jesus be with us we can give joy to others. I know some whose very presence comforts their fellows; their words are so full of consolation, and their hearts so overflowing with sympathy that they make gladness wherever they go. Aye, but the best of you, ye sons of consolation, are not anointed with the oil of gladness to the same extent as He was. Above His fellows, even above Barnabas the son of consolation; above the best and the tenderest sympathizers is He thus anointed, and from Him there pours forth a continual stream of effectual consolation which becomes the oil of joy to those who wear the garments of heaviness. Thus much upon the first point, the Saviour's anointing of gladness.

II. Let us now consider THE REASON FOR THE BESTOWAL OF THIS ANOINTING UPON HIM. It is given in the text. He is anointed above His fellows, because it is said of Him, "*Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness.*" The perfect righteousness of Christ has brought to Him this gladness, because perfect holiness there must be before there can be perfect happiness. Sin is the enemy of joy. Let the sinner say what he likes, sin can no more dwell with real joy than the lion will lie down with the lamb. To be perfectly glad you must be perfectly cleansed from sin, for until you are so cleansed you cannot possess the oil of gladness to the measure that Christ possessed it. As the believer is delivered from the power of sin he is brought into a condition in which the joy of the Lord can more and more abide in him. Now, every way Jesus loved righteousness intensely and hated wickedness intensely. He died that He might establish righteousness; and that He might destroy wickedness from off the face of the earth; therefore it is that He has greater gladness, because He had greater holiness. Moreover, you know that in any holy enterprise if the business succeeds the joy of the worker is proportionate to the trial it has cost him. In the great battle of righteousness our Lord has led the van, in the great fight against wickedness our Saviour has borne the brunt of the battle; therefore, because He to the death loved righteousness and to the agony and bloody sweat strove against sin, the accomplished conquest brings Him the greatest joy. He has done the most for the good cause, and therefore He is anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows.

Now, note there is another reason why He is anointed, and there is another view of the anointing. He is anointed above His fellows, which shows that those who are in fellowship with Him are anointed too. You observed in our reading that the high priest had the oil poured on his head, but the sons of Aaron who were minor priests were sprinkled with this same oil mixed with the blood of the sacrifice. On Christ this anointing is poured above His fellows, and then upon His fellows in communion with Himself there comes the sprinkling of the oil. We have our measure; He has it without measure. Now, beloved, Christ is anointed above His fellows that His fellows may be anointed with Him. Even as He ascended above all things that He might fill all things, so is He anointed above His fellows that He may anoint His fellows; and through the power of the anointing we are told that His people come into the same condition of righteousness as Himself. Turn to Isaiah lxi., which passage we have already had before us, and you find as follows—"To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that"—mark this!—"*that they might be called trees of righteousness.*" Now, observe, that we first read, "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness, therefore God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness," and then we meet with the parallel with reference to ourselves, "The oil of joy for mourning, that they may be called trees of righteousness." He is anointed because He is righteous; we are anointed that we may be righteous, and thus in Christ we come into the condition in which it is safe for us to be glad, and possible for joy to dwell in us. To the unrighteous the oil of gladness cannot come, but to the righteous there ariseth light even in darkness. "There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked." The holy oil was forbidden to be placed upon a stranger to God's holy house; and upon man's flesh it could not be poured, because man's flesh is a corrupt, polluted thing. This oil of gladness comes only on those who are born into God's Israel by regeneration, and are delivered from walking after the flesh; these the Lord makes to be as "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." See then the two reasons why Christ has received the anointing, first because He is righteous Himself; and secondly, that He may make others righteous. Therefore is the Spirit of the Lord God upon Him that He may give the oil of joy to His own chosen, and make them righteous, even as He is righteous, glad as He is glad.

III. We will now meditate upon THE MANNER OF THE OPERATION OF THIS OIL OF GLADNESS UPON US. Jesus is anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. Now, we have to show that His fellows are anointed with the oil of gladness too. Did not David say, "Thou anointest mine head with oil; my cup runneth over"? so that we can say of ourselves what we say of our Lord, we are anointed, for He was anointed. Now, in what respects does the anointing of the Holy Spirit give us gladness? I shall notice eight things, and touch but very briefly on each.

First, we too, through Jesus Christ, are *anointed*

to an office, "for He hath made us"—whisper it to one another in the joy of delight—"He hath made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign for ever and ever." When the oil went on Aaron's head, you know how it ran down his beard, even Aaron's beard, unto the skirts of his garments, and now this day this anointing oil, which made the king and the priest, has fallen upon us too. Blessed be His name, shall we not be glad? It is very inconsistent with our position if we are not. Are you a king and do you not rejoice?

"Why should the children of our King
Go mourning all their days?
Sweet Comforter, descend and bring
Some unction of Thy grace."

May the gladness now come to you. You are priests to God. Shall the anointed priests serve their Lord with gloomy countenances? No: rejoice in the Lord always, all ye priests of His that are anointed to this blessed work. "Bless the Lord, O house of Israel: bless the Lord, O house of Aaron."

We, too, are *consecrated to the Lord*, for the oil poured upon the priest was the oil of consecration. From that time forward he was a dedicated man; he could not serve anyone but God; he, above all the rest of the congregation, was the man of God for ever as long as ever he lived. So beloved, we have been consecrated: the Spirit of God has sanctified us and set us apart unto the Lord, as it is written, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." Our Lord said in His matchless prayer, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Sanctify them," said He, "by Thy truth, Thy word is truth." Yes, blessed be God, we are consecrated men and women: we belong to the Lord, and are vessels for the Master's use, hallowed from all other uses to be the Lord's. "For I will be to them a God, they shall be to Me a people." Does not this make you glad? Are you really set apart to be the Lord's own sons and daughters, and hallowed to be used by Him in His service both here and hereafter, and do you not rejoice? O my soul, dost thou not feel the trickling of the consecrating oil adown thy brow even now, and does it not make thy face to shine and make thy heart happy, because thou art now the Lord's?

Thirdly, by this oil we are also *qualified for our office*. You see the Spirit descended upon Christ that He might have the spirit of wisdom, and power, and so be strengthened and qualified to discharge His sacred work. Now, the Spirit of God is upon every believer in this sense. Remember how in his First Epistle, second chapter, and twentieth verse, John says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things," or "ye are able to discern all things." And further on, in that same chapter, he says, "This anointing teacheth you all things." Well, if we are to serve the Lord a main gift is knowledge, for how can we instruct the ignorant, or guide the perplexed, except we know ourselves? And it is this anointing which teaches us, and makes us fit for the service to which the Master has called us. Oh, does the Holy Spirit then lead us into all truth, and give us knowledge, and shall we not rejoice? Ignorance means sorrow, but the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ means joy. O brethren, will ye not bless God to-day for what the Spirit of God has taught you? If you do not, what must you be made of? for He has taught you such wonderful lessons so full of joy. Even if He has never taught you more than this, that whereas you were once blind now you see, He has taught you enough to make your heart rejoice as long as you live. Is He not the oil of gladness?

Fourthly, the Spirit of God *heals us of our diseases*. The Eastern mode of medicine was generally the application of oil, and I should not wonder if in the course of years it should be discovered that the modern pharmacy, with all its drugs, is not worth so much as the old-fashioned method. Certainly, when the Holy Spirit spake concerning sick men, and advised that medicines should be used, and prayer for their restoration, He prescribed anointing with oil. I suppose that anointing with oil was mentioned because it was the current medicine of the times, but it could not have been injurious or altogether absurd, or the Holy Spirit would not in any measure have sanctioned it. I will not raise the question, however. But a frequent medicine of the olden time was, undoubtedly, anointing with oil, and it is well known that olive oil does possess very remarkable healing qualities. I have read in books of one or two instances of the bites of serpents having the venom effectually removed by the use of olive oil. It is more commonly used in countries where it grows than here, and it is in many ways a very useful medicine. Certainly the Holy Spirit is that to us. What wounds and bruises have been healed with this oil. Before the Spirit came they were putrefying, they had not been bound up nor mollified with ointment, but now this ointment, mixed after the art of the apothecary, with the costliest spices, has effectually healed us, and what remains of the old sores and wounds it continues still to heal; and so wonderful is its power it will ultimately take out every scar, and we shall be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing through its healing power. Shall we not, therefore, be glad and rejoice in the Lord, for if restoration to health makes us happy surely the renewal of our spiritual youth should make our hearts bound for joy?

Thus also we are *suppled and softened*. Oil applied to the body supples and softens, and, believe me, brethren, nothing is more akin to joy than softness and tenderness of heart. If ever you meet with a hard-hearted proud man, he is not a happy man and if he should seem to be happy in his pride it is a dangerous and deadly happiness, and the sooner it is taken away the better. Where God dwells is heaven, and where does He dwell? With the humble and the contrite heart. That is a beautiful expression of David's, I have drank joy out of it, "Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." Oh, there is never a bone in manhood's system that knows how to rejoice till God has broken it, and when it is broken then comes the mighty Physician and applies the oil and restores the bone to infinitely more than its former strength, and then the bones which had been broken become each one so many new arguments for gratitude, and all our healed wounds become mouths of praise unto the Most High. We are thus softened and gladdened.

By the oil of the Holy Spirit we are also *strengthened*. Oil well rubbed into the system was anciently assumed to be a great strengthener, and I suppose it was. Certainly the Holy Spirit is the strength of Christians, and where He is the strength there is sure to be joy. "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Oil, too, is a *beautifier*. The Easterns did not think themselves fit for their banquets till they had washed their face and anointed themselves with perfumed oil. They were very fond of locks dripping with oil and faces bright therewith. Certainly there is a beauty which the Spirit gives to men, which they can never obtain in any other way. Oh, the excellence of the character that is formed by the hand of the Spirit of God! It is a beautiful thing which even God Himself delights to look upon; it is a thing of beauty, and in the most emphatic sense a joy for ever. He that is made comely with the comeliness which the Holy Spirit gives must be a happy man. Other beauty may bring sorrow, but the beauty of holiness makes us akin to angels.

Once more, it becomes a *perfume*. When oil was poured on a man his presence scented the air around him, and when the Spirit of God is given to us it is perceived by other spiritual minds. Cannot you detect in a brother's prayer that he has been with Jesus? Do you not know by the lives of some of Christ's dear saints that He is very familiar with them? Do you not perceive that they have had a special anointing? The ungodly world cannot tell it, but saints discern it. The nostril of the wicked is only pleased by the leeks, and the garlic, and the onions of Egypt, but the believing nostril has been sanctified, and it perceives the delicate myrrh and cinnamon, and sweet calamus and cassia, which make up the anointing oil. The rare combination of sacred qualities which make up a holy character will be seen in the believer in whom the Holy Spirit displays His power, and as a consequence he will be glad at heart.

Furthermore, I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now, for the time is spent. Therefore I will only say, I pray, brethren, that the anointing may be ours in all the various senses I have mentioned. I should like all of you to go away happy. You children of God, be as glad as ever you can be. I would to God that a sacred gladness rang through this house like a marriage peal: yet for all that, do not forget that Jesus has joy above you all. You may be very glad, but *He* is gladder still. You may sing His praises, but He leads the sacred orchestra of heaven. "In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee," saith He. Rejoice in His joy. I have often thought it did not matter any more what became of me so long as *He* is victorious. A soldier in battle, sorely wounded, lies bleeding in a ditch, but he hears the sound of the trumpets, and they tell him the commander is coming along, the King for whom his loyal heart is willing to bleed, and he enquires, "Have they won the day?" "Oh, yes," they say, "he has won the day, and the enemy are flying before him." The soldier exclaims, "Thank God, I can die." It is the soldier's joy to die with victory ringing in his ears. Our Lord is glad, and therefore we are glad.

> "Let Him be crowned with majesty
> Who bowed His head to death,
> And be His honour sounded high,
> By all things that have breath."

If it be so we will be content to say, like David, "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended." We have no more to pray for; we have done with the world, done with wishing, done with everything if Christ reigns, and all things are under His foot. May this joy be yours. Amen.

EARTHQUAKE, BUT NOT HEARTQUAKE

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."—Psalm xlvi. 1—3.

THIS psalm is a song for all Israel; for all who are truly the chosen of God, called to be His own people, should exhibit a fearless courage. The peace of God which passeth all understanding should keep the hearts and minds of all who rest in God. If, indeed, the Lord be our refuge and strength, we are entitled to seek after a spirit which shall bear us above the dreads of common men. It is not every man that can sing this psalm; he must belong to the believing company, he must have God to be his God, and he must, like Israel, have learned the art of prevailing prayer, or else he cannot sing the song of peace amid commotion and calamity. No man can truly sing this psalm but those who are redeemed from the earth.

While this is a psalm for all Israel, it is specially marked as committed to the charge of the sons of Korah. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram perished because of their presumption: they went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them. They and all that appertained unto them were swallowed up; only we are astonished to read, "Notwithstanding, the children of Korah died not." I attribute their singular escape to the sovereign grace of God, who spared them when their kinsmen were destroyed. They were made singers in the courts of the Lord, and surely they would sing with peculiar emphasis these words, "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed." They saw the earth open her mouth and swallow up the offenders of their household while they themselves were preserved by sovereign grace. Surely the tears must have stood in their eyes when they sang this verse, and thought of the opening gulf at their feet. The circumstance under which a man is saved will influence the rest of his life. To be saved of God from between the teeth of judgment is a rescue so special and vivid that the subject of it learns henceforth to sing aloud unto the preserving Lord. Delivered from so great a death, believers learn to trust that the Lord will yet deliver them. When conversion is specially remarkable, the music of gratitude is pitched in a high key, and the converts reach to notes which are impossible to others. It is for sons of Korah to sing, "Therefore will not we fear."

It is significant, also, that this psalm was to be

sung " upon Alamoth," which in all probability means that it was to be set to music suitable for virgin voices. The hallelujah at the Red Sea was chiefly in the hands of Miriam and the maidens of Israel: she took her timbrel, and the daughters of Israel followed after her, singing unto the Lord. This is a psalm of the same sort. Ye virgin souls, arise and sing unto God, your refuge and strength. Awake, ye hearts that follow the Lord fully in the fervour of your first love, and lift your voices to the Lord. Come, ye that have been kept pure and undefiled in your word and way, you whose hearts are chaste to the love of Jesus Christ, you are called upon above all others to sing, " God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

It was because Luther's heart was chaste towards God, and his whole mind virgin towards divine truth, that he delighted to sing this psalm. In the days of the most furious opposition he was wont to say to Melancthon, " Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm, and let the devil do his worst." So, too, when Luther was dead, Melancthon heard a girl singing this psalm, and he said to her, " Sing on, dear daughter mine, thou knowest not what comfort thou bringest to my heart." We read of the armies of Gustavus Adolphus singing this psalm before their victory at Leipzic. So, you see, the young, the simple, the guileless may sing that which nerves warriors for the battle.

" God our refuge and our strength,
In straits a present aid ;
Therefore, although the earth remove,
We will not be afraid."

This morning, as I shall be enabled, I shall say a little, first, upon *the confidence of the saints :* " God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Then I will speak upon *the courage which grows out of it :* " Therefore will not we fear." We shall close with a brief survey of *the conflicts to which that courage will be sure to be exposed :* " Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

I. First, then, let us carefully consider THE CONFIDENCE OF THE SAINTS.

God's people have a sure confidence. Other men build as best they may, but true believers rest upon the Rock of Ages. *Their confidence is altogether beyond themselves.* In this song there is nothing about their own virtue, valour, or wisdom. The heathen moralist boasted that if the globe itself should break, his integrity would make him stand fearless amid the wreck. But the believer has a humbler though a truer reliance. Though the earth be removed he is undismayed ; and this does not arise from his own personal self-sufficiency, but from God, who is his refuge and strength. He is fearless, not because of his original stoutness of heart and natural firmness of will, but because he has a God to shelter and uphold him. If he does not fear calamity, it is because he fears God, and God alone. Our psalm begins with God, and with God it ends :—" The God of Jacob is our refuge." We may be as timid by nature as the coneys, but God is our refuge ; we are as weak by nature as bruised reeds, but God is our strength. We never know what strength is till our own weakness drives us to trust omnipotence ; never understand how safe our refuge is till all other refuges fail us. When the earth is removed, and the waters of the sea roar and are troubled ; being driven both from land and sea, we hide ourselves in God. You who are strong in yourselves imagine strength where only weakness can be found ; you seek the living among the dead, and substantial confidences amid the " vanity of vanities." If we look to ourselves for courage we shall fail in the hour of trial. When the earth is removed, the mightiest men are the first to shudder ; the greatest boasters become the worst cowards. For confidence and peace we must say unto the Lord, " All my fresh springs are in Thee."

This confidence is gained by an appropriating faith. Peace comes to me, not only by what God is, but by what God is *to me.* " God is *our* refuge and strength." " This God is *our* God." You never enjoy the goodness and greatness of God if you view them in an abstract manner ; you must grasp them as your own. It seems a daring act for a man to appropriate God, and yet the Lord invites us to do it ; He says, " Let him take hold of My strength."

Why hesitate to make the appropriation ? Look at the men of the world ; they would appropriate the whole earth if they could—continents are not too wide. It is no fault of theirs if they do not hedge in the stars, and monopolize the sun. And shall not the Christian appropriate those heavenly things of which he is made the heir—an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ, Jesus ? Let us join with the prophet Jeremiah in his comfortable soliloquy : " The Lord is my portion saith my soul ; therefore will I hope in Him." As with Thomas we behold the print of the nails, let us say unto our blessed Redeemer—" *My* Lord and *my* God." The deep grace which is our right and privilege will not be ours unless, with assured faith, we take the Lord to be ours in all the fulness of His love. Come, let us now say—" God is our refuge and strength."

This confidence will be greatly sustained by a clear knowledge of God. " Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace : thereby good shall come unto thee." If we were greater students of God, how much happier we should be ! Pope said, " The proper study of mankind is man." It is a deplorably barren subject. Say, rather, " The proper study of mankind is God." When men of God make God their study, then they discover in Him those things which make Him a refuge for their hours of danger, a strength for days of labour, and a help for emergencies of every kind. We ought to be able to say more of God to-day than we could a few years ago : our general notion should now branch out into instructive particulars. We ought now to see the varied blessings which come to us from God, and to speak of Him under a threefold description as " our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." We notice under the Old Testament dispensation that certain sacrifices, like the doves and pigeons, which were brought by poor Israelites, were simply cut in two, and thus were laid on the altar. But other offerings which were brought by richer Israelites were more carefully divided. Take the offering of the rich to represent, as a type, the ideas of those who are well taught in knowledge and have a greater experience of the things of God, and then you see how matters of detail were mentioned. When bullocks were presented we read of the fat, and the head, and the legs, and the inwards : so here we read of refuge, and strength, and help. The more we

know the Lord, the more shall we perceive that He is full of blessings to us. "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." You shall be saved by the little knowledge which trusts God; but your peace shall be far fuller and deeper if you know the deep things of God and understand the secrets thereof; for then you shall not be afraid of evil tidings, since your heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. If you are as yet a timid believer, seek to grow in the knowledge of God; for thus shall you learn to say, "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed." Half our fears are the result of ignorance. Truth as yet unknown would greatly encourage us if we did but perceive it. If we knew more of God we should be bold as lions. Wherefore I exhort all true believers here to dwell much in the presence of God, and ask to be instructed in the nature, the character, the attributes of God: yea, the purpose, the promise, and the providence of the covenant God of Israel. To know Him is life eternal. Solid peace, which no calamity can destroy, must come from God; from God appropriated; and from God growingly known.

All this will be certified to us by our experience. This psalm is best sung by men and women who know what they are singing, because they have felt the preserving and delivering grace of God. I shall put it to you this morning, you that know the Lord, can you say by experience, "God is our refuge"? You have fled to Him: have you not found a shelter in Him? There have been times of trial so severe that you could not endure its force, but were compelled to flee from it. You fled to God: was His door closed against you? Did He bid you go elsewhere? Did He upbraid you for your presumption? And when you have hidden yourself in God, let me ask you, has He not afforded you a very blessed retreat? When you have entered into your chamber, and shut to your door, and hidden yourself with God, have you not been at perfect peace? Yes, you have been as safe and as happy as Noah when the Lord shut him in. Look at the little chicks yonder, under the hen! See how they bury their little heads in the feathers of her warm bosom! Hear their little chirp of perfect happiness, as they nestle beneath the mother's wing! "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be Thy shield and buckler." Have you not found it so? My happiest hours have not been in the days of my mirth, but in the nights of my sorrow. When all waters are bitter, the cup of divine consolation is all the sweeter. For brightness, give me not the sunlight, but that superior glory with which the Lord lights up the darkness of affliction. It is not necessary to happiness that a man should be prosperous in business, or applauded by mankind: it is only needful that the Lord should smile on him. It is not essential to happiness that he should be in good health, or even that he should be naturally of cheerful spirit: God gives the truest health in sickness, and the tenderest joy amid depression. Brethren, "God is our refuge." It is many a day since first we went to Him, and we have been many times since, but He has never failed us once. I appeal to the aged and the experienced here, and I know that the older they are and the more tried they have been, the more stedfastly will they bear their witness that "God is a refuge for us."

We can also say that God has been our strength. When we have not been afflicted, but have had arduous labour to perform for God, we have been made to feel and mourn our weakness, and then the Lord has made us to glory in infirmity, because His power has rested on us. What multiform shapes that strength has taken! Many of you have had strength for the daily battle of business life, others for domestic life. Under fierce temptations you remain unconquered, under stern duties you remain unwearied, you have had strength for exhausting service or crushing suffering. Had you been left to your own wit and wisdom, they alone could never have sufficed you; strength of mind has been given from above. See the widow, left penniless, who has brought up a family of children! Can she tell how she did it? See the girl placed amid coarse and brutal men of licentious character; she remains pure; but can she tell you how? God is our strength in ways unknown to ourselves. Our trials are all different. No two of us have proved the Lord in exactly the same way, but yet our testimony is uniform; the Lord has been all-sufficient, His strength is perfect. Thus far we find that promise good, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

We have also proved another thing, namely, that God is "a very present help in trouble." We have had helpers after the flesh who have not been present when we wanted them—perhaps they have studiously kept out of the way: at any rate, just at the pinch when we have said, "Oh, that so-and-so were here," our friend has been at the end of the earth. But it has never been so with God. Has He not said, "Before they call I will answer them, and while they are yet speaking I will hear"? Just there where the burden pressed, God has been immediately present to lighten the load. He is not only present, but *very* present. More present than our nearest friend when most present. God's presence permeates us. He is not only by our side, but He is within us, in the heart of our thoughts, at the springs of our life. Beloved, you have sometimes complained that God was absent from you. Because of your sin He has hidden His face from you; but let me ask you, did you ever find the Lord absent in your hour of trial? In the burning furnace, if ever anywhere, you shall see "one like unto the Son of God." He has said, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." Wherever else He may be supposed to be absent, He will be sure to be present in trouble. Now, this is matter of experience; and because we have experienced it, therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed. Having already tried and tested God, we are not going to doubt Him now. We feel something of the mind of Sir Francis Drake, who, after he had sailed round the world, was buffeted with a storm in the Thames. "What!" said he, "have we sailed round the world safely, and shall we be drowned in a ditch?" So do we say at this day. Helped so long, and helped so often! God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, why should we fear? How dare we fear?

Once more, dear friends, in order to realize the fearlessness of which this text so sweetly singeth, we must not only have a past experience at our back, but *an immediate enjoyment of the divine help.* If you can truly sing in your soul, "God *is* my refuge and my strength," then it will be impossible for you to be afraid. A sense of the nearness and graciousness of God will be an antidote to fear. I know that it is so in alarms and distresses which come under my observation. I have often stood at the bedsides of dear brethren and sisters, members of this church, when they have come to die, and I have, without exception,

always found them perfectly restful and free from fear. It is a sorrow to see friends full of pain, and to know that they are dying; but the various interviews that I have had with the departing have left no impression of gloom on my mind; but the very reverse. I came this week out of a quiet bed-chamber where I saw a Sunday-school teacher passing away. It was a little sanctuary. Everything so quiet, peaceful, happy. Death cast no shadow over the sweet face. Heaven lighted the features. It seemed more like a marriage-day than a death-day. Why are these dying beds so happy? Because these people have any goodness of their own? Far from it; without exception they disown it. Because they are strong and self-contained? No. I might speak of young and old believers, greatly emaciated by long sickness, and yet as greatly strong in faith. What brings this peace? Truly, the Lord was there. His presence realized makes death a small matter. Do we not sing—

> "Oh, if my Lord would come and meet,
> My soul should stretch her wings in haste,
> Fly fearless through death's iron gate,
> Nor feel the terrors as she pass'd"?

The presence of God with the soul of a believer swallows up death in victory, and aught else that is terrible in time or in eternity loses its terror in the presence of the mighty God of Jacob. Thus have I shown you where the confidence of the Christian really lies.

II. I come, secondly, to notice THE COURAGE WHICH GROWS OUT OF IT.

This courage is very full and complete. "Therefore will not we *fear*." It does not say, "Therefore will not we run away," but, "Therefore will not we *fear*." It doth not even say, "Therefore will not we faint and swoon in dread," but, "Therefore will not we fear." The presence of God does so stay the soul and quiet the heart, that fear, which hath torment, is driven away. Nature feareth, it could not be otherwise; but through grace the heaven-born spirit triumphs over nature and its fear. God does not take away from us those natural fears which lead us to seek the preservation of life; but He masters them by a serene security of heart produced by His presence. We are perplexed, but not in despair. We see the position to be full of danger, and yet we know that we are in no danger, the Lord being near. "Therefore will not we fear." It is a most delightful thing, when the heart is placid, because we believe in God and in His Christ. This peace is the peace of God which passeth all understanding; no pretence of peace, but a divine reality which the world can neither create nor destroy.

Then, further, *this courage is logically justifiable.* It is not the courage of nature, which may be a mere brute virtue, such as dogs and bulls possess. Neither does it grow out of want of feeling. The courage of the Christian is not the hardness of the Stoic. The Stoic boasts that he does not feel; the Christian does feel, feels as keenly as anybody, and much more than most; and yet, for all that, the conscious love of God lifts him above fear. The believer's fearlessness is founded upon argument, and so the Psalmist words it, "*Therefore* will not we fear." Because God is present as the refuge of His people, it is unreasonable for them to fear.

Observe, then, dear friends, that whatever happens to the man who has God to be his God, he need not fear, because none of these things will affect the ground of his confidence. No calamity will change God's love to us. Suppose we should witness an earthquake, a tempest, a famine, a pestilence, a war; none of these would separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. These temporal calamities do not touch the vital matter: such things have no influence upon the unchangeable love of God, except it be to make it more clear.

Suppose, again, that the most awful things were to occur, would they not occur according to God's decree? We believe in a God who has arranged all things according to the counsel of His will. Do you believe that anything is left to chance? Is any event outside the circle of the divine predestination? No, my brethren, with God there are no contingencies. The mighty Charioteer of Providence has gathered up all the reins of all the horses, and He guides them all according to His infallible wisdom. There is a foreknowledge and predestination which concerneth all things, from the motion of a grain of dust on the threshing-floor to that of the flaming comet which blazes athwart the sky. Nothing can happen but what God ordains; and, therefore, why should we fear?

Again, nothing happens without the divine power being in it. The Lord saith, "Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire. I have created the waster to destroy." The most violent and wicked men could not move a finger if strength were not lent them by the Lord. As for the catastrophes of nature, is not the Lord distinctly in them? Who shakes the earth? Is it not God that looketh on it and it trembleth? When the mountains vomit fire, is it not because He toucheth the hills and they smoke? Our Father worketh all things; wherefore should His children be afraid?

Furthermore, do not you and I believe that God overrules everything; that even that which naturally might be called evil is turned to good account? The Lord's goodness extracts the viper's tooth, and supplies an antidote to the poison. Evil was it, but God transmuted it into good by the alchemy of His divine wisdom. Who is he that can harm you? "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."

Furthermore, we know that nothing that can happen, however tremendous it may be, can shake the kingdom of God. Our chief possession lies in that kingdom, and if that is secure, all is safe. The gates of hell shall not prevail against that kingdom; therefore, whatever is imperilled, our highest, best, and most vital interests are safe beyond the shadow of harm. Suppose an accident should take away our lives; I smile as I think that the worst thing that could happen would be the best thing that could happen. If we should die, we should but the sooner be "for ever with the Lord." If in the quiver of God's providence there should lie an arrow which shall to-day bring us death, it would also bring us glory. So, if the worst that can befall us is the best that can come, why should we fear? I think this is good reasoning, is it not? If you are a believer indeed, and if God be your refuge and your strength, there is a logical reason why you should not yield to alarm.

Now, *this fearlessness is exceedingly profitable.* If a man is able to contain himself, and possess his soul in patience through the presence of God, he will not do that which is foolish. Men when they are frightened are in hot haste, and hurry themselves into folly. As

if they were turned to children, men in their alarm will act without reason: in fact, terror is a kind of madness. Many absurd actions have been performed under the influence of panic. In times of danger the man who is calm is the most ready to use the proper means of escape. Presence of mind is invaluable, and the best way to secure presence of mind is to believe in the presence of God. In cases of sickness, the patient who does not fret is the most likely to be cured. We have had among us just now instances of dear friends in this church, who have been called to undergo most serious operations, and it has been a wonderful help to them that they have known no dread, but have been passive in the Lord's hands. Our Lord Jesus was ever sweetly serene, and this was one element of the wisdom of His behaviour. In the struggle of life a cheerful fearlessness is a grand assistance. Here is a man on the Exchange, and things are going heavily against him: prices are falling, and all he can do appears to make bad worse. If that man gives way to fear he may plunge into utter ruin; but if he can step aside a minute or two, and breathe a prayer to God, he will pull himself together, and when he comes back he will coolly survey the situation, and act with discretion. Lose your head and you lose the battle. Lose your heart and you have lost all. To him who knows no fear there is no fear, provided that his forgetfulness of fear arises out of his memory of God. For the prudent government of life as well as for its enjoyment the overcoming of fear is a great help.

Fearlessness also assists in keeping us from doing wrong. The man who can trust God with consequences will not do wrong in order to escape from losses. The man who yields to the fear of man is apt to conceal his convictions; and if he does not deny the faith, he is apt to attempt a compromise, and that is the most dangerous operation which a Christian man can enter on. If faith in God lifts us up above the fear of losses and sufferings, we shall say to every form of temptation, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

One thing I desire to say about this fearlessness, namely, that *it brings great glory to God.* If you are enabled to rise above fear in times of alarm, then will those who see you say, "This is a man of God, and this is God's work upon his soul." I knew a youth, near forty years ago, who was staying with relations when a thunderstorm of unusual violence came on at nightfall. A stack was struck by lightning and set on fire, within sight of the door. The grown-up people in the house, both men and women, were utterly overcome with fright. The strong men seemed even more afraid than the women. All the inmates of the house sat huddled together. Only this youth was quietly happy. There was a little child upstairs in bed, and the mother was anxious about it; but even her love could not give her courage enough to pass the staircase windows, to bring that child down. The babe cried, and this youth, whom I knew right well, who was then but newly converted, went upstairs alone, took the child, and, without hurry or alarm, brought it down to its mother. He needed no candle, for the lightning was so continuous that he could see his way right well. He felt that the Lord was wonderfully near that night, and so no fear was possible to his heart. He sat down and read a psalm aloud to his trembling relatives, who looked on the lad with loving wonder. That night he was master of the situation, and those in the house believed that there was something in the religion which he had so lately professed. I believe that if all of us can, by God's grace, get such a sense of God's nearness to us in times of danger and trouble that we remain calm, we shall bring much honour to the cause of God and the name of Jesus. Holy confidence sings psalms by its spirit and acts. It is well to sing, in the language of David, "God is our refuge and strength"; but it is better still so to act that all can see that we do not fear though the earth be removed.

III. Time has fled, and I must ask your patience while I dwell for a little while upon the third point, THE CONFLICTS TO WHICH THIS FEARLESSNESS WILL BE EXPOSED. If you become fearless through the presence of God, that courage will be tried.

It will be tried in ways *novel and unusual.* "Though the earth be removed." This is a terrible novelty. Those who have been in earthquakes tell me that the feeling is most singular. It does not seem like a common shake, but as if everything had given way at once. You do not know what to do: the very foundations of everything have slipped from under you. Suppose that the Lord is about to try us in new and unheard-of ways; yet, having the Lord to be our refuge, strength, and present help, we will not fear. New trials will bring new grace, and prove the value of old promises.

Certain trials are very *mysterious and threatening.* It would be a great mystery if we were to see "the mountains carried into the midst of the sea." There they have stood for ages, and should they take a leap, we should be at our wits' end to account for their motion. If some giant force plucked them up by their roots, and hurled them into the centre of the ocean, we should be amazed. But some afflictions are of that order; you cannot understand them. The sting of sorrow often lies in the unseen. What we cannot comprehend astounds and appals us. Yet, my brethren, we need not fear if God be with us: though the mountains were hurled into the midst of the sea, the Lord could put them back into their places again. If all the devils in hell had a hand in your trouble, you need not therefore be alarmed; for one God is greater than millions of demons. If all the legions of the pit rushed forth in hosts innumerable as flying locusts, all armed to the teeth, and eager for your blood, yet the Lord of Hosts being with you, you would march through them as a man goes through a field of grass. One lion does not fear a flock of sheep, and one man who trusts in God is master of armies of adversaries. Therefore, will we not fear, "though hills amid the seas be cast." Our God is mightier than all mysterious forces whatsoever.

Some trials also seem to be *utterly ungovernable*—"Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled." You cannot do anything with the sea when it rages. It hurls itself aloft in great masses; it yawns in fathomless abysses; it rushes, it whirls, it sinks. As for its noise, it drowns your thoughts. The water is here, there, everywhere, when the deep once begins to break loose; and certain troubles seem to be of like nature; they rush upon you on a sudden, they multiply like swelling waves, they drive furiously, they carry all before them; and yet even then we need not fear. If God be with us, He is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. There is no reason to fear noise, and none even to fear the sea; for "the Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." Let the sea roar, and let the waters thereof be troubled; our faith shall never yield to fear.

Sometimes we get afraid through *sympathy with fear of others*. Observe, "Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof," as though when the sea had taken to roaring and trembling, the mountains followed it in sympathy. So, when we see the strongest people giving way, and panic seizing upon them, we are apt to yield; but if God be with us, and we can hold firm to the truth that He is our refuge and our strength, we shall not fear.

"Well," saith one, "what is the practical run of all this?" Why, just this. There may come to you and to me trouble great and unexpected, and it will then be well to rise out of the reach of fear. War may soon burst upon us. The political atmosphere is charged with war, and we may be surrounded by it before the year grows old. We have enjoyed, as a nation, so much of rest within our own island that we have grown somewhat secure; but even if war were at our gates, those who have made the Most High their refuge need not fear.

Something worse than war is threatening. Anarchy seeks to make havoc in the streets. There are plenty of signs and tokens that a break-up of social order is desired by not a few. Fierce spirits are eager to repeat among us the horrors of the French Revolution. To break down, divide, destroy, disintegrate, is the policy of many. The earthquake of society is more to be dreaded than the quaking of the globe, and we are within measurable distance of such a catastrophe. Shall we lie down and die? Nay, verily, we will not fear, though the earth be removed. If God is our confidence we need not be afraid, though the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. The unloosing of the bond of society is a thing to be dreaded more than an incursion of wild beasts; but the Lord reigneth, and therefore right will prevail.

Perhaps some of you feel this sad depression of trade weighing upon your spirits. "I do not know what is coming of it," says one; "I do not think I shall long be able to provide for my family." Yes, but if God is our refuge and strength, I beseech you, do not lose heart. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." This depression is to you what the earthquake has been to the Riviera; but yet you must not be buried in despair. Hope on, hope ever.

"Ah!" saith one, "but I fear the return of persecution. Popery is making rapid strides, and may come into power again." I am not quite so much alarmed about that as some are; but even if it were so, we must not show the white feather. Do not be afraid. He that helps His people is stronger than their adversaries. He can deliver from the jaws of the lion, and He will deliver without fail.

As for myself, I am often sadly tossed about because of the heresies and false doctrines of this present age. It grieves me to the heart to see the want of spirituality among ministers, and of holiness among professing Christians. It cuts me to the quick to see the utter rubbish and poison which is preached instead of Christianity. At times it looks as if all things were going wrong; the men to whom one looked as pillars, forsake the faith, and the stanchest give way for the sake of peace. We are apt to cry, "What will become of us?" But if God is our refuge and strength, we need not be afraid, even amid general apostasy. While God lives, truth is in the ascendant. I remember years ago meeting with that blessed servant of God, the late Earl of Shaftesbury. He was at Mentone with a dying daughter, and he happened that day to be very much downcast, as, indeed, I have frequently seen him, and as, I am sorry to confess, he has also frequently seen me. That day he was particularly cast down about the general state of society. He thought that the powers of darkness in this country were having it all their own way, and that, before long, the worst elements of society would gain power, and trample out all virtue. Looking up into his face, I said to him, "And is God dead? Do you believe that while God lives the devil will conquer Him?" He smiled, and we walked along by the Mediterranean communing together in a far more hopeful tone. The Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock. As long as the Lord liveth our hope lives also. Gospel truth will yet prevail; we shall live to see the old faith to the front again. The church, like Noah's dove, will come back to her rest again, and bring somewhat with her which shall prophesy eternal peace.

Now, my beloved friend, think about yourself a minute, and all the trials which may yet beset you. If you are to be afflicted with incurable sickness, and gradually to pine away amid multiplied pains, yet you need not fear. If you are to be an invalid from this time forth to the end of your days, yet, be not greatly depressed in spirit, for the Lord's presence will sustain you. If heart and flesh both fail, God will be the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. By-and-by you and I will have to die, unless the Lord should suddenly come. What then? Then will the earth be removed, so far as we are concerned; and then, as far as our experience goes, our mountain will be carried into the midst of the sea; but since God is our refuge and strength we ought not to dread the day.

Look into the Book of Revelation and you will see that tremendous events are foretold. All things shall be shaken; all the glories of earth shall melt away. Confusion, like the first chaos, shall cover all things; the earth shall rock and reel, and the stars shall fall from heaven. But even then will not we fear, since God will be our very present help. Some people dine on horrors, they are not content unless a future is set before them spiced with dread. I confess that I am not of their mind. The Lord Jesus has made an end of horrors for me. Whether we live or die we shall be "for ever with the Lord," and to be where He is is to be far away from fear. There will come a day when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise; but we fear not resurrection. There shall be a day of days, for which all other days were made, with its great white throne, and pomp of angels, and judgment of quick and dead; but, beloved, though that day shall burn as an oven, we will not fear, because we are secure in Christ Jesus. Wherefore let us stand at the window and look out at the storm, and see the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds without a trace of fear.

I thought when I read my text what an awful case the ungodly must be in; for the very things which men most dread, namely, the falling of mountains and the gaping open of the earth, will become the desire of terrified sinners at the last. How great must be that horror which will altogether eclipse the horror which sends myriads flying in panic from their homes! When sinners shall see the face of Christ in His glory, they will entreat the mountains to fall upon them, and the rocks to cover them, to hide them from the dread-

ful vision. The face of love is terrible to those who have rejected it. Oh, sinners, what will be your anguish when you shall seek for death, and shall not find it! What will be your dismay when a tottering mountain, reeling with earthquake, shall be regarded as a friend! Oh, that you would escape from the wrath to come! Oh, that you would by faith take Jesus to be your refuge and your strength!

"Ye sinners, seek His grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of His cross,
And find salvation there."

"AS WE HAVE HEARD, SO HAVE WE SEEN"

"As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever."—Psalm xlviii. 8.

"AS we have heard, so have we seen": this is seldom true. In many places we see what we have not heard, and what we have heard we do not see. Time was when many simpletons believed that the streets of London were paved with gold. I am sure I do not know any part of London in which a single lump of that metal can be found in the footway. Ten thousand idle tales there are in every country, of mines where fortunes may be dug out of the earth, and plains where wealth forces itself on the immigrant; but how seldom do we hear the good news, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

But when you come into the "City of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God," the reports about it are true, and the truth exceeds the report; for, like the Queen of Sheba, we cry, "The half was not told me." When we speak of the privileges of the Church of God on earth it is impossible to exaggerate. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Behold, what blessings, what riches, what royalties the Lord Jesus bestows upon His chosen! How cleansed they are by His blood! How quickened by His life! How honoured by His glorious enthronement at the right hand of the Father! You cannot speak of Zion, and her prosperity, in too exulting a style. Happy art thou, O Israel! And if we speak of the city of God as it shines in full splendour above, words fail us to set it forth. I doubt not when we arrive at its blest abodes, and tread its golden streets, and wear our crowns of immortality, we shall not only say, "As we have heard, so have we seen," but we shall be lost in wonder and surprise at the overwhelming revelations of divine love.

It is always true of the things of God, and of the Church of God—"As we have heard, so have we seen." What His Word promises His work performs. This thought will be the clue of my sermon, and my line of discourse will be guided by the text. May the Holy Spirit make it useful to us all!

I. Our first observation upon the text is this—IT IS MOST IMPORTANT THAT WE LISTEN TO TRUE WITNESSES; for, else, we shall not be able to say, "As we have heard, so have we seen." If we listen to false witnesses, the more we believe them the worse for us: it will not be faith but credulity, and in due time there will be a sad awakening from idle dreams. It is of the first importance to you all that you should hear the Word of God, and receive the truth as it is in Jesus; so that, both in the throng of life, and when you stand upon the borders of death, and in the changeless state of eternity, you may be able to say, "We thank God for the gospel which we heard; for what we heard with our ears has been verified in our lives."

The Israelites who sang this forty-eighth Psalm had heard of Jerusalem and its Temple; of Jehovah, and of His sure defence of His chosen city: how had they heard of it?

They had heard of it by reading for themselves, or listening to the reading of *the Word of God*. They had five books of Moses, and other writings. In these books they read marvellous stories of what Jehovah had done for His people. They would remember well how the Lord wrought for His chosen in Egypt, and how He brought them out of the house of bondage with a high hand and an outstretched arm. They would read the record of God's merciful provision for the tribes in the wilderness, of His victories over their enemies, such as Og, king of Bashan, and Sihon, king of the Amorites. They would read with wonder the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, and the overthrow of tyrants by Gideon and Barak and Jephthah. They would see what the Lord wrought by His servant David, and by others who trusted Him in the old times. All this would raise high their confidence in Jehovah; and now it had come to pass that, while Jehoshaphat was king, the holy city had been beleagured by confederate Moabites, and Edomites, and Ammonites; and once more the Lord had made bare His holy arm and given a glorious triumph to Judah, without it being necessary for His people to strike a single blow. The adversaries, moved with mutual jealousy, had fallen upon one another, and become their own executioners. When the men of Judah saw this, they cried, "The old Book is true. Jehovah has wrought wonders before our eyes; as we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts."

My brethren, attend carefully to what this Book records and reveals. It is now enlarged for your greater edification. Let this record be the report which you hear, concerning the Lord our God and His ways of grace. Let us give earnest heed to prophets and apostles and evangelists, who wrote in the name of the Lord; for in that case we shall hear truths which shall be so verified by experience, as to make us joyfully exclaim, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

These good people had also listened to *the ministers of God*. The priests, when they were not engaged in actual attendance at the Temple, were expected to teach the people. It is said of the tribe of Levi, "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel

Thy law." Prophets also went through the land declaring the mind of God, and when the people heard these messengers, whom the Lord had sent to speak in His name, they heard that which the Lord fulfilled; for none of the words of His servants were suffered to fall to the ground. How necessary it is that you should hear the truth spoken by those that are sent of God; for many false prophets have gone forth into the world. That which a man fetcheth out of his own mind may or may not be true; in any case you have a right to criticize and discuss it; but he that speaketh with "Thus saith the Lord" at the back of his words, stands on another platform. God's Word demands our reverent faith, and he that speaketh it faithfully speaketh with authority, and not as the scribes. Conscience within the breast of man echoes to the voice of divine truth, and owns its power, even when the will refuses to obey. Oh, that you may not, because of itching ears, heap to yourselves teachers; but may you hear the faithful messenger of God, so that you may say at the end, "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God"!

No doubt, also, these good people had listened to *their fathers*. In these days the proud notion is abroad that our fathers cannot have been so wise as their highly cultured sons. Yet, in the long run, these same youths will alter their opinions as their years increase. Wisdom is neither in age nor in youth, but in God alone; yet I love to hear what grey-headed men have to say, who are further advanced in the journey of life than I am; for there is weight in their testimony. They may not speak with all the brilliance and fire of youth; but their speech has salt in it, derived from the certainty of actual experience. I love to think of those things which we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us; even the wondrous things which the Lord did in their day, and in the old time before them. The singers of our psalm had listened to their gracious fathers, and when they saw the adversary round about the City of God, and afterwards marched forth to that strange battle, in which there was no clash of arms, but only a joyful division of the spoil—then, I say, they knew that what their fathers had told them was really true, and they cried out in wonder, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

> "In Zion God is known,
> A refuge in distress;
> How bright has His salvation shone
> Through all her palaces!
>
> Oft have our fathers told,
> Our eyes have often seen,
> How well our God secures the fold
> Where His own sheep have been."

Those who were not actually in Jerusalem would hear the descriptions of *those who had been there*. They had heard of the Temple which was so "exceedingly magnifical"; of Jachin and Boaz, the two famous pillars; of the great altar, and the smoking sacrifices of the morning and the evening lamb; and the priests in their white attire ministering at the altar. They had heard of the high priest himself, when he came forth in his garments of glory and of beauty, and of the blessing wherewith he blessed the assembled people. In the cottage homes on the far-off hills, they had heard of all these things, and heard a truthful report, so that when they came to the holy city, and their feet stood within the gates of Jerusalem, their hearts beat high, and they said within themselves, "We have not listened to cunningly devised fables; but as we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts."

It is well, dear friends, for us to form our associations with a view to lasting benefit. Let the friends of God be your friends. Speak to those who speak well of God, and of His holy name. Cultivate the acquaintance of those who, by experience, are able to inform you whether these things are so. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." He that talks much with experienced Christians will acquire much assurance in the things of God. It is most important for us that we receive the recorded witness of ancient saints, and the hearty testimony of living worthies, that afterwards we may be able to say, "As we have heard, so have we seen." Some, nowadays, are inclined to hear everything, bad, good, and indifferent. I believe that hearing everything will end in hearing nothing. That text is often quoted and misunderstood, which says "Prove all things." If men really mean what they say and are going to prove all things, I would persuade them to begin with their bodies, and not at first to run great risks with their souls. Gentlemen, I invite you to begin with commoner things than the gospel; for instance—commence with proving all the patent medicines, and next prove all the drugs of the chemist. If you survive the process, it will then be time to go round and prove all the ministers, and all the different doctrines of this wretched period. If you survive the drugs and poisons, you will not survive the false doctrines. False doctrines cannot be proved, and you need not make the attempt. It is only the truth which is capable of proof. The text does not mean "experiment upon everything"; but receive nothing until it has been proved to be true and good. The most of us are not appointed to the office of Universal Taster: we are not commissioned to taste all deadly things that we may know their precise effect: we are far better employed in holding fast that which is good. The truths which we have already proved to be the truth of God, we hold as with a death-grip; and, as we hold them fast, we also hold them forth. That which we accept for ourselves we commend to others: this is a far safer and healthier exercise than imitating the Athenians in their desire to be for ever hearing some new thing. Take heed what you hear, lest you be not able to say, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

II. Secondly, GOOD HEARING LEADS ON TO SEEING—"As we have heard, so have we seen." You cannot all use those words. Some of you have heard, and heard, but have never yet seen. The man who is content with one inlet to his mind, namely, his ears, but never uses his eyes, must imagine that God has made a mistake, and has given him more senses than he needs. Surely this argues a want of sense. Dear friends, you are not only invited to hear the gospel, but the Lord Jesus says to you, as He said to His first disciples "Come and see." "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good." You are invited to see for yourselves whether these things be so. You will ask how can a hearer of the gospel become a seer of it?

Note first, that he can do this *by examining the facts* which he hears stated, and judging whether they are really so. The Scripture tells you that your heart is deceitful—see whether it be not so. It tells you that there is a natural inclination in man towards evil—study yourself, and see whether this is not the

case. It tells you that there is in human nature an impotence towards that which is truly good, and an aversion to God. Seriously consider whether your own life, as a natural man, does not prove the truth of these charges. There are some things about yourself, while as yet you are unconverted, which you have heard of in the Scriptures, and I would urge you to see whether they are not true in your own case. It will be a great help to you if you will examine into these things in reference to your own self. The subject for consideration is near at hand, and it will be, in many ways, useful to yourself to know whether Holy Scripture gives a true description of human nature, as you find it in yourself.

We further see what we hear, when we *obey the commands and receive the blessings promised upon obedience.* For instance, you are bidden to confess your sins; now see whether this is true. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins"—not only hear the precept, but see whether the promise is true. Here is another test—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You have heard it hundreds of times: come and see for yourself whether such a rest is given. Obey the precept, that you may receive the promise which hangs upon the precept.

We also turn hearing into sight when, receiving the blessings which are promised to faith, *we enter into a new life.* Some of us can bear witness that we have entered into a new world; that things which are now everything to us, were nothing to us a little while ago. As to a deaf man there is no sound, as to a blind man there is no light, so to us a few years ago there were no spiritual things; for we were devoid of those spiritual faculties by which spiritual things are discerned. But, now that we have believed in Jesus, we have passed into another universe; and we now possess a life as much above the life of our former state as the mental life is above that of the brute, which perisheth. We know that there is a heavenly life, for we possess it; and in the power of it we see a thousand things not dreamed of in the common man's philosophy. We heartily wish that all of you who hear the gospel would see its truths, so that you might say with the singers in this psalm, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

The promises of God are of little service to a man if he merely hears them or reads them, and has no further dealing with them. They are like a cheque which is kept for months and years in a drawer, and never presented at the bank. The promises of God must be presented by prayerful faith to the Lord Himself. The sacred promises, though in themselves most sure and precious, are of no avail for the comfort and sustenance of the soul, unless you grasp them by faith, plead them in prayer, expect them by hope, and receive them with gratitude. Oh, that you might say of every promise of God, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

The best hearing is that which leads to seeing. When a man says, "The Word of God tells me so, and I will test it for myself"—that man is in a very hopeful state. To this we invite our hearers. The banquet is spread, and rich are the viands; but do not so trust our testimony as to stay away. Come and see for yourselves. We tell you that there is a great atonement made by the blood of Jesus, which will at once wash out the most scarlet sins. Believe our message so far as to come and try it for yourselves, and you will soon exclaim, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

III. I beg your attention to the third point, which is this: that SEEING WONDERFULLY CONFIRMS THE TRUTH OF WHAT WE HEAR.

We are bound to believe God, even when we cannot see. That the Lord has said it, would be quite enough for us if we reverenced Him as we ought. But it does help us very much when, having implicitly believed in God's testimony, He grants us grace to see that what we have believed is most surely true. Let me show how the experience of a believing man confirms the truth of what he has heard.

To go back to where I was just now, all that Holy Scripture says about *our ruin* may be seen to be true. Many of us have not only heard, but we have felt the evil result of sin upon our minds and hearts. We know that sin dwelleth in us, and strives for the mastery. We can never doubt that our natural tendencies are faulty, and that our best desires are imperfect. Since the Holy Spirit convinced us of sin, the existence of a foul fountain within our nature is a fact which we cannot doubt. Sin's infinite demerit is, also, a truth to which our conscience gives solemn assent. I remember when I learned this lesson, with the law as my schoolmaster. If any one had asked me whether I deserved to be sent to the lowest hell, my tears would have owned that no punishment could be too severe for sin like mine. Whenever I read a terrible threatening in Scripture, I gave an inward assent to it in my quickened conscience; yea, and I do so now. Apart from my Lord on the cross, a deep damnation must be mine. It does not matter what modern deceivers preach; you may depend upon it, that men when they come to die, if their consciences are at all awake, are persuaded that the threatenings of Holy Scripture are true. Sentiment kicks against eternal punishment; but conscience cries "Amen" to the righteous sentence of the law. When the Spirit of God awakens conscience, it ceases to trifle with sin, and no longer denies that an awful penalty must surely be its consequence.

I am sure I can appeal to those of you who have seen the Lord in His glory, so as to abhor yourselves in dust and ashes, and to those of you who have seen yourselves, so that you have been ashamed and confounded at your own ways. I say, I can appeal to you to confirm the most solemn statements of Holy Scripture. However much its denunciations may make you shudder, your inmost soul consents to the truth of them. When the Holy Ghost opens up before us the bottomless pit of our natural depravity, we admit that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." We believe in the Fall, for we are fallen; we are sure we are not as the Lord made us. We believe in the hereditary taint of natural depravity; for we mourn it in ourselves. We believe in the impotence of fallen humanity; for we are ourselves without strength. We believe in our personal desert of the wrath of God, for we are sure it is so, and our only comfort is that the sentence of death has been fulfilled in us, in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Substitute. All that the Holy Scripture saith about sin and its results, we do from our heart of hearts confirm, for "As we have heard, so have we seen."

Brighter things, however, have we heard and seen. Brethren, we heard that there is *a calling of God*, whereby He separates His chosen from the rest of mankind; and we know that there is such an

effectual calling by the Spirit of God, for we have been so called. We heard the general call by which men were invited to come to Christ; but we refused that call. We learned that there was a special effectual call of the Holy Spirit, by which men are sweetly drawn to Jesus, and we found this report to be true, for we have been so drawn. The Spirit of God did not drag us to Christ by our ears, but He drew us with bands of love. We came to Jesus with the full consent of our renewed wills, and yet against our old wills. Without violating one single delicate law of our mind, the Lord constrained us to run in the way of salvation. As we have heard concerning the effectual calling of the Spirit of God, so have we seen, and we cannot but bear witness of it this day.

We heard, too, that if we came to Jesus as we were, *He would receive us;* and He did receive us. We heard that He would graciously forgive; and He did forgive. We heard that in forgiveness He would give us peace, and we have found it so. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We heard that poor sinners, justified by faith, received a joy unspeakable, and we have received that joy. We bear our testimony that "This Man receiveth sinners": we bear witness that He casts out none that come to Him. We declare to you that, in the fulness of His grace, He puts rebels in the children's place. Yes, "As we have heard, so have we seen." The bravest preacher of the gospel has never preached more gospel than is true. The boldest testifier to the free grace of God has never said more for the freedom and fulness of grace than he ought to have said. Exaggeration is impossible. When you would describe infinite grace, you may lay the reins upon the neck of thought.

Then we heard that there was such a thing as *regeneration.* We used to hear with wonder that declaration, "Ye must be born again." We were told that we must pass from death unto life: that old things must pass away, and all things must become new. We heard it attentively and believingly; but now we have gone further—we have seen it. Many of you know the great and radical change, because you have experienced it. You can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." We have passed out of a dead world into a living world. Having been buried with Christ, we have also risen with Him, and our life dwells and flourishes in a new world. We are conscious that a new heart beats within us; a new life looks out of our eyes, and moves in our members. The new birth is a fact: "As we have heard, so have we seen."

We used to hear of *the Holy Spirit,* and it seemed to us when we heard it, that His operations and indwellings were mysteries incomprehensible. How could God the Holy Ghost dwell in men, and make their bodies His temples? We marvelled as we heard of His convincing men of sin, withering their self-righteousness, enkindling hope in their bosoms, leading them to Jesus, renewing them, comforting them, sanctifying them, illuminating them, preserving them. We used to hear of all this; but now with delight we can stand before you, and say, "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God." The Holy Ghost has convinced us of sin. What a "spirit of bondage" He was to us for a time! He seemed to fetter hand and foot, and shut us up under the law! Then He broke our chains asunder, and taught us that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. What a liberty it was! How joyfully did we leap, when we were set free from the tyranny of sin. Since then the blessed Spirit has continually quickened, guided, and strengthened us. Speak, ye sons and daughters of mourning, and tell how the Comforter has graciously consoled you! He has also taught us, and led us into all truth. He has been in us life, and light, and fire. He has moved upon our minds, and He has ever given us in the same hour what we should speak! What a permeating influence is that of the Holy Ghost! How He makes us mourn for sin! How He constrains us to follow after holiness! How He uplifts and elevates the heart, causing our conversation to be in heaven, while our body is still on earth. "As we have heard, so have we seen"; and we have never heard more of the glorious power of the Holy Spirit than is absolutely true: our own joyful experience leads us to believe that He can work all gracious things in us.

Further, to show how experience supports the Word of God, we were told many times over that *God hears prayer.* We were reminded of the Saviour's words, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Brothers and sisters, how have you found it? Has prayer been a mere pious amusement? or have you found it to be a reality? Have you not prayed yourselves out of the dark into the sunlight; prayed yourselves out of the low dungeon of despondency to the mountain-top of communion; prayed yourselves out of the depths of despair up to the throne of God? "Out of the belly of hell, cried I," said one, "and Thou heardest my voice." Oh, the omnipotence of prayer! The facts which prove the prevalence of prayer would convince anybody unless he is determined not to be convinced. There are numbers of persons here whom any lawyer would be glad to put in the witness-box on any matter of fact; for their statements would be questioned by nobody, since they are well known for integrity and truth. These persons are prepared to bear solemn witness, as in the presence of God, that many a time God has as distinctly heard their prayers as if He had thrust His hand through yonder skies. As we have heard about prayer, so have we seen; and none can drive this faith out of us, since it is confirmed by what we have seen over and over again in actual experience. So long as reason holds her seat we must and will believe in prayer.

Yes, let me remind you, also, that we heard with our ears, that there is a God of *Providence* who rules and over-rules all things. We were glad to sing "The Lord will provide." We used joyfully to hear the congregation say:—

> "Though cisterns be broken, and creatures all fail,
> The word He has spoken will surely prevail."

We believe in a gracious providence, and we have also seen it! Time does not suffice this morning for us to narrate personal incidents, but assuredly my own experience teems with them: in times of need the Lord has showed Himself quite as able and willing to supply the needs of His servant in these days as He was to feed the nation in the wilderness when He rained manna from heaven for them, day by day. All things have worked together for good to them that love God, even until now. We can look back upon experiences which, at the time, were especially

bewildering and perplexing; and of those very xperiences we can now say, "Blessed be God for hem!" If I were to ask those to stand up who ave seen undoubted proofs of providential care, believe thousands of you would rise from your seats, nd bear witness that the hand of the Lord still vorks wisely and powerfully, for those who trust n Him. We heard that it was so, and we have seen hat the report was true to the letter. Even as to emporal things, the Lord is gracious; and as to ternal things, He is beyond conception kind.

One thing more I will notice, and have done with hese verifications which sight gives to hearing. We have often heard that those who believe in God ave *hope in their deaths*. We have been told over nd over again, that

> "Jesus can make a dying bed
> Feel soft as downy pillows are."

Now, we have not seen this for ourselves, for we have ot yet forded the last river; but we have seen it n others. I suppose that the most of you have distinctly seen that the end of the righteous man s peace. I, from my calling, have many scores of imes seen saints in their last hours. This is the witness I put on record—the very happiest persons I have ever met with have been departing believers. I have not met at weddings, nor at jubilee feasts, nor in moments of singular prosperity, such joyful persons as I have seen amid weakness and pain upon their dying beds. The only sons of men for whom I have felt any envy have been dying members of this very church, whose hands I have grasped in their passing away. Almost without any exception I have seen in them holy delight and triumph; and in the exceptions to this exceeding joy I have seen deep peace, exhibited in a calm and deliberate readiness to enter into the presence of their God. They have been as ready for the eternal world as they would have been to rise from their beds and return to their daily callings on the Monday morning. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding" has kept their hearts and minds even when the joy of the Lord has not lifted them into transports or ecstasies. Saintly death-beds are grand evidences of Christianity. It is something to say in our last hours, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

I can truly say that hitherto my own experience and observation have confirmed the teachings of the Word of God. I have not yet met with anything which could shake my confidence in the divine revelation. I trust I am neither an absolute fool nor a blind bigot, who would shut his eyes to reason: I would not ignore a certified fact, either in science, or history, or in the world of mental life; and yet I know of no fact which can disprove so much as one of the solemn declarations of God, nor even cast a shadow of suspicion upon a doctrine of Holy Scripture. I have *heard* much, but I have *seen* nothing of the science which disproves the Scriptures: there is no such science, it is an imposture which has stolen the name. Our knowing is far better than our theorizing; and whatever our theorizing may have done, our actual knowledge has never been on the side of the baptized infidelity of the advanced school. All our experience makes us say, "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts."

On this point I have spent the strength of my discourse; the remaining two heads shall be treated briefly, although they are of great practical value.

IV. WHEN HEARING TURNS TO SEEING, AND IS CONFIRMED BY IT, THEN IT LEADS TO WITNESSING.

The text, you see, is itself a testimony—"As we have heard, so have we seen." In these days, every man that can witness for the truth ought to do so: even if he stammers, he must not be silent. So many are decrying the truth, that, if in your heart and conscience you have proved it true, you are bound to give to the Lord the testimony of even a stammerer. I suppose Moses could do no more than that, for he was a man slow in speech; but when he would have preferred to be quiet the Lord said to him, "Who hath made man's mouth?" Your mouth is as God made it: use it as best you can, and speak up for His name and cause.

Such testimony as that of our text is *sometimes* involuntary, and is none the less precious on that account. When these good people had seen the Moabites, and Ammonites, and Edomites, marching round Jerusalem in their pride, and a few days afterwards had beheld them cold in death, they could not help crying, "As we have heard, so have we seen." You could not have kept them quiet in the presence of such a marvel. You could not have muzzled them into silence. They were so taken aback, so astounded at what God had done, that they cried aloud, "As we have heard, so have we seen." So, when you have tasted and handled of the good things of God, I am sure you will have to tell others of your glorious discoveries! Your mouth will be filled with laughter and your tongue with singing, till those who are round about will be compelled to say, "The Lord hath done great things for them," and you will answer, "Yes, the Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." Jesus said, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength," when the children were shouting in the Temple. Young converts, if they have newly tasted that the Lord is gracious, must sound out their joys. Who would stop them? If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out. But your involuntary witnessing must lead up to constant *voluntary* witnessing for your Lord, and His holy cause. O ye who are on the Lord's side, awake, arise, or be condemned as traitors!

Our testimony should be *very frequent*. Believers would do a thousand times more good if they were not so particularly careful to avoid offending men of the world. If Christ Jesus offends people, they ought to be offended; for He is sure to be a "Stumbling-stone and rock of offence" to those who stumble at the Word, being disobedient. We have heard of a great warrior, who was more at home on the field of battle than amid the ceremonies of courts; his sword nearly tripped him up when walking backwards from the throne, and his majesty remarked that his sword seemed very much in the way. "Yes," said the brave man, "and your majesty's enemies find it so." If we give offence by the gospel to those who take no active part in holy warfare, let us not be put out of countenance; we are soldiers of the cross, and we do not regret that our religion does trouble certain people, for they ought to be troubled. The man who has never offended anybody by his religion has none worth having; rest assured of that. There are times and places when it must be seen that we are the friends of God, and consequently, cannot be in league with His enemies. Silence, when

truth is questioned, will prove us to be recreant to Christ, and false to our profession. Let us speak when it may bring upon us sneers, and slanders. Why, what matters if they do sneer? We shall survive *that*. We do not live on the breath of other men's nostrils. We ask not leave of mortal man to be true to our convictions; but we will often, and far more often than we have done, bear witness that "As we have heard, so have we seen."

This we should be sure to do more earnestly, if we were more thoughtful. Read the ninth verse:—"We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of Thy temple." As a true man thinks in his heart, he will speak with his lips. That which lies in the well of your thought will come up in the bucket of your speech. Think much of what the Lord has done for you, and then you will bear witness for Him.

This needs to be done on a far larger scale than at present. Read the rest of the psalm, and see how the Psalmist puts it: "According to Thy name, O God, so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth." Oh, for more of the missionary spirit, more telling out to the ends of the earth of what the Lord has done! What were the stars, if they did not shine? What were the sun, if he did not make our day? What were the rivers, if they did not water the lands. What were the sea itself, if it did not act as the pulsing heart of the world? What are Christians, if they do not shine as lights? Piety bottled up is dead. Religion put into a tin and hermetically sealed is useless. Why not go to heaven at once, if you do no good on earth? Nay, but would they have you among the angels? He that is of no use in the world is not fit for heaven. He who does not glorify God on earth would not glorify Him in heaven. Where shall we put useless people? What shall be done with salt that has lost its savour? I know not where it can be put, for Jesus says it is not fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; and, if men cast it out, what will God do with it? If even men cannot use dead religionists, what will God do with them? If a vine does not bear fruit it is good for nothing: you cannot boil a pot with it, nor even make out of its wood a hook by which to hang the pot over the fire. Without fruitfulness the vine becomes the most worthless of all trees; and without testimony for truth the professing Christian is of no use whatever. Creation's blot, creation's blank, is the best description of a dead professor. Think what you will of yourselves, O ye savourless professors, your religion is mere emptiness, a vain pretence. O children of God, stand up and bear your witness—

"Stand up, stand up for Jesus!"

in this day of blasphemy and rebuke.

V. For, lastly, HEARING, SEEING, WITNESSING, GOD WILL GIVE YOU A YET FULLER ASSURANCE THAN YOU HAVE AS YET. Permit me to read the text again:—"As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God: *God will establish it for ever.*" That is the conclusion which the saint comes to, when he has tried the truth for himself, and borne witness to the result of his trial. God will never leave His Church. God will never forfeit His Word. God will never desert His gospel. Because He is Jehovah of Hosts and changes not, and has all power at His disposal; because He is our Lord, our God in covenant. He cannot desert the work of His own hands, nor leave the people of His love. Because His honour is bound up in the whole enterprise that Christ undertook, He must go through with it, and He must arrive at a glorious conclusion. God will establish it for ever. Come, my brethren, let us cast aside all doubts about what the future is to be. The battle rages, the foe is as furious as he is subtle, while we are weak as water and can do nothing by ourselves; but let us not despond; for, if the gospel be God's gospel, He will take care of it; if the Church be Christ's Church, the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. The battle is not ours, but the Lord's: in His name let us set up our banners and cry with full confidence of victory, "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Hallelujah, hallelujah. Amen.

ROBINSON CRUSOE'S TEXT

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."—Psalm l. 15.

ONE book charmed us all in the days of our youth. Is there a boy alive who has not read it? "Robinson Crusoe" was a wealth of wonders to me: I could have read it over a score times, and never have wearied. I am not ashamed to confess that I can read it even now with ever fresh delight. Robinson and his man Friday, though mere inventions of fiction, are wonderfully real to the most of us. But why am I running on in this way on a Sabbath evening? Is not this talk altogether out of order? I hope not. A passage in that book comes vividly before my recollection to-night as I read my text; and in it I find something more than an excuse. Robinson Crusoe has been wrecked. He is left in the desert island all alone. His case is a very pitiable one. He goes to his bed, and he is smitten with fever. This fever lasts upon him long, and he has no one to wait upon him—none even to bring him a drink of cold water. He is ready to perish. He had been accustomed to sin, and had all the vices of a sailor; but his hard case brought him to think. He opens a Bible which he finds in his chest, and he lights upon this passage "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.*" That night he prayed for the first time in his life, and ever after there was in him a hope in God, which marked the birth of the heavenly life.

De Foe, who composed the story, was, as you know, a Presbyterian minister; and though not overdone with spirituality, he knew enough of religion to be able to describe very vividly the experience of a man who is in despair, and who finds peace by casting himself upon his God. As a novelist, he had a keen eye for the probable, and he could think of no passage

more likely to impress a poor broken spirit than this. Instinctively he perceived the mine of comfort which lies within these words.

Now I have everybody's attention, and this is one reason why I thus commenced my discourse. But I have a further purpose; for although Robinson Crusoe is not here, nor his man Friday either, yet there may be somebody here very like him, a person who has suffered shipwreck in life, and who has now become a drifting, solitary creature. He remembers better days, but by his sins he has become a castaway, whom no man seeks after. He is here to-night, washed up on shore without a friend, suffering in body, broken in estate, and crushed in spirit. In the midst of a city full of people, he has not a friend, nor one who would wish to own that he has ever known him. He has come to the bare bone of existence now. Nothing lies before him but poverty, misery, and death.

Thus saith the Lord unto thee, my friend, this night, "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.*" You have come here half hoping that there might be a word from God to your soul; "half-hoping," I said; for you are as much under the influence of dread as of hope. You are filled with despair. To you it seems that God has forgotten to be gracious, and that He has in anger shut up the bowels of His compassion. The lying fiend has persuaded thee that there is no hope, on purpose that he may bind thee with the brazen fetters of despair, and hold thee as a captive to work in the mill of ungodliness so long as thou livest. Thou writest bitter things against thyself, but they are as false as they are bitter. The Lord's mercies fail, not. His mercy endureth for ever; and thus in mercy does He speak to thee, poor troubled spirit, even to thee—"*Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.*"

I have the feeling upon me that I shall at this time speak home, God helping me, to some poor burdened spirit. In such a congregation as this, it is not everybody that can receive a blessing by the word that is spoken, but certain minds are prepared for it of the Lord. He prepares the seed to be sown, and the ground to receive it. He gives a sense of need, and this is the best preparation for the promise. Of what use is comfort to those who are not in distress? The word to-night will be of no avail, and have but little interest in it, to those who have no distress of heart. But, however badly I may speak, those hearts will dance for joy which need the cheering assurance of a gracious God, and are enabled to receive it as it shines forth in this golden text: "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.*" It is a text which I would have written in stars across the sky, or sounded forth with trumpet at noon from the top of every tower, or printed on every sheet of paper which passes through the post. It should be known and read of all mankind.

Four things suggest themselves to me. May the Holy Ghost bless what I am able to say upon them!

I. The first observation is not so much in my text alone as in the text and the context. REALISM IS PREFERRED TO RITUALISM. If you will carefully read the rest of the psalm you will see that the Lord is speaking of the rites and ceremonies of Israel, and He is showing that He has little care about formalities of worship when the heart is absent from them. I think we must read the whole passage: "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." Thus praise and prayer are accepted in preference to every form of offering which it was possible for the Jew to present before the Lord. Why is this?

First of all I would answer, real prayer is far better than mere ritual, because *there is meaning in it*, and when grace is absent, there is no meaning in ritual; it is as senseless as an idiot's game.

Did you ever stand in some Romish cathedral and see the daily service, especially if it happened to be upon a high day? What with the boys in white, and the men in violet, or pink, or red, or black, there were performers enough to stock a decent village. What with those who carried candlesticks, and those who carried crosses, and those who carried pots and pans, and cushions and books, and those who rang bells, and those who made a smoke, and those who sprinkled water, and those who bobbed their heads, and those who bowed their knees, the whole concern was very wonderful to look at, very amazing, very amusing, very childish. One wonders, when he sees it, whatever it is all about, and what kind of people those must be who are really made better by it. One marvels also what an idea pious Romanists must have of God if they imagine that He is pleased with such performances. Do you not wonder how the good Lord endures it? What must His glorious mind think of it all?

Albeit that the incense is sweet, and the flowers are pretty, and the ornaments are fine, and everything is according to ancient rubric; what is there in it? To what purpose that procession? To what end that decorated priest?—that gorgeous altar? Do these things mean anything? Are they not a senseless show?

The glorious God cares nothing for pomp and show; but when you call upon Him in the day of trouble, and ask Him to deliver you, there is meaning in your groan of anguish. This is no empty form; there is heart in it, is there not? There is meaning in the appeal of sorrow, and therefore God prefers the prayer of a broken heart to the finest service that ever was performed by priests and choirs. There is meaning in the soul's bitter cry, and there is no meaning in the pompous ceremony. In the poor man's prayer there are mind, heart, and soul; and hence it is real unto the Lord. Here is a living soul seeking contact with the living God in reality and in truth. Here is a breaking heart crying out to the compassionate Spirit. Ah! you may bid the organ peal forth its sweetest and its loudest notes, but what is the meaning of mere wind passing through pipes? A child cries, and there is meaning in *that*. A man standing up in yonder corner groans out, "O God, my heart will break!" There is more force in his moan than in a thousand of the biggest trumpets, drums, cymbals, tambourines, or any other instruments of music wherewith men seek to please God

nowadays. What madness to think that God cares for musical sounds, or ordered marchings, or variegated garments! In a tear, or a sob, or a cry, there is meaning, but in mere sound there is no sense, and God cares not for the meaningless. He cares for that which hath thought and feeling in it.

Why does God prefer realism to Ritualism? It is for this reason also that *there is something spiritual in the cry of a troubled heart;* and "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Suppose I were to repeat to-night the finest creed for accuracy that was ever composed by learned and orthodox men; yet, if I had no faith in it, and you had none, what were the use of the repetition of the words? There is nothing spiritual in mere orthodox statement if we have no real belief therein: we might as well repeat the alphabet, and call it devotion. And if we were to burst forth to-night in the grandest hallelujah that ever pealed from mortal lips, and we did not mean it, there would be nothing spiritual in it, and it would be nothing to God. But when a poor soul gets away into its chamber, and bows its knee and cries, "God be merciful to me! God save me! God help me in this day of trouble!" there is spiritual life in such a cry, and therefore God approves it and answers it. Spiritual worship is that which He wants, and He will have it, or have nothing. "They that worship Him must *worship* Him in spirit and in truth." He has abolished the ceremonial law, destroyed the one altar at Jerusalem, burned the Temple, abolished the Aaronic priesthood, and ended for ever all ritualistic performance; for He seeketh only true worshippers, who worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Further, the Lord loves the cry of the broken heart because *it distinctly recognizes Himself as the living God,* in very deed sought after in prayer. From much of outward devotion God is absent. But how we mock God when we do not discern Him as present, and do not come nigh unto His very self! When the heart, the mind, the soul, breaks through itself to get to its God, then it is that God is glorified, but not by any bodily exercises in which He is forgotten. Oh, how real God is to a man who is perishing, and feels that only God can save him! He believes that God is, or else he would not make so piteous a prayer to Him. He said his prayers before, and little cared whether God heard or not; but he prays now, and God's hearing is his chief anxiety.

Besides, dear friends, God takes great delight in our crying to Him in the day of trouble because *there is sincerity in it.* I am afraid that in the hour of our mirth and the day of our prosperity many of our prayers and our thanksgivings are hypocrisy. Too many of us are like boys' tops, that cease to spin except they are whipped. Certainly we pray with a deep intensity when we get into great trouble. A man is very poor: he is out of a situation; he has worn his shoes out in trying to find work; he does not know where the next meal is coming from for his children; and if he prays now it is likely to be very sincere prayer, for he is in real earnest on account of real trouble. I have sometimes wished for some very gentlemanly Christian people, who seem to treat religion as if it were all kid gloves, that they could have just a little time of the "roughing" of it, and really come into actual difficulties. A life of ease breeds hosts of falsehoods and pretences, which would soon vanish in the presence of matter-of-fact trials. Many a man has been converted to God in the bush of Australia by hunger, and weariness, and loneliness, who, when he was a wealthy man, surrounded by gay flatterers, never thought of God at all. Many a man on board ship on yon Atlantic has learned to pray in the cold chill of an iceberg, or in the horrors of the trough of the wave out of which the vessel could not rise. When the mast has gone by the board, and every timber has been strained, and the ship has seemed doomed, then have hearts begun to pray in sincerity; and God loves sincerity. When we mean it; when the soul melts in prayer; when it is "I must have it, or be lost"; when it is no sham, no vain performance, but a real heart-breaking, agonizing cry, then God accepts it. Hence He says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." Such a cry is the kind of worship that He cares for, because there is sincerity in it, and this is acceptable with the God of truth.

Again, in the cry of the troubled one *there is humility.* We may go through a highly brilliant performance of religion, after the rites of some gaudy church; or we may go through our own rites, which are as simple as they can be; and we may be all the while saying to ourselves, "This is very nicely done." The preacher may be thinking, "Am I not preaching well?" The brother at the prayer-meeting may feel within himself, "How delightfully fluent I am!" Whenever there is that spirit in us, God cannot accept our worship. Worship is not acceptable if it be devoid of humility. Now, when in the day of trouble a man goes to God, and says, "Lord, help me! I cannot help myself, but do Thou interpose for me," there is humility in that confession and cry, and hence the Lord takes delight in them. You, poor woman over there, deserted by your husband, and ready to wish that you could die, I exhort you to call upon God in the day of trouble, for I know that you will pray a humble prayer. You, poor trembler over yonder; you have done very wrong, and are likely to be found out and disgraced for it, but I charge you to cry to God in prayer, for I am sure there will be no pride about your petition. You will be broken in spirit, and humble before God, and "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Once more, the Lord loves such pleadings because *there is a measure of faith in them.* When the man in trouble cries, "Lord, deliver me!" he is looking away from himself. You see, he is driven out of himself because of the famine that is in the land. He cannot find hope or help on earth, and therefore he looks towards heaven. Perhaps he has been to friends, and they have failed him, and therefore, in sheer despair, he seeks his truest Friend. At last he comes to God; and though he cannot say that he believes in God's goodness as he ought, yet he has some dim and shadowy faith in it, or else he would not be coming to God in this his time of extremity. God loves to discover even the shadow of faith in His unbelieving creature. When faith does, as it were, only cross over the field of the camera, so that across the photograph there is a dim trace of its having been there, God can spy it out, and He can and will accept prayer for the sake of that little faith. Oh, dear heart, where art thou? Art thou torn with anguish? Art thou sore distressed? Art thou lonely? Art thou cast away? Then cry to God. None else can help thee; now art thou shut up to Him. Blessed shutting up! Cry to Him, for He can help thee; and I tell thee, in that cry of thine there will be a pure and true worship, such as God

desires, far more than the slaughter of ten thousand bullocks, or the pouring out of rivers of oil. It is true, assuredly, from Scripture, that the groan of a burdened spirit is among the sweetest sounds that are ever heard by the ear of the Most High. Plaintive cries are anthems with Him, to whom all mere arrangements of sound must be as child's-play.

See then, poor, weeping, and distracted ones, that it is not Ritualism, it is not the performance of pompous ceremonies, it is not bowing and scraping it is not using sacred words; but it is crying to God in the hour of your trouble; which is the most acceptable sacrifice your spirit can bring before the throne of God.

II. Come we now to our second observation. May God impress it upon us all! In our text we have ADVERSITY TURNED TO ADVANTAGE. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee."

We say it with all reverence, but God Himself cannot deliver a man who is not in trouble, and therefore it is some advantage to be in distress, because God can then deliver you. Even Jesus Christ, the Healer of men, cannot heal a man who is not sick; so that it turns to our advantage to be sick, in order that Christ may heal us. Thus, my hearer, your adversity may prove your advantage by offering occasion and opportunity for the display of divine grace. It is great wisdom to learn the art of making honey out of gall, and the text teaches us how to do that; it shows how trouble can become gain. When you are in adversity, then call upon God, and you shall experience a deliverance which will be a richer and sweeter experience for your soul than if you had never known trouble. Here is the art and science of making gains out of losses, and advantages out of adversities.

Now let me suppose that there is some person here in trouble. Perhaps another deserted Robinson Crusoe is among us. I am not idly supposing that a tried individual is here; he is so. Well now, when you pray—and oh! I wish you would pray now—do you not see what a plea you have? You have first a plea from *the time:* "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." You can plead, "Lord, this is a day of trouble! I am in great affliction, and my case is urgent at this hour." Then state what your trouble is—that sick wife, that dying child, that sinking business, that failing health, that situation which you have lost—that poverty which stares you in the face. Say unto the Lord of mercy, "My Lord, if ever a man was in a day of trouble, I am that man; and therefore I take leave and license to pray to Thee now, because Thou hast said, 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble.' This is the hour which Thou hast appointed for appealing to Thee: this dark, this stormy day. If ever there was a man that had a right given him to pray by Thy own word, I am that man, for I am in trouble, and therefore I will make use of the very time as a plea with Thee. Do, I beseech Thee, hear Thy servant's cry in this midnight hour."

Next, you can not only make use of the time as a plea; but you may urge *the trouble itself.* You may argue thus, "Thou hast said, 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble.' O Lord, Thou seest how great my trouble is. It is a very heavy one. I cannot bear it, or get rid of it. It follows me to my bed; it will not let me sleep. When I rise up it is still with me, I cannot shake it off. Lord, my trouble is an unusual one: few are afflicted as I am; therefore give me extraordinary succour! Lord, my trouble is a crushing one; if Thou do not help me, I shall soon be broken up by it!" That is good reasoning and prevalent pleading.

Further, turn your adversity to advantage by pleading *the command.* You can go to the Lord now, at this precise instant, and say, "Lord, do hear me, for Thou hast commanded me to pray! I, though I am evil, would not tell a man to ask a thing of me, if I intended to deny him; I would not urge him to ask help, if I meant to refuse it." Do you not know, brethren, that we often impute to the good Lord conduct which we should be ashamed of in ourselves? This must not be. If you said to a poor man, "You are in very sad circumstances; write to me to-morrow, and I will see to your affairs for you;" and if he did write to you, you would not treat his letter with contempt. You would be bound to consider his case. When you told him to write, you meant that you would help him if you could. And when God tells you to call upon Him, He does not mock you: He means that He will deal kindly with you. You are not urged to pray in the hour of trouble, that you may experience all the deeper disappointment. God knows that you have trouble enough without the new one of unanswered prayer. The Lord will not unnecessarily add even a quarter of an ounce to your burden; and if He bids you call upon Him, you may call upon Him without fear of failure. I do not know who you are. You may be Robinson Crusoe, for aught I know, but you may call on the Lord, for He bids you call; and, if you do call upon Him, you can put this argument into your prayer:

> "Lord, Thou hast bid me seek Thy face,
> And shall I seek in vain?
> And shall the ear of sovereign grace
> Be deaf when I complain?"

So plead the time, and plead the trouble, and plead the command; and then plead with God *His own character.* Speak with Him reverently, but believingly, in this fashion, "Lord, it is Thou Thyself to whom I appeal. Thou hast said, 'Call upon Me.' If my neighbour had bidden me do so, I might have feared that perhaps he would not hear me, but would change his mind; but Thou art too great and good to change. Lord, by Thy truth and by Thy faithfulness, by Thy immutability and by Thy love, I, a poor sinner, heart-broken and crushed, call upon Thee in the day of trouble! Oh, help Thou me, and help me soon; or else I die!" Surely you that are in trouble have many and mighty pleas. You are on firm ground with the angel of the covenant, and may bravely seize the blessing. I do not feel to-night as if the text encouraged *me* one-half so much as it must encourage others of you, for I am not in trouble just now, and you are. I thank God I am full of joy and rest; but I am half inclined to see if I cannot patch up a little bit of trouble for myself: surely if I were in trouble, and sitting in those pews I would open my mouth, and drink in this text, and pray like David, or Elias, or Daniel, in the power of this promise, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

Oh, you troubled ones, leap up at the sound of this word! Believe it. Let it go down into your souls. "The Lord looseth the prisoners." He has come to loose you. I can see my Master arrayed in His silken garments, His countenance is joyous as heaven, His face is bright as a morning without clouds, and in His hand He bears a silver key

"Whither away, my Master, with that silver key of thine?" "I go," saith He, "to open the door to the captive, and to loosen every one that is bound." Blessed Master, fulfil Thy errand; but pass not these prisoners of hope! We will not hinder Thee for a moment; but do not forget these mourners! Go up these galleries, and down these aisles, and set free the prisoners of Giant Despair, and make their hearts to sing for joy because they have called upon Thee in the day of trouble, and Thou hast delivered them, and they shall glorify Thee!

III. My third head is clearly in the text. Here we have FREE GRACE LAID UNDER BONDS.

Nothing in heaven or earth can be freer than grace, but here is grace putting itself under bonds of promise and covenant. Listen. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: *I will deliver thee.*" If a person has once said to you, "I will," you hold him; he has placed himself at the command of his own declaration. If he is a true man, and has plainly said, "I will," you have him in your hand. He is not free after giving a promise as he was before it; he has set himself a certain way, and he must keep to it. Is it not so? I say so with the deepest reverence towards my Lord and Master, He has bound Himself in the text with cords that He cannot break. He must now hear and help those who call upon Him in the day of trouble. He has solemnly promised, and He will fully perform.

Notice that this text is *unconditional as to the persons.* It contains the gist of that other promise—"Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The people who are specially addressed in the text had mocked God; they had presented their sacrifices without a true heart; but yet the Lord said to each of them, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee." Hence I gather that He excludes none from the promise. Thou atheist, thou blasphemer, thou unchaste and impure one, if thou callest upon the Lord now, in this the day of thy trouble He will deliver thee! Come and try Him. "If there be a God," sayest thou? But there is a God, say I; come, put Him to the test, and see. He saith, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee." Will you not prove Him now? Come hither, ye bondaged ones, and see if He doth not free you! Come ye to Christ, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest! In temporals and in spirituals, but specially in spiritual things, call upon Him in the day of trouble, and He will deliver you. He is bound by this great unrestricted word of His, about which He has put neither ditch nor hedge; whosoever will call upon Him in the day of trouble, shall be delivered.

Moreover, notice that this "I will" *includes all needful power which may be required for deliverance.* "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee." "But how can this be?" cries one. Ah! that I cannot tell you, and I do not feel bound to tell you: it rests with the Lord to find suitable ways and means. God says, "I will." Let Him do it in His own way. If He says, "I will," depend upon it He will keep His word. If it be needful to shake heaven and earth, He will do it; for He cannot lack power, and He certainly does not lack honesty; and an honest man will keep His word at all costs, and so will a faithful God. Hear Him say, "I will deliver thee," and ask no more questions. I do not suppose that Daniel knew how God would deliver him out of the den of lions. I do not suppose that Joseph knew how he would be delivered out of the prison when his mistress had slandered his character so shamefully. I do not suppose that these ancient believers dreamed of the way of the Lord's deliverance; but they left themselves in God's hands. They rested upon God, and He delivered them in the best possible manner. He will do the like for you; only call upon Him and then stand still, and see the salvation of God.

Notice, *the text does not say exactly when.* "I will deliver thee" is plain enough; but whether it shall be to-morrow, or next week, or next year, is not so clear. You are in a great hurry; but the Lord is not. Your trial may not yet have wrought all the good to you that it was sent to do, and therefore it must last longer. When the gold is cast into the fining-pot, it might cry to the goldsmith, "Let me out." "No," saith he, "you have not yet lost your dross. You must tarry in the fire till I have purified you." God may therefore subject us to many trials; and yet if He says, "I will deliver thee," depend upon it He will keep His word. The Lord's promise is like a good bill from a substantial firm. A bill may be dated for three months ahead; but anybody will discount it if it bears a trusted name. When you get God's "I will," you may always cash it by faith; and no discount need be taken from it, for it is current money of the merchant even when it is only "I will." God's promise for the future is good *bona fide* stuff for the present, if thou hast but faith to use it, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee," is tantamount to deliverance already received. It means, "If I do not deliver thee now, I will deliver thee at a time that is better than now, when, if thou wert as wise as I am, thou wouldst prefer to be delivered rather than now."

But promptitude is implied, for else deliverance would not be wrought. "Ah!" says one, "I am in such a trouble that if I do not get deliverance soon I shall die." Rest assured that you shall not die. You shall be delivered, and therefore you shall be delivered before you quite die of despair. He will deliver you in the best possible time. The Lord is always punctual. You never were kept waiting by Him. You have kept Him waiting long enough; but He is prompt to the instant. He never keeps His servants waiting one single tick of the clock beyond His own appointed, fitting, wise, and proper moment. "I will deliver thee," implies that His delays will not be too protracted, lest the spirit of man should fail because of hope deferred. The Lord rideth on the wings of the wind when He comes to the rescue of those who seek Him. Wherefore, be of good courage!

Oh, this is a blessed text! and yet what can I do with it? I cannot carry it home to those of you who want it most. Spirit of the living God, come Thou, and apply these rich consolations to those hearts which are bleeding and ready to die!

Do notice this text once again. Let me repeat it, putting the emphasis in a different way: "Call upon *Me* in the day of trouble, and *I* will deliver *thee*." Pick up the threads of those two words. "*I* will deliver thee; men would not; angels could not; but I will." God Himself will set about the rescue of the man that calls upon Him. It is yours to call: and it is God's to answer. Poor trembler, you begin to try to answer your own prayers! Why did you pray to God then? When you have prayed, leave it to God to fulfil His own promise. He says, "Do thou call upon Me, and *I* will deliver thee."

Now take up that other word: "I will deliver

thee." I know what you are thinking, Mr. John. You murmur, " God will deliver everybody, I believe, but *not me.*" But the text saith, " I will deliver *thee.*" It is the man that calls that shall get the answer. Mary, where art thou? If thou callest upon God He will answer *thee.* He will give *thee* the blessing even to thy own heart and spirit, in thy own personal experience. " Call upon Me," says He, " in the day of trouble: I will deliver *thee.*" Oh, for grace to take that personal pronoun home to one's soul, and to make sure of it as though you could see it with your own eyes! The apostle tells us, " Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God." Assuredly I know that the worlds were made by God. I am sure of it; and yet I did not see Him making them. I did not see Him when the light came because He said, " Let there be light." I did not see Him divide the light from the darkness, and the waters that are beneath the firmament from the waters that are above the firmament, but I am quite sure that He did all this. All the evolution gentlemen in the world cannot shake my conviction that creation was wrought by God, though I was not there to see Him make even a bird, or a flower. Why should I not have just the same kind of faith to-night about God's answer to my prayer if I am in trouble? If I cannot see how He will deliver me, why should I wish to see? He created the world well enough without my knowing how He was to do it, and He will deliver Me without my having a finger in it. It is no business of mine to see how He works. My business is to trust in my God, and glorify Him by believing that what He has promised He is able to perform.

IV. Thus we have had three sweet things to remember; and we close with a fourth, which is this: here are GOD AND THE PRAYING MAN TAKING SHARES.

That is an odd word to close with, but I want you to notice it. Here are the shares. First, here is your share: " Call upon Me in the day of trouble." Secondly, here is God's share: " I will deliver thee." Again, you take a share—for you shall be delivered. And then again it is the Lord's turn—" Thou shalt glorify Me." Here is a compact, a covenant that God enters into with you who pray to Him, and whom He helps. He says, " You shall have the deliverance, but I must have the glory. You shall pray; I will bless; and then you shall honour my holy name." Here is a delightful partnership: we obtain that which we so greatly need, and all that God getteth is the glory which is due unto His name.

Poor troubled heart! I am sure you do not demur to these terms. " Sinners," saith the Lord, " I will give you pardon, but you must give Me the honour of it." Our only answer is, " Aye, Lord, that we will, for ever and ever."

> " Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
> Or who has grace so rich and free? "

" Come, souls," says He, " I will justify you, but I must have the glory of it." And our answer is, " Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By the law of works? Nay, but by the law of faith." God must have the glory if we are justified by Christ.

" Come," says He, " I will put you into My family, but My grace must have the glory of it "; and we say, " Aye, that it shall, good Lord! Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God."

" Now," says He, " I will sanctify you, and make you holy, but I must have the glory of it "; and our answer is, " Yes, we will sing for ever—' We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore will we serve Him day and night in His temple, giving Him all praise.' "

" I will take you home to heaven," says God: " I will deliver you from sin and death and hell; but I must have the glory of it." " Truly," say we, " Thou shalt be magnified. For ever and for ever we will sing, ' Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.' "

Stop, you thief, there! What are you at? Running away with a portion of God's glory? What a villain he must be! Here is a man that was lately a drunkard, and God has loved him and made him sober, and he is wonderfully proud because he is sober. What folly! Have done, sir! Have done! Give God the glory of your deliverance from the degrading vice, or else you are still degraded by ingratitude. Here is another man. He used to swear once; but he has been praying now; he even delivered a sermon the other night, or at least an open-air address. He has been as proud about this as any peacock. O bird of pride, when you look at your fine feathers, remember your black feet, and your hideous voice! O reclaimed sinner, remember your former character, and be ashamed! Give God the glory if you have ceased to be profane. Give God the glory for every part of your salvation.

Alas! even some divines will give man a little of the glory. He has a free will, has he not? Oh, that Dagon of free will! How men will worship it! The man did something towards his salvation, by virtue of which he ought to receive some measure of honour! Do you really think so? Then say as you think. But we will have it from this pulpit, and we will declare it to the whole world, that when a man reaches heaven there shall not a particle of the glory be due to himself; he shall in no wise ascribe honour to his own feeble efforts; but unto God alone shall be the glory. " Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name."

" Call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee "—that is your part. But " thou shalt glorify Me "—that is God's part. He must have all the honour from first to last.

Go out henceforth, you saved ones, and tell out what the Lord has done for you. An aged woman once said that if the Lord Jesus Christ really did save her, He should never hear the last of it. Join with her in that resolve. Truly my soul vows that my delivering Lord shall never hear the last of my salvation.

> " I'll praise Him in life, and praise Him in death,
> And praise Him as long as He lendeth me breath;
> And say when the death-dew lies cold on my brow,
> ' If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.' "

Come, poor soul, you that came in here to-night in the deepest of trouble, God means to glorify Himself by you! The day shall yet come when you shall comfort other mourners by the rehearsal of your happy experience. The day may yet come when you that were a castaway shall preach the gospel to castaways. The day shall yet come, poor fallen woman, when you shall lead other sinners to the Saviour's feet, where now you stand weeping! Thou abandoned of the devil, whom even Satan is tired of,

whom the world rejects because thou art worn out and stale—the day shall yet come when, renewed in heart, and washed in the blood of the Lamb, thou shalt shine like a star in the firmament, to the praise of the glory of His grace who hath made thee to be accepted in the Beloved! O desponding sinner, come to Jesus! Do call upon Him, I entreat you! Be persuaded to call upon your God and Father. If you can do no more than groan, groan unto God. Drop a tear, heave a sigh, and let your heart say to the Lord, "O God, deliver me, for Christ's sake! Save me from my sin and the consequences of it." As surely as you thus pray, He will hear you, and say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee. Go in peace." So may it be. Amen.

BROKEN BONES

"Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice."—Psalm li. 8.

BACKSLIDING is a most common evil, far more common than some of us suppose. We may ourselves be guilty of it, and yet may delude our hearts with the idea that we are making progress in the divine life. As the cunning hunter always makes the passage into his pits most easy and attractive, but always renders it most difficult for his victim to escape, so Satan makes the way of apostasy to be very seductive to our nature, but, alas! the path of return from backsliding is very hard to tread, and were it not for grace, no human feet would ever be able to make progress in it. If I should be successful this morning in calling attention to decline in the spiritual life, especially in calling the attention of those to the matter whom it most concerns—I mean those who are themselves declining—I shall feel happy indeed. At the same time, if I should so speak that those who have backslidden may be encouraged to hope for restoration and to seek, with earnestness and eagerness, that they may even now be restored, a second good result will have followed, and unto God shall be double praise. Dear friends, we make advance little enough in the divine life; as it is, it were a thousand follies in one to be going back. When I look at my own standing in the road to heaven, I am so dissatisfied with that to which I have attained, that to give up an inch of what I have gained would be excess of madness. A rich man may lose a thousand pounds, or more, and not feel it, but he whose purse is scant cannot afford to lose a shilling. Those who abound much in grace, might perhaps be able to bear some spiritual losses, but you and I cannot afford it; we are too near bankruptcy as it is, and so poverty-stricken in many respects, that it well behoves us to look to every one of the pence of grace, to watch our little drains and expenditures, and to neglect no means by which even a little might be gained in the divine life. May God grant to us now that while we are listening to His word we may derive a blessing.

There are three things to which I shall call your attention this morning. The first is, *the plight in which David was*—he speaks of his bones as having been broken; secondly, *the remedy which he sought*, "Make me to hear joy and gladness"; and then, thirdly, *the expectation which he entertained*, namely, that the bones which had once been broken would yet be able to rejoice.

I. In commencing, let us notice THE PLIGHT IN WHICH DAVID WAS. His bones had been broken.

We hear persons speak very flippantly of David's sin, boldly offering it as an accusation against godliness, and as an excuse for their own inconsistent conversation; I wish they would look also at David's repentance, for if his sin was shameful, his sorrow for it was of the bitterest kind; and if the crime was glaring, certainly the afflictions which chastised him were equally remarkable. From that day forward, the man whose ways had been ways of pleasantness, and whose paths had been paths of peace, limped like a cripple along a thorny road, and traversed a pilgrimage of afflictions almost unparalleled. Children of God cannot sin cheaply. Sinners may sin, and in this life they may prosper, aye, and sometimes prosper by their sins, but those whom God loves will always find the way of transgression to be hard; their follies will cost them that peace of mind, cost them their present comfort, and even cost them all but their souls, so that they are saved, but so as by fire. David had sinned, and for awhile the sin was pleasurable, and all the attendant circumstances appeared to be favourable to his escape from punishment. He had managed adroitly to conceal his crime from the injured Uriah and then he had with horrible craftiness effected the death of the injured husband. Every circumstance in providence seemed to favour the concealment of the monarch's sin. His conscience slept, his passions rioted, his heart was estranged, his grace was at the lowest ebb. Perhaps he even persuaded himself that his adultery, which might have been a great sin in others, was excusable in himself, because of his position as a despotic sovereign, who, according to Oriental notions, had almost absolute power over the persons of his subjects—it is so easy to persuade ourselves that what custom concedes to us, it is right to take. But because David was a man after God's own heart, his ease in sin could not long continue; the Lord would not allow such a disease to destroy His servant. His rest was broken. The stern prophet, Nathan, delivers to him a parable, with a personal application; the sense of right in the king is awakened, conviction of sin, like a lightning flash, destroys the towers of his joy, and lays his peace prostrate in ruins. He trembles before God, whom in his heart he loved, but whom he had for awhile forgotten. The king goes into his chamber mourning and lamenting before the Lord, followed by the chastising rod, which drives the word home upon his conscience, while the Holy Spirit becomes the spirit of bondage to him, and makes him again to fear; by the rough north wind of conviction, all his joys are withered, and his delights cut off. He becomes one of the most wretched of mortals, his sighs and groans resound through his palace,

and where once his harp had poured forth melodies of pleasant praise, nothing is heard but dolorous notes of plaintive penitence. Alas! for thee, O conscience-smitten monarch, thy couch is watered with thy tears, and thy bread made bitter with thy grief. Well dost thou compare thy sorrow to the pain of broken bones. Brethren, let us open up that poetical metaphor before us.

We may gather from this that David's plight was *very painful.* "His bones," he says, "were broken." A flesh wound is painful—and who would not escape from it? but here was a more serious injury, for the bone was reached, and completely crushed. No punishment was probably more cruel than that of breaking poor wretches alive upon the wheel, when a heavy bar of iron smashed the great bones of the arms and of the legs—the pain must have been excruciating to the last degree; but David declares that the mental anguish which he endured was comparable to such extreme agony. You are on your way home to-day, and in affecting a passage across one of our most perilous roads, you are startled by a fearful cry, for some poor unwary passenger has been dashed down by a huge and impetuous vehicle; you rush to the rescue, but it is too late, the unhappy victim is pale and death-like, and the word sounds terribly on your compassionate ears when you are informed that his bones are broken. We think comparatively little of wounds which only tear the curtains of flesh, but when the solid pillars of the house of manhood are snapped in twain, and the supporters of the body are broken, then every man confesses that the pain is great indeed. David declares that such was his pain of mind. His soul was racked and tortured, anguished and tormented. The pain of a broken bone is as constant as it is excruciating. It prevents sleep by night and ease by day. The mind cannot be diverted from it. Men cannot shake off the remembrance that this their frame is so seriously injured. Oh beware, you believers, who are just now tempted by the sweets of sin, and remember the wormwood and gall which will be found in the dregs thereof. You who feel the soft blandishments of sin to be so pleasing to your flesh, and are ready to yield to its gentle fascinations, remember that when it reveals itself, the softness of its touch will all be gone, and it will be towards you as a huge hammer, or like the crushing wheels of the chariot of Juggernaut, crushing your spirit with anguish. The velvet paw of the tiger of sin conceals a lacerating claw. Beware in time!

The metaphor also signifies that the result of his sin and of his repentance, was exceedingly *serious.* A trifling thing is superficial; that which is merely on the surface is not a matter which may cause us deep anxiety: but a broken bone is not a thing to laugh at; such an injury compels a man to change his lightheartedness for apprehension. Had it been but a skin wound, he might have wrapped his handkerchief about it and have gone his way, and have said, "It will heal in due time"; but in the case of a broken bone he anxiously sends for the surgeon, and knows that he must lie by awhile; he feels the accident is no mere trifle. Believe me, dear friends, genuine sorrow for sin is not as some suppose it, mere sentimentalism. Under sorrow for sin, I have seen men driven almost out of their senses, until it seemed as if their minds would fail them under their apprehensions of guilt and its heinousness. Aye, some of us have personally felt it, and we bear witness that if all forms of bodily pain could be heaped upon us at once, we had sooner bear them all than the burden of sin. O believe me, as I am sure you will, who have felt the same, that guilt upon the conscience is worse than the body on the rack; that even the flames of the stake may be cheerfully endured, but the burnings of a conscience tormented of God are beyond all measure unendurable. Many have felt this soul anguish, and have endured this month after month, but have at last found rest; so that there is comfort in this misery, for it ends well and profitably. May you who now feel your bones to be broken, now plead, as David did, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice."

The plight into which David fell was more than serious and painful—it was *complicated.* The setting of one broken bone may puzzle the surgeon, but what is his task when many bones are broken? In one bone a compound fracture will involve great difficulty in bringing the divided pieces together in the hope that yet new bone may be formed, and so the member may be spared; but if it should come to a broken bone of arm, of leg, of rib—if in many places the poor human frame has become injured—how exceedingly careful must the surgeon be! Often the very treatment which may be useful to one member may be injurious to the other: disease in one limb may act upon another. The cure of the whole, where all the bones are broken, must be a miracle. If a mass of misery, a man full of broken bones, shall yet become healthy and strong, great credit must be given to the surgeon's skill. Brethren and sisters, you see the case of a man, then, who has sinned against God by backsliding from His ways, and who is heavily smitten by his conscience and by the Holy Spirit. It is a complicated sorrow which he endures. The metaphor of broken bones seems to indicate that *the greater powers* of the soul are grieved and afflicted. The bones are the more important part of the structure of the body. In our spirits there are certain graces which are, so to speak, the bones of the spiritual man; to these David refers. Our Heavenly Father is pleased sometimes, when we have sinned, to allow our faith to become weak, like a broken bone; we cannot grasp the promises we once delighted in; we cannot rejoice in the encouraging word as we did in happier days: our faith brings us pain rather than rest. He suffers our hope to lose its joy-creating power, and like a broken bone our very hope for a better land, where rest remaineth, becomes a pining disquietude at our present forlorn condition; while even love, that notable limb of strength, which makes the soul to run so nimbly, is full of weakness and anguish, and makes us cry, "Do I love my Lord at all, and if so, how could I have offended Him so greatly? When I have backslidden so far, surely for me to talk about love to God would be to take a holy word upon a polluted lip!" So that the great master graces within our spirit seem each of them to minister to our woe, and though they be there, as the broken bone is still in the man's body, yet are so injured and weakened, and all but powerless, that their only vitality is the sad vitality of pain; our faith in the Scriptures leading us to tremble at their threatenings; our hope shocking us because, though we have hope for others, we cannot rejoice for ourselves; and our very love to God, yet alive within us, making us

hate and despise ourselves to think we should have acted thus towards one so good and kind. O brethren, you who are lingering on the brink of sin, and are beginning to slip with your feet, may the thought of those broken bones awaken you from your dangerous lethargy as with a thunderclap, and may you fly at once to the cross, and to the fountain filled from Jesus' veins, and begin your spiritual career anew with more earnestness and watchfulness than you have ever shown before. The case was painful, serious, and complicated.

In the fourth place, it was extremely *dangerous*, for when several bones are broken, every surgeon perceives how very likely it is that the case will end fatally. Around each shattered bone there lingers the evil spirit of gangrene: if that grievous ill shall intervene, the healing art will be all in vain. When a heart is broken with repentance, the gangrene of remorse is most urgent to enter it; when the spirit is humbled, the gangrene of unbelief covets the opportunity to take possession of the man; when the heart is really emptied, and made to feel its own nothingness, then the demon despair beholds a dark cavern in which to fix its horrible abode. It is a dreadful thing to have the faith broken, the hope broken, and the love broken, and the entire man, as it were, reduced to a palpitating mass of pain. It is a dreadfully dangerous condition to be in; for, alas! my brethren, when men have sinned, and have been made to suffer afterwards, how often have they turned to their sins again with greater hardness of heart than ever! With many, the more they are smitten the more they revolt. When the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint, and they seem to be nothing but "wounds and bruises and putrifying sores," through the afflictions they have suffered; yet they return to their idols still; and the more they are chastened the more they revolt. Think, I pray you, how many professors have backslidden and have been chastened, but have continued in their backsliding until they have gone down to hell! I did not say children of God, but I said professors; and how do you know but what you may be mere professors yourselves. Ah! my friend, if you are living in known sin at this time, and are happy in it, you have great cause to tremble. If you can go on from day to day, and from week to week, in neglected prayer and neglected reading of the Word; if you can live without the means of grace in the week days, if you are cold and indifferent towards our Lord and Master, if you are altogether becoming worldly, and covetous, and vain, fond of levity and the things of this world, and yet are at ease—you have grave cause to suspect that you are a bastard in the family and not one of the true children of the living God. I use that hard expression, remembering how the poet puts it:—

> "Bastards may escape the rod,
> Plunged in sensual, vain delight;
> But the trueborn child of God,
> Must not, would not, if he might."

Ah, indeed, he would not if he might. Great God, never let us sin without a smart! Never suffer us to turn to the right or to the left without receiving at once a reproof for it, that we may be driven back into the strait and narrow path, and may so walk all our lives with Thee! The danger is, when the man's bones get broken, lest the gangrene of despair, or the mortification of indifference, should set in, and the man should become a castaway. How this ought to keep any of you, who know the Lord, from indulging in the beginnings of declension! How jealous should you be lest you run these frightful risks!

Yet again, the case of David was most *damaging*. Supposing the danger to be overpast, yet a broken bone is never a gain, but must always be a loss. Poor man! while his bone is broken he is quite unable to help himself, much less to help others. His being unable to help himself makes a draft upon the strength of the Church of God. Power which might otherwise be employed, has to be turned into the channel of succouring him; so that there is a clear demand upon the Christian power of the Church, which ought to be expended mainly in seeking after lost souls. There is a damage to the whole Church in the declension of one backsliding believer. Moreover, while the man is in this state, he can do no good to others. Of what service can he be who does not know his own salvation? How can he point others to a Saviour, when he cannot yet see the cross himself? How shall he comfort another man's faith, while his own faith can scarcely touch the hem of Jesus' garment? By what energy and power shall he help the weak, when he himself is weakest of all? Aye, and let me say even after God in His mercy has healed every broken bone, it is a sad detriment to a man to have had his bones broken at all. Somehow or other there is never the freedom of action and degree of energy in the healed arm, that there is in the one that was never broken. It is a great blessing for the cripple to be helped to walk with a crutch, but it is a greater blessing never to have been a cripple; it is an unspeakable blessing to have been able always to run without weariness and walk without fainting. When a man's bone has been broken in his boyhood, if it be ever so well set, yet, I have heard say, it will feel the changes of the weather, and will feel starts and shocks unknown before—unpleasant reminders that it was once broken. So it is with us; if we have fallen into a sin, even though we have recovered from it, there is a weakness left, and a tendency to pain. We never are the men after backsliding that we were before; we never make altogether a recovery from great spiritual decline, so as to be all, things else considered, quite what we were before. I grant that in some points we may become superior, as, for instance, in knowledge of self and in experience of the divine life, we may even have made an advance, but still in holy agility, in sacred vivacity, in consecrated exultation, we are not what we were. I will defy David to dance before the ark of God with all his might after the sin with Bathsheba had crippled him; aye, and there is no giant killing, there is no slaying his ten thousands, there is very little of high and mighty exploit in Israel's cause after the sin, although succeeded by a gracious recovery. I grant you, David exhibited virtues of another class, and excellencies of another kind, but even these are not such as to tempt us to risk the experiment for ourselves. God grant that our bones may not be broken, lest our soul be damaged for life. May we never be like a ship which has been all but wrecked and just escaped the rocks, tugged into harbour with extreme difficulty, her hull all but waterlogged, her cargo spoiled, her masts gone by the board, her streamers gone, her crew and passengers all wet, and saved as by the skin of their teeth, a mere hulk dragged into haven by infinite mercy: God grant, instead of that, that we may

have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, sails all filled, with a goodly cargo on board, to the praise of the glory of His grace who hath made us accepted in the Beloved.

One more reflection on this point, and that is, although David's case was very painful, very serious, very complicated, very dangerous, and very damaging, yet it was still *hopeful.* The saving clause lies here. "The bones which *Thou* hast broken." What, did God break those bones? Then the breaking was not done by accident, but by design. Did God in chastisement deal with David's spirit, and bring him into this killing sorrow? Then He who wounds can bind up. Infinite power rests in God, and if He has, in wisdom, been pleased to break, He will, in mercy, be pleased to reset the bones. O you wounded spirits, far be it from me to wound you yet more; far rather would I help to bind on the splints and the strapping. Let this then be your consolation, like a piece of heavenly court-plaster may this be to you—"The Lord killeth *and* maketh alive. The Lord woundeth *and* He maketh whole." None but He can do it. If your sorrow is a hatred for sin, depend upon it the devil did not give you that sorrow, and your own nature did not breed it; it is a heaven-given sorrow, and when it has wrought its end, it shall be a heaven-removed sorrow. Those bones of yours shall yet be healed, aye, and they shall yet rejoice.

The lesson for this first part of the subject then, is, let as many as are now possessing any spiritual health and enjoyment, be careful that they do not lose it. Let such as have lost their nearness to God, be anxious to regain it before worse evils shall come. Let those who are almost in despair, take heart, for they cannot be in a worse plight than David was, and the God who rescued David can rescue them. Let them now sit down in despair, but, with the Psalmist, let them rise up with humble hope, and address themselves, as we do now, in the second place, to the remedy.

II. THE REMEDY WHICH THE PSALMIST RESORTED TO.

Observe, negatively, he did not lie down sullenly, in despondency; he turned to his chastening God in prayer. He did not offer sacrifices, nor attempt good works of his own; he turned not to himself in any measure, but to God alone. He did not cast away his confidence in God. He believed still that there was power in heaven to save him, and therefore, by humble faith, he lifted up the voice of his cry to the Most High in these words: "Make me to hear joy and gladness."

Now notice, brethren, in this, first of all, *David believed that there was joy and gladness even for such as he.* Notice the verse which comes before this text, "Purge me with hyssop: and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Aye, there is the key to his meaning. He believed that there was pardon, and that pardon would restore his joy and gladness to him; he was confident that God could pardon, that He could pardon completely, that He had already provided the means of pardon; for he alludes to that in the hyssop—that God could thoroughly pardon even him, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Now, beloved mourner, I pray you believe the same precious fact. There is forgiveness with God, that He may be feared. Great as your sin may be, whether as a sinner or as a fallen Christian, yet still it cannot exceed the boundless extent of Jehovah's compassion. He is able to forgive the greatest sins, through the blood of His dear Son. There cannot be so much enormity in your sin as there is merit in the Saviour's atonement. What though you should have sinned against light and knowledge, and so far as you could do so, have crucified the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame, yet, without injury to His justice or taint upon His holiness, God can stretch out the silver sceptre and forgive you, even you; and He can do that at this instant. Believe that, believe that now, for it is most certainly true.

In the next place, *David knew that this joy and gladness must come to him by hearing.* Observe, "Make me to *hear* joy and gladness." He did not expect it by doing, he did not look for it merely by praying, he certainly did not expect it by feeling, but he expected it by hearing. Oh, those fops and fools, for what are they better, who attempt to preach the gospel, as they say (which gospel is no gospel), through the eye, by their vestments and pantomimes! Why, the gate of mercy is the ear. Salvation comes to no man through what he sees, but through what he hears. As saith the Scripture, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live." As it was well observed this week by an eminent brother in Christ, there are some who despise sermons, and imagine that the saying of public prayers is everything; but these should remember that, nowhere in the New Testament, did Jesus commission special men to go forth and celebrate public prayer, nowhere did He give even a hint of a ritual; nowhere prescribe a liturgy, ordain matins and vespers, or so much as a collect for the day; but He did say to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel." Far are we from undervaluing the assembling of ourselves together for public prayer, but yet it is suggestive that so little should be said of that which we call public worship in the New Testament, while the same book teems with references to the preaching of the Word, and plainly declares that, by the foolishness of preaching, God will save them that believe. Our Lord Himself was, throughout His whole life, a preacher; and among the greatest signs of His Messiahship, He mentioned that the poor had the gospel preached unto them. The fact is, the sermon reverently heard, and earnestly delivered, is the highest act of worship; and the preaching of the gospel is, in the hands of the Holy Ghost, the grandest instrumentality for the salvation of men. Though all the liturgies that were ever said or sung had remained unwritten; though all the notes of pealing organs had been silent; though every morning celebration and evening chant had been unknown; though every "performing of service" had been foresworn; the world might have been all the better for the loss, but the gospel faithfully proclaimed is God's gate of mercy—the preaching of His Word by earnest lips, touched with the consecrating fire, is the power of God unto salvation. The hearing of the Word is the great horror alike of papists and infidels, but it is the greatest of all means of grace. Let those who are disconsolate and cast down, remember the Master's precept, and be diligent in listening to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus. God asks no sacraments of you: "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it." David turned away from ceremonies, and his truly evangelical prayer was, "Make me to *hear*," for there is the point

of healing. Notice, that the hearing which David intended was an inward and spiritual hearing with his whole soul. One is struck with the expression, "*Make* me to hear." What, David, hast thou no ears? Does he mean, "Lord, send me a prophet"? No, there was Nathan, there was Gad; Israel was not without her prophets in those days. He does not ask for a preacher. What then did he seek? What, had the man's ear become deaf? Spiritually, that was the case. He heard the word of comfort, but he did not hear it aright. He was distracted, his soul was tempest-tossed, conscience tormented him, the threatenings of the law thundered in his ears; so that when the good word came, "The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die," he did not hear it as being his own. He took it with him into his prayer-closet, and he remembered the words, but he could not feel the inward sense to be true to himself. Therefore does he ask for the hearing ear. "Lord," he seems to say, "Cleanse these ears of mine! Oh give my poor heart the power to grasp these absolving words, lest I should be like those who, having ears, hear not, and having eyes, see not, and do not understand." Believe me I can make some of you hear well enough with your outward ear, but one of my most earnest prayers is, that God would make you all hear within; and especially those who are desponding, those who refuse to be comforted. I suggest this prayer to mourners to-day to take home with them, and I beg God's people to join in supplication for them. "Make me to hear! Make me to hear that precious gospel! Make me to hear and to receive Thine own true word! It has comforted so many, Lord, let it comfort me! I know Thy blood has pardoned others, oh help Thy poor broken-hearted servant to get pardon as well as they. I do not doubt Thy power or Thy willingness to save others, but, Lord, there are such obstacles and difficulties about my case, I beseech Thee roll away the stone from the sepulchre of my poor dead hopes, and make me to live in Thy sight. It is really a making, Lord—a creation, a work of omnipotence, a work in which the attributes of Thy power and Thy grace will be resplendent. *Make* me to hear. Thou who hast made the ear at first can new make it. Oh *make* me to hear joy and gladness!" Do you catch the meaning of the Psalmist? He knows that the comfort must come by hearing, but he knows it must be a spiritual hearing, and therefore he asks for it of the Lord.

III. And now, as time fails us, though we might have enlarged here, we shall turn in the last place to THE HOPE WHICH THE PSALMIST ENTERTAINED.

What was it? "That the bones which Thou hast broken may *rejoice*." Notice, not "that the bones which Thou hast broken may grow quiet and be calm and at rest"—that was not enough. Not "that the bones which Thou hast broken may become callous, indifferent, painless"; no, no; that he would have vehemently deprecated; but "that the bones which Thou hast broken may *rejoice*." He dares to ask for great mercy, yea, the greatest mercy. When a great sinner comes to a great God, if he pleads at all he will do well to plead for great things; for since he deserves nothing at all, all that comes to him must come of grace, and, therefore, the same mercy which freely gives the little may as well give the much; therefore, seeking sinners, make bold to open your mouths wide, for He will fill them.

Let us look at these words more closely—"that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice." He means, then, that if he is enabled by faith to look to Christ, whose blood is sprinkled by the hyssop upon the soul, if he receives perfect pardon through the atoning sacrifice, which makes sinners white as snow, then he will possess a deeper and truer joy than before. Aforetime, his tongue rejoiced, but now his bones will rejoice; before, his flesh rejoiced, now his bones and marrow will rejoice. The deep pain which he had felt within the inmost depths of his nature would now be exchanged for an equally deep content, which, like an Artesian well gushes up from the very bowels of the earth all clear and fresh, would rise in continual flood from the bowels of his nature, all fresh with holy exultation. He would now know what sin meant as he never knew before; he would know what chastisement for sin was as he could not have dreamed before; he would know what mercy meant as he had not before understood; and therefore his inmost nature shall praise and bless God in a way in which he had never done until that hour. That deeply experimental, painful, and yet blessed experience of his weakness, and of God's power to save, taught him a heart-music which only broken bones could learn. You know, brethren, there is a great deal of flash about many of our spiritual joys; they are in the grosser parts very near akin to carnal excitement; and especially with young beginners, the gladness is too apt to trail in the mire of mere mental pleasure. Our gladness is frequently far from being deep as we could wish, but after the bone-breaking everything is solid; after the bone-healing everything is true; what our joy lacks in vividness it makes up in stability and depth. So David means, "the innermost core of my nature, the very essentials of my spiritual being, shall sing and rejoice."

Note again, he means that his joy would be more than ever *a matter of his whole soul*. "My bones which were broken shall all of them," in the plural, "rejoice." He had been a mass of misery—mercy shall make him a mass of music. It is not easy to get the whole man to praise God. You can bless God sometimes in His house with your heart and with your voice too, but your thoughts will wander after the sick child, or after the bad debt; some faculty or other is unstrung—the ten strings are not all in tune. But when the bone-breaking process has been suffered, when the man feels himself thoroughly crushed before God, all his thoughts are concentrated then upon his misery; and when he obtains relief, then all his thoughts are concentrated upon the mercy, for which he blesses God with a unanimity of all his powers nohow else to be reached. The bones which God has broken, without discord, every one of them praise Him.

That rejoicing expected was peculiar to the brokenness which would be apparent in it. Every broken bone would then become a mouth with which to bless God; but there would be always a humility, gentleness, softness, and tenderness, in such praise. I must confess I like to listen to the high sounding cymbals, and I can shout as loudly as any, "Praise the Lord with the harp. Blow upon the trumpet in the new moon." I can cry with ardour, "Oh for a shout, a sacred shout, to God, the Sovereign King." But the dulcimer's soft notes often have the most music in them to my weary ear. Trumpet notes of triumph may be too much like the noise of those who

go forth to the battles of earth, or make merry in the feast; but the soft music of broken bones is peculiarly sacred and reminds one of the Master's sacred joy, the soft and solemn music of His soul when He said, "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before them that fear Him." When He blessed God on the cross, that a seed should serve Him; that it should be unto the Lord for a generation, His joy was true and deep. "Still waters run deep." The brokenness of heart has not in it the roaring as when the sea roars, and the fulness thereof, but it has the gentle flow of that silver river, "the streams whereof make glad the city of God."

Once again, the joy which the Psalmist expected would have *much of God in it*, for you observe that the Lord appears in this verse twice: "He breaks the bones, and He makes the ear to hear joy and gladness." God is appealed to as the breaker and the healer. After having been sorely smitten, and having at last found comfort, we always think more of our Lord Jesus than we did before. If I have grown in anything since I have known the Lord, I think it is in this one thing, in having more frequent and realising thoughts of God the Father, Son, and Spirit, personally considered. There was a day when I thought doctrine the first thing and all-important, and there was a time when I conceived inward experience to be most exceedingly worthy of my regard; I think the same now, but over and above all, that my soul possesses a deep sense of God, and a longing to be in daily personal fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Surely this being filled with God is a more excellent way, for doctrine may be but food untasted, and experience may turn out to be but fancy, but to live upon God by faith, and to serve Christ with the heart, and to feel the Holy Spirit's indwelling, this is reality and truth. Now, when a man has had such dealings with God as David had, and received such mercy from Him, then his joy will be fuller of God than it ever was before.

You will notice in the verse, too, that David *sets no end* whatever to his joy. "The bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice," but how long? Oh, as long as ever they please! Once let the bone be set, the ground of joy is constant and continuous. A pardoned sinner never need pause in his sacred gratitude. Let the Lord visit the most broken-hearted among His people, and light their candle, and the devil cannot blow it out; nor death itself, that last of foes, shall quench the sacred flame. O see, my brethren, how blessed a remedy Christ has provided for all the evils of your backsliding! See how to get at it, by an earnest prayer to God through Christ! Go to your chambers and breathe out a prayer, ye daughters of sorrow, and ye sons of woe, for—

> "The mercy-seat is open still—
> There let your souls retreat."

God waits to be gracious. He comes to-day in the gospel to meet His poor prodigal, and to receive him with arms of love. Christ, this morning, by our ministry, is sweeping the house to search for His lost piece of money. The Good Shepherd is seeking His wandering sheep. Oh be joyful and thankful that you are in the land of mercy, in the place where the bowels of God yearn over His dear wandering ones! Come to Jesus now, oh come now by faith, and let your prayer be the words of the text, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice."

THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT BUSINESS

"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee."—Psalm li. 12 and 13.

BELOVED brethren and sisters, sinners are all around us living in their sins. Tens of thousands in our great cities and our country towns and villages are abiding in the densest spiritual darkness, and know not their right hand from their left as to eternal things; and an equally numerous class who do know something of the letter of the gospel are yet as men who see but perceive not, who hear but understand not. Some of these wanderings ones are in great misery every day, as the result of their sins, and if we knew what they suffered we should greatly pity them; it would be impossible for us to remain indifferent if we heard their secret groanings. And all these sinners, whether they are suffering or not, are living to the dishonour of God, robbing God of the glory which is due to Him as Creator, and more or less dishonouring the Lord Jesus, who receives no reward from them as Redeemer. If we were in a right state of heart we could not live where we are without feeling daily anguish on account of abounding sin. Meanwhile, all around us there are potent agencies at work to hold these sinners in their present condition, and prevent their escape into a better life. We may be idle, but the powers of darkness and their agents are busy—busy in working mischief, leading men into one form of error or another, or casting one or other of the nets of infidelity around them. Hell from beneath is stirred at this moment. If there be no revival in the Church of God, there is certainly a revival amongst her enemies. They are compassing sea and land to make proselytes, though, when they make them, they will be tenfold more the children of hell than they were before. The activity of the hosts of the Evil One should act as the sound of the tocsin to awake the slumbering army of the living God. What mean ye, O sleepers? Arise, for the Philistines are at your gates!

Meanwhile, the case is graver still. Sinners are dying; every hour hurries a company of them into eternity. They are carried away as with a flood, they fall like grass before the mower's scythe. And whither do they go? Alas, we know, but how little do we consider. They are driven from the presence of God and from all hope of restoration. Their woe is such as cannot be described in language, though in the book of God the Holy Spirit has employed

terms of extreme expressiveness, whose meaning it would be hardly possible to exaggerate. I might say, eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the doom which awaits all those who perish in impenitence. Beloved, the thought of souls sinking into everlasting woes stirs me with the desire to arouse you. I feel that if my heart be cold, I may share the responsibility of any lack of zeal in you, but if I shall be helped to be earnest, I shall hope that the sacred contagion will spread, and that all around believers in Christ will be deeply concerned for the souls of others.

Our topic, then, is the life-business of the Christian —to teach transgressors God's ways, that sinners may be converted unto Him. We shall handle our subject thus—first, we shall show *who are to teach others;* secondly, *what they are to aim at in their teaching;* thirdly, *why they should thus seek the conversion of others;* and, fourthly, *how they can do this;* for there may be some who will need a little practical guidance as to what they shall attempt.

I. First, dear brethren, WHO ARE TO TEACH TRANSGRESSORS THAT THEY MAY BE CONVERTED UNTO GOD? The reply is easy. The text is found in a psalm which is deeply penitential all through, but ends in the joy of forgiven sin, and the words before us relate to joy restored by a sense of pardon; therefore the men who should teach others the ways of God are those *who have themselves been pardoned.* Who else can tell of the guilt of sin but men upon whom the burden of sin has pressed, who have felt the arrows of conviction in their own soul, who have been bowed into the dust, because they have felt that the wrath of God rested upon them? They can speak with authority concerning what they have personally felt. When such men speak of pardoning love, and of the blood which cleanses, how sweetly do they tell of that blessed moment when their transgressions were forgiven, and their sins were covered. These are not the men to descant upon the dignity of human nature, the excellencies of virtue, and the merit of moral reformation; their story is of quite another kind. They cry, "We have destroyed ourselves, and all our help is found in Jesus. We are condemned, and have no means of self-justification, but there is a precious blood that speaketh better things than that of Abel, which pleads for us." Pardoned sinners, go and publish the story of what God's grace has done for you. You are the men, and none others in the world, who can tell it to advantage. Tell it with the hope that your fellow men will hear it and live.

While, however, all pardoned sinners ought to do this, we should remember that *we are fittest for the doing of it when we are full of the joy* of God's salvation. Notice the prayer—"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways." If you are doubtful as to whether you are saved or not, the sword of the Spirit in your hand is rusted, or hidden in a scabbard. You cannot wield the weapons of your holy war with any force while your arm is trembling with doubt. You must know in yourself that you are forgiven, and that you have proved the power of the precious blood, before you can speak to others with the hope that they will believe your message. When Luther lay sick and sorrowing, before he had found peace with God, a truly gracious monk came to his bedside and said, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Luther looked at him, for he had often repeated those words in the creed, but had never felt their power before. The man of God said, "Thou believest in the forgiveness of David: thou believest in the forgiveness of Peter; believe thou in the like forgiveness of thine own sins through the precious blood of Jesus." And Luther did believe it, and from that time he spoke like a man whom God had sent, speaking mightily because he believed confidently. In preaching justification by faith he roared like a lion in the glory of his strength, for the joy of the Lord in his own soul had become his strength to bear testimony to others. I wonder not that some men doubt, and waver, and vacillate in their doctrinal sentiments and teachings, and talk about views and opinions. O sirs, if they had once felt a broken heart and the terrors of a broken law, if they had once known the power of the blood to bind up the wounds of the heart, they would speak of certainties, and soon would come to be accused, as some of us are, of being positive and dogmatic. Who can help being dogmatic about a thing which is his very life, and is as sure to him as his existence itself? While we believe in the joy of the Lord we shall not come to sinners with "ifs" and "buts," but with a faith which will, by God's grace, help them also to believe.

To prepare us to win souls, *we must have the Holy Spirit resting upon us,* for the text says, "Uphold me with Thy free spirit." The Spirit of God in the Church is the standing miracle which proves that she is of God. Were the Spirit of God gone from her it would be impossible for the Church to hold her ground, but the Holy Ghost abiding in the Church, is the testimony of God to His Church and the strength of her testimony for her God. Beloved, if the Holy Ghost shall come upon you and rest on you continually, you will sweetly tell of your Lord's grace, and of His dying love. The right words will come, for it shall be often given you in the same hour what you shall speak. The right emotions will attend the words, for the Spirit of God creates tenderness and pity. The ice will melt in your spirit, the hard frosts of your long backsliding winter will yield to the returning sun of righteousness, the season of cold and death shall be over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds shall have come to your soul. Then will you be able to teach transgressors God's ways. O brethren, pray for a revival, in your own souls. Beseech the Holy Spirit to come upon you; entreat the Lord to send the breath from the four winds, not only upon the dry bones, but also upon the men who have to prophesy in the valley of the dead.

Note also that if we would bear good testimony for God to the conversion of souls, *we must by the Spirit of God be upheld in consistency of life,* "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." Brethren, if you are inconsistent in your own daily lives, how can you hope to be useful to others! The old proverb is a true one, "Actions speak louder than words." If we speak to men upon the evil of sin, and yet indulge in it, what can they infer from our conduct. If we tell them of the wrath of God against evil, and yet find pleasure in it ourselves, will they believe us?

If we speak of a Saviour's dying love, and yet are ourselves unloving, how will they believe us to be Christ's disciples? Vain must it be for us to converse upon the power of grace, when it never appears in our own conduct. Inconsistency will mar the most eloquent testimony, and make it no better than silence. If we are unholy we shall pull down with our right hand dexterously what we in a clumsy manner attempted to build up with our left. We must be con-

sistent, and our prayer must be—"Uphold me with Thy free Spirit," or we cannot teach transgressors. Then, brethren, we shall not say "Stand by! for I am holier than thou"; but feeling that we owe our preservation entirely to divine grace, we shall not reckon it any condescension on our part to come down to teach even the most guilty transgressors, God's ways, that so the most notorious sinners may be converted unto God.

Brethren, the text plainly shows us that pardoned sinners, possessed of the Holy Spirit, rejoicing in salvation, and upheld in consistency of life, are the chosen instruments of God for the conversion of their fellow-men; let us note this, and act accordingly. I see nothing in the text, and indeed nothing in the Scriptures, about a certain class of officials being set apart to convert sinners, to the exclusion of others. One of the most deadly injuries ever inflicted upon the church of God was the invention of the distinction of clergy and laity; there really is no such distinction in the Word of God. On the contrary, the apostle says to the saints, "Ye are God's *cleros*"—ye are God's clergy—ye are God's heritage all of you; and another apostle tells you that the Lord Jesus has made you kings and priests unto God, not *some* of you, but all His people. God forbid that we should ever arrogate any superiority over our fellows; the ministry is not alone ours, ye also are all to minister according as ye have gifts and grace. All the members of Christ's body have a ministry to discharge—not the tongue alone, but the hand and the foot; and even those parts of the body which are least observable and even less comely, are all necessary for the health of the entire system, and therefore should occupy themselves in their own peculiar service. Do not excuse yourselves, therefore, by saying, "We will pray for *you*, that *you* may teach transgressors, and sinners may be converted unto God." Do it, my brethren, for greatly do I need your prayers, but do not, when you have prayed for me, forget that you also are bought with the blood of Christ, and therefore owe all your strength to His service.

Neither does the text suggest that persons of superior abilities are the only persons who should addict themselves to teaching transgressors. The least in ability, the man of one talent, should as diligently serve His Lord as the servant whose talents are more numerous. Neither does it appear that men, because of the pressure of business, are to think themselves excused, for David was a king, and kings have much to do. In any kingdom much thought and activity must be required, and David might therefore perhaps have claimed exemption from spiritual work; but he knew that he had been a sinner, and he knew that he had been saved, and therefore he was ready to help others. Have you been saved? Then, dear brother, though you be up to the throat in business cares, still, nevertheless, say, "I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." For, beloved, if the saved ones do not communicate the gospel to the unconverted, who will do so? Will the devil try to save them? Will the devil's servants try to save them? Will the men who are themselves in error or in unbelief try to convert others to Jesus? You know they will not. Who else ought to do so? "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare My statutes." Nobody ought to teach the things of God but the regenerate, and these are bound by a thousand ties to give themselves to the service. My beloved brother and sister in Christ, if there are no bonds laid upon us to seek the wandering souls of men, upon whom can the labour be laid? Who else can do it? Shall the blind lead the blind? Shall the dead prophesy to the dead? What other heart but that which has itself been renewed, can tell of regeneration and the Spirit's quickening power? Remember, if the tongues of the saints speak not for Jesus, then the testimony for Jesus has ceased from among men. If the saints do not preach the gospel, the angels cannot, for no such ministry has been assigned to them, and therefore sinners must perish for lack of knowledge. O Church of God, to thee is this commission given; be not faithless in it, but be thou clear of the blood of all men!

II. We will consider WHAT THE BELIEVER OUGHT TO AIM AT IN HIS WORK WITH SOULS. Brethren, our great aim is *conversion—the conversion of transgressors.* "I will teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." We are to aim at the conversion of all men, of whatever sort they may be; for Christ has a people redeemed by blood in all ranks of society. We should seek for the conversion of our children, and of those who sit constantly with us under the shadow of the means of grace. Still, lest it should be forgotten, I will mainly dwell upon this point, that if there are any in the world who peculiarly and above all others are transgressors, these are the persons whom our own sense of love to Christ should induce us to teach God's ways; for if there be glory brought to God by one person more than another when he is converted, it is by one who was notoriously a sinner. The forgiveness of great sin, the reclaiming of a man from gross habits of vice, the deliverance of a woman who has fallen, these are the things which make the grace of God illustrious. The Church of God should recollect that the light is most wanted where the darkness is densest; that the physician is most required where disease is most rife; therefore should she bend her utmost strength against the most fully developed sin. The point to aim at is the *conversion* of sinners, not their reformation merely. It is a good thing to improve a man by reforming him, he is all the better for being sober, honest, and industrious. It was a good thing that the beasts, when they were in Noah's ark, were so tame, but they came out as they went in: lions were lions, and vipers were vipers still. The work we long to see accomplished is far greater than mere restraint or education, it is a thorough transformation; we pray that the lions may become lambs and the serpents become doves. Less than this it is not worth while for the Christian to live for, for there are philanthropic minds abroad apart from the church who will look after moral reformation, and sufficiently discharge the service. Let us help them if we can, but it is a side issue; our business is a more radical one, the laying of the axe to the root of the tree by the change of the nature. Our object is more lasting; we have to do with immortal souls and their eternal future. Beloved, we must keep to this, and be content with nothing short of the conversion of men. But it must be their conversion *to God*: "Sinners shall be converted unto *Thee*." I am very glad to convert a brother to scriptural views upon baptism, church government, and the higher doctrines; it is always desirable to see brethren learn the truth, but what will be the use of it if the individual is not first converted to God. The main object of all Christian work should be that sinners may be converted *unto God*, that they may love the God whom they have

forgotten, that they may adore the Christ whom they have despised, that they may feel the power of the Holy Spirit whom they have grieved. This is what we want, O sinners; it is not your outward washing to make ye appear like Christians, it is your inward renewing, it is your possession of a new heart and right spirit that we desire. "Ye must be born again." It will not do for us to mince matters with you: our prayer is that you may be turned to God, as the prodigal son was when he said, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee." May such a blessed turning as this come to you, for this and this alone can fit you for glory. Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.

This work is to be accomplished by teaching. "Then will I *teach* transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted." It cannot be done by processions, and pictures, and incense, and performances, after the manner of the Romanist and the Anglican; and it cannot be accomplished by excitement, bawling, stamping, and shouting, after the manner of certain brethren of our acquaintance, who cry "Believe! Believe! Believe!" but who do not tell the people what they are to believe, nor instruct them in the faith. Teaching is wanted. All the earnestness possible should go with the teaching, but there must be sound doctrine, real instruction, solemn truth made known; for it is by such means that sinners will be converted to God.

The most important teaching is that which dwells upon the *Lord's ways*—God's way of punishing sin, God's way of forgiving sin, God's way of mercy through a sacrifice, God's way of pardon through faith in Jesus; God's ways of wounding, and of healing, of killing, and of making alive; God's ways of sending forth the Eternal Spirit, and working as He wills among the sons of men, neither waiting for man nor tarrying for the sons of men. The more of God's ways we proclaim, the more likely is it that sinners will be converted unto God. Ye see, then, brethren and sisters, what you are to aim at, and you are not to be satisfied without it. Did we not at the beginning of this year propose the one to the other, that we would each one seek for the conversion of at least one soul? Brethren, we have now passed into September. Has your desire been fulfilled? Has your labour of love been blessed? I know that some of you have been the means of bringing several to Jesus. I could point at this moment, if I chose, to one who would blush to have his name known, who during the last few months has led several to Jesus, and that by inducing them to attend here, lending them his seat, and taking care that they were comfortably accommodated. He has also a kind, encouraging word for them, and he looks after them with much anxiety, and therefore he has had the joy of bringing them to Jesus. God be thanked for this; may this be the joy of you all. Brethren, are you doing something of that sort, or striving for Jesus in some other way? If not, God grant that in the few weeks of the year yet left, you may yet accomplish something for the Lord, by the power of His Spirit.

III. And now, thirdly, gathering up all my strength for it, let me try to show you, my beloved brethren, WHY WE SHOULD SEEK THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS.

And it should be done first—and I will begin with the lowest motive—because *it will save us from many ills.* I believe that the not seeking to win souls brings many spiritual maladies upon Christian men. The lepers outside the gates of Samaria found that the Syrians had fled; they went from tent to tent and feasted, and at last they said, "We do not well; let us go and tell this to the king's household, lest some mischief befall us." They felt that if they did not reveal the good news some evil might happen to them; and I tell you solemnly, God in discipline often brings sorrow upon His own people because of their unholy silence as to gracious things. An eminent surgeon, who was also an eminent Christian, visited a lady who was a professed believer in Christ, but who, like some ladies I have heard of, was frequently troubled with imaginary diseases. The good doctor was frequently called in, until at last he said to her, "Madam, I will give you a prescription which I am certain will make a healthy woman of you, if you will follow it." "Sir," she said, "I shall be so glad to have good health that I will be sure to follow it." "Madam, I will send you the prescription this evening." When it arrived it consisted of these words, "Do good to somebody." She roused herself to relieve a poor neighbour, and then sought out others who needed her help, and the Christian woman, who had been so constantly desponding, and nervous, and fanciful, became a healthy, cheerful woman, for she had an object to live for, and found joy in doing good to others. I can recommend that medicine to many, whose lives are subject to bondage, for I know brethren and sisters who are never a day free from pain, who are nevertheless full of happiness, because they live to serve the Lord with their substance. Some of you might do great good with articles which you might very readily spare. You have ornaments which Christian men and women are better without, which, if broken up or sold, would aid the good cause. I wish many would follow the example of Oliver Cromwell, when he went into Exeter Cathedral, and saw twelve massive images of the apostles in silver. "Oh, oh," said he, "what do these gentlemen here?" "They are the twelve apostles," was the reply. "Very well," said he, "melt them down, and send them about doing good." I wish Christians would do that with some of their gold and silver jewellery. Anyhow, for our own sakes, lest the canker get into our gold, and the rust into our silver, use it for doing good; yea, by all means, seek the souls of men for God. Some evil will befall you if you keep the gospel to yourselves.

Secondly, *it will greatly add to your joy.* Who does not like to be the bearer of good news? The pleasant tale of redeeming grace and dying love, the pleasant story of a Saviour who came from heaven to earth, to lift up from earth to heaven, the story of our own conversion, the story of God's goodness since our conversion—why, it must be delightful to tell it. And when you have spoken for Jesus, if you succeed in converting a sinner to God, then comes the pleasure, Great is the mother's joy when she looks upon her firstborn child; she remembereth no more her travail for joy that a man is born into the world. I am sure, however, that the pleasure is greater of looking upon a newborn child of God, and remembering no more your anguish over that soul, and your care in seeking to bring it to Jesus, because you have such bliss in knowing that there is one soul the more to decorate the Redeemer's crown. Happy are our lives who can win souls! I am very apt to be cast down and distressed in soul; but, next to fellowship with my Lord, my greatest consolation is found in receiving glad tidings of souls saved. Here comes a letter of loving thanks

from Ceylon, and another from the north of Norway, saying, "Blessed be God that I read your sermons and found a Saviour." From America I hear af an eminent Jewish Rabbi who has become a Baptist minister through reading one of my discourses, and anon I receive a letter from Havannah from a sailor who has just left the hospital, and tells me how the man who died in the next bed told him that he had a treasure which he would give him if he would take care of it, and he then handed him a number of my sermons stitched together. "They have saved my soul," said he, "and I hope they will save yours." The sailor who writes blesses God in a warm-hearted way that it is so, and the sermons have led him to Jesus. Is not this joy? Would you not like to share it? From almost every quarter of the globe the good news comes to me—comes like manna, almost every day, and my heart is glad within me. I want you to know the same gladness, all of you in your measure. This honey is so sweet that I would have your mouths filled with it. You are each one helping me in the work of the College, which aims at helping our young brethren to preach, and, therefore, I do not speak as if I found fault, but still, dear brethren and sisters, you may *personally* be engaged in the Master's work, and so in a larger degree have a share in the joy of seeing transgressors converted unto God.

I have, however, better reasons than these. We will get out of these selfish motives into something higher. Unless you tell abroad the gospel, *how will you prove the sincerity of your prayers*? You bow your knee and say, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." How can it be, if you never try to speak a word for Jesus, and never seek to bring new subjects into His kingdom? Your prayers—what can they be but hypocritical if they are not supported by your actions?

Again, *what proof is there of the sincerity of your love to Christ*? You say you love Him, and I believe you do; I believe there are thousands here to whom Christ is dearer than all besides; shew ye, then, a proof of your love. Do you say, "How?" Out of your Master's mouth shall you receive the answer, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Do you answer "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee" Here, then, is the proof which He demands,—"Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs. Distribute unto others the heavenly food which you receive from Me. What I tell you in the ear that speak ye upon the housetops." Abundantly yield to your Lord this proof of your affection.

Indeed, beloved, *is there any proof of the sincerity of any man's religion who does not try to spread it.* You have found this good thing, if it be indeed good you will wish others to have it. What a disgrace it is that Christians should be so indifferent to the spread of truth in these days! There has been lately a revival amongst Mahometans; we had all thought that the crescent was waning, and that Mussulmen would never endeavour to make converts again. Instead thereof there appears to have been in many parts a singular awakening of the old enthusiasm which marked the early days of Islam. What, and shall the false prophet command the zeal of his followers and shall not the Son of God possess the souls of His people? Let it not be said the Christians are cold. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice over us. Can lies and falsehoods lead men to martyrdom, as popery has done full many a time; does it lead men and women to seclude themselves, and give all their lives to the service of Antichrist, and is there no zeal left among the believers in Jesus? Followers of God, is there no zeal left among you? The Lord help us to answer this question, as we shall wish to have answered it when the judge sits upon His throne.

I will go further and say, that if we do not try to bring sinners to Christ, let alone our religion, *where is our humanity*? If I believed that sinners could be annihilated I should have no particular reason for preaching to them; in fact, I should have a very urgent reason for never doing anything of the kind. Certain heretics teach that if men do not hear the gospel at all they will be annihilated at death, but if they do hear it and reject it, they will live and be punished for a time; then, I say, let them die, they will be better without hearing the gospel, and he is a traitor who preaches it to them and makes them run so great a risk. But we, beloved, who believe the solemn truth, which has often made us tremble from head to foot, that the wrath of God *abideth* upon the ungodly for ever, if we do not attempt their salvation, are demons! That was a harsh word, but I will not correct it, I leave it where it stands. I care not what pretensions you are making to Christianity, if you are doing nothing in any way for the souls of men, you act like demons! If there is a wreck at sea, and a mariner refuses to aid in saving when he is strong and able, men cry shame of him. A man is dying for want of bread at your door, and if you have plenty, but refuse to give him a crust, and let him die on your doorstep, the whole neighbourhood will censure you. But a *soul* perishing, a *soul* perishing for lack of knowledge, for lack of the bread of life, and you have it and do not hand it to him—O sirs, how dwelleth the love of God in you? Is there a spark left? You are without grace, for you have fallen below the humanity of nature. In vain your years of profession, your long prayers, and loud professions, if neither your substance nor your tongue is consecrated to God.

Beloved, there is one argument which ought to touch us all, and it is this. Can *any* of us refuse to teach the sons of men if he has really seen and known the Saviour? There, stand a minute, and look at Him upon the tree. See you His wounds, and the blood distilling from them? Mark you the traces of agony in that dear face, so lovely, and yet so marred? Catch a glimpse of your Master's shoulders, where the ploughers made deep furrows with their scourges? Can you gaze through His body into His heart, and see the deeps unknown of anguish which He endured for sinners—guilty, lost, and ruined sinners; and have you no love for them? Does He come to you this morning, and put His pierced hand upon you, and say, "I laid down My life for thee, and as My Father hath sent Me into the world, even so send I you"; and can you look into His face and say, "My Master, I have never done anything for poor sinners, and I never shall?" No; I think you will say, "My Lord, forgive the past, and help me in years to come." The seraphic Summerfield, just before he died, said to those around him, "I have been looking into eternity, and if ever I should rise from this bed I shall preach very differently from what I have done"; and yet he preached most fervently the gospel of Christ. Some of us might well say, "I have looked at Jesus; I have seen His disinterested love; I have marked His agonies and groans, and I must preach

differently; I must live differently; I must teach differently from anything I have ever done before." O, Holy Spirit, make it so, and Thine shall be the praise.

IV. And now we have to close with the last point, which is to be most practical. The question will arise—How, then, are we to teach transgressors God's ways, that sinners may be converted unto God? I would say to you, dear brethren and sisters, "wait upon the Lord, for direction." But one of the directions you need not wait for is this, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Some of you who could not speak, at least not to many, can assist those who do. If your own tongue will not serve your heart, get other men's tongues to help you: in connection with our College there are always needs, and by helping others into the ministry, you may have a tongue to speak for you if you cannot speak for yourself. Yet still, at your own house talk about the Saviour or write about Him, or in some other directly personal way try to serve your Lord.

To all believers far and near, be it known at this time, that almost all our Missionary Societies are in want not so much of money as of men. The Baptist Missionary Society has sent out a circular requesting the prayers of the churches that God will raise up men who will go abroad. Our older missionaries are dying off, many are coming home through sickness, and very few come forward to fill their places. Surely some brave young men whose hearts God has touched, who have been doing work at home, will cheerfully surrender all they are and all they have to go and proclaim among the heathen the unsearchable riches of Christ. I would be a recruiting sergeant this morning, and I pray the Lord that some of the right kind may join the noble army of missionaries.

At home we greatly want evangelists to travel throughout the land. I do not see where funds will come from for their maintenance, but if men of some small property who can preach would retire from business, and go from town to town preaching the gospel it would be the grandest work they could undertake. If we had a hundred of such men in our own denomination who would go from place to place like the apostles, the missing link in the Church would be supplied, and we should see many sinners converted to God. When any of you remove into the country, as you do when you increase in wealth, should you not feel that you ought to seek the good of the people, and if there is no church of your own faith and order near, should you not commence one? Rest not till you see the gospel preached in the neighbourhood and that fully, that sinners may be converted to God?

Ministers also are needed, and especially ministers who can support themselves. How much good might be done if the many merchants in London, men of education, would on the Sunday go into the villages and preach the gospel, bearing their own charges and helping to find their own preaching-room. It is impossible in a poor community like the Baptist denomination that we can ever cover the country with the gospel if all ministers must be supported. We want a body of men who do not need support—who can do without it—who would think it their highest honour, like Paul the apostle, to be no burden to the churches. I feel that if I were a business man I should like to make money for Jesus, and with a prosperous business, such as some of you have, it would be delightful to me to be the father of a church in some destitute locality, where it would be a pleasure rather to give than to take; whereas by our present mode of action a poor little church must need be presided over by a brother who is pretty nearly starved, and does not obtain a stipend equal to the average wages of a common artizan, and therefore the cause of God is evil spoken of. The fault does not always lie with the church, which may be too poor to do better, but with rich brethren, who ought to be preaching the gospel themselves instead of hearing it. Many here, I daresay, among my own hearers, possess latent talent which only needs to be dug out of the earth and delivered from the napkin. Lord, stir them up and set their tongues on fire! If the Lord hears that prayer, and touches your lips with a live coal from off His altar, you will say, "Here am I! Send me."

"But these things are beyond our power," you say. Then there is our own Sabbath-school. Do you know, that because I am constantly urging our friends to go out and teach anywhere, the result has been that a large number of the Sunday-schools in our neighbourhood are well supplied by our people, and our own schools are often short of teachers. I do not desire to narrow your catholic spirit which prompts you to work in the schools of other churches, but do not forget your own home work. Thanks be to God for the zeal of our young people, but the best women in the church, and the best men, ought to be in the Sunday-school, teaching there what they experimentally know. I pray you see to it that our Sabbath-schools are well sustained: there are enough of you to do this.

Then, again, time was when we had in our Evangelist Society, for preaching in the street, many young men, and some, probably, who had better have learned a little more before they began. Now we have not so much of that. Is zeal for preaching the gospel diminishing among us? Brethren, it ought not to be. That society needs many more who will proclaim the gospel of Jesus by the wayside, or in the lodging-houses. Let me say to every man who can speak for Jesus, do not let that excellent work flag, no, not for a moment. And the visiting societies, and the tract societies, all these want helpers. Are there not some here who will come to their rescue? I love to see our brethren opening little prayer-meetings in back streets, in places where the gospel is not proclaimed, or among people who do not go to hear it. Try to start fresh places of worship in regions remote from others. For all this kind of service Christ wants you, brethren; shall He call in vain? We wish those we love to show their love to us. Do, therefore, by the love of Jesus, by the blood of Jesus, if there be in you any love towards Him, and any gratitude for what He has done for you, go forth from this day forward and teach transgressors His ways, that sinners may be converted unto Him. The Lord seal this address with His blessing. Amen.

REPENTANCE AFTER CONVERSION

" The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."—Psalm li. 17.

THE French have a phrase which signifies in English assisting at a service. A person who has been present at some grand function of the church speaks of himself as having " assisted " at the service. I want that many of us should literally carry out that expression just now. I do not want so much to preach as to lead you in the offering of sacrifices. Somebody says, perhaps, " But I have no bullock, no lamb." No, but you have a heart ; and it is a broken and a contrite heart that I propose that we should present to God. I will not invite those of you to do so who have never experienced the working of divine grace within your souls ; I trust that you will be led to do so by the Spirit of God, but I cannot just now invite you to offer that sacrifice, for my appeal is to those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to those who have been restored from spiritual death, to those who are debtors to free grace and dying love. It is to them I speak, and I invite and entreat them to accompany us while we present to God the sacrifices which He will not despise, the sacrifices of a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

I would have you specially notice that, in this psalm, David puts the sacrifice in its right position, and I would put it in the same position. You observe that he has first of all sought pardon for his sin, and he has found it. He has prayed, " Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." His sin, then, is forgiven. He has next asked for a restoration of purity : " Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." That also has been done. I will suppose it, my dear friend, to have been done in your case also, that you have been renewed in the spirit of your mind by the grace of God. Then, next, joy has also been restored to David, for he says, " Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation " ; so that it is not a question with him as to whether he is saved or not, he is a man who is saved, and living in the assurance of salvation. Sin is pardoned, and the impurity engendered by grievous transgression has been put away, and he has peace with God ; that is the man who brings the sacrifice, that is the man who presents to God a broken heart and a contrite spirit. More than that, he has become a preacher ; his gratitude to God has led him to be useful to others, as he says in the thirteenth verse, " Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways ; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." And even more than that, he has gone from the pulpit to the choir ; he has become a singer, and he sings a sweet song of thankfulness to the great God who has saved him. Now, this is the man whose lips the Lord has opened, and whose mouth is showing forth God's praise ; this is the man who says, " The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Perhaps you have the notion that repentance is a thing that happens at the commencement of the spiritual life, and has to be got through as one undergoes a certain operation, and there is an end of it. If so, you are greatly mistaken ; repentance lives as long as faith. Towards faith I might almost call it a Siamese twin. We shall need to believe and to repent as long as ever we live. Perhaps also you have the idea that repentance is a bitter thing. It is sometimes bitter : " They shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born " ; but that is not the kind of repentance that I am talking of now. Surely that bitterness is past, it was all over long ago ; but this is a sweet bitterness which attends faith as long as ever we live, and becomes a source of tender joy. I do not know whether I shall quite convey my meaning to you ; but I can assure you that the greatest joy I have ever known has not been when I have laughed, but when I have cried. The most intense happiness I have ever felt has not been when I have been exhilarated and full of spirits, but when I have leaned very low on the bosom of God, and felt it so sweet to be so low that one could scarcely be lower, and yet did not wish to be any higher. I quite agree with Mr. Rowland Hill, who said he supposed that there could be no tears of repentance in heaven, and that would be the only thing that he could almost regret, for sweet Sister Repentance is such charming company that we shall regret to part with her even at the gates of pearl. As we may have to part with her there, I want us to keep her company all the time this service lasts, and my object at this time is to ask you to bring to God, while we are here in this house of prayer, the sacrifices of a broken and a contrite spirit. I want you to indulge yourselves in this most rare and *recherché* delight of sorrow at the feet of Jesus,—not sorrow for unpardoned sin, but sorrow for pardoned sin, sorrow for that which is done with, sorrow for that which is forgiven, sorrow for that which will never condemn you, for it was laid on Christ long ago, and is put away for ever. It is this sweet sorrow that I want you to indulge. Up with the sluices, then, brethren and sisters, and let these sacred streams of sorrow flow forth.

I. And, first, LET US CONSIDER WHAT THIS SACRIFICE IS. It is a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.

If you and I have a broken spirit, *all idea of our own importance is gone.* What is the use of a broken heart ? Why, much the same as the use of a broken pot, or a broken jug, or a broken bottle ! Men throw it on the dunghill. Hence David says, " A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise," as if he felt that everybody else would despise it. Now, do you feel that you are of no importance ? Though you know that you are a child of God, do you feel that you would not give a penny for yourself ? You would not wish to claim the first place ; the rear rank suits you best, and you wonder that you are in the Lord's army in any rank at all. O, brothers, I believe that the more God uses us, the less we shall think of ourselves ; and the more He fills us with His Spirit, the more will our own spirit sink within us in utter amazement that He should ever make use of such broken vessels as we are ! Well now, indulge that feeling of nothingness and unimportance ; not only indulge it as a feeling, but go and act upon it, and be you in the midst of your brethren less than the least, humble yourselves in wonder that God should permit your name to stand on the roll of His

elect at all. Admire the grace of God to you, and marvel at it in deep humiliation of spirit. That is part of the sacrifice that God will not despise.

Next, if you and I have a broken and a contrite heart, it means that *frivolity and trifling have gone from us.* There are some who are always trifling with spiritual things, but he who gets a broken heart has done with that sort of spirit. A broken heart is serious, and solemn, and in earnest. A broken heart never tries to play any tricks with God, and never shuffles texts as though even Scripture itself were meant only to be an opportunity for testing our wit. A broken spirit is tender, serious, weighed down with solemn considerations. Indulge that spirit now, be solemn before God, grasp eternal things; let slip these shadows; what are they worth? But set you your soul on things divine and everlasting. Pursue that vein of thought, and so bring before God a broken and a contrite spirit.

Further, a broken spirit is one out of which *hypocrisy has gone.* That vessel, whole and sealed up, may contain the most precious otto of roses, or it may contain the foulest filth; I know not what is in it. But break it, and you will soon see. There is no hypocrisy about a broken heart. Oh, brethren and sisters, be before men what you are before God! Seem to be what you really are. Make no pretences. I am afraid that we are all hypocrites in a measure; we both pray and preach above our own actual experience full often, and we perhaps think that we have more faith than we actually have, and more love than we have ever known. The Lord make us to have a broken heart that is revealed by being broken! You know now what was in that pot, for there it lies, broken to shivers; its contents are no longer concealed, they have all run out. Now, pour out your hearts before God as you sit there in your pews, and let Him see what He really does see—all that is in your soul, for in your hidden parts He would have you to know wisdom. Reveal yourselves unto yourselves, and so reveal yourselves unto your God.

Once more, a broken spirit signifies that now *all the secrets and essences of the spirit have flowed out.* You remember what happened when that holy woman broke the alabaster box; we read that "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." A broken heart cannot keep secrets. Now is all revealed, now its essence goes forth. Far too much of our praying and of our worship, is like closed-up boxes; you cannot tell what is in them. But it is not so with broken hearts; when broken hearts sing, they do sing. When broken hearts groan, they do groan. Broken hearts never play at repenting, nor play at believing. There is much of religion, nowadays, that is very superficial, it is all on the surface; a very small quantity of gospel paint, with just a little varnish of profession, will go a very long way, and look very bright. But broken hearts are not like that; with broken hearts, the hymn is a real hymn, the prayer is a real prayer, the hearing of sermons is earnest work, and the preaching of them is the hardest work of all, Oh, what a mercy it would be if some of you were broken all to pieces! There are many flowers that will never yield their perfume till they are bruised. Even the generous grape lets not its juice flow forth till it is trodden under foot of men. Breaking and bruising are fit treatment for the nature of men, especially for the new nature. When God has put sweetness into our hearts, it is then that breaking develops the sweetness. Oh, to worship God in spirit and in truth! One has well said, "No one ever worshipped God with his whole heart unless he worshipped Him with a broken heart; and there never was a heart that was truly broken that did not thereby become a whole heart." The divided heart is not broken, but the broken heart is never divided. I know that I am talking in riddles, but the wise will understand me. To get unity of spirit, there must be contrition and brokenness of heart.

II. Now, in the second place, LET US OFFER THE SACRIFICE.

I have told you a little of what the sacrifice means, now we will try, as God shall help us, to bear our brokenness of heart before the Lord. Come, my brothers and sisters, let us mourn a while on account of our past sin; we will do so from several points of view.

First, let us deeply regret that *we have sinned against so good a God.* While I regarded God as a tyrant, I thought sin a trifle; but when I knew Him to be my Father, then I mourned that I could ever have kicked against Him. When I thought that God was hard, I found it easy to sin; but when I found God so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, I smote upon my breast to think that I could have rebelled against One who loved me so, and sought my good. Will you not now think of the goodness of God, brothers and sisters, and shall it not lead you to repentance? Shall we not feel within our hearts a burning indignation against sin, because it is committed against so holy, so good, so glorious a Being as the infinitely-blessed God?

Let me help you again, and may the arrow pierce your very hearts this time! Let us mourn to think that *we have offended against so excellent and admirable a law.* If the law of God were like the laws of men, it might sometimes be a virtue to break it; but where a law is so balanced, so perfect, oh, how could we have run contrary to it? Brethren, the law of God, when it says to us, "Thou shalt not," only sets up a danger signal to tell us where it is injurious to go. And when the law says, "Thou shalt," it does but lift up a kindly hand to point out to us the best and safest path. There is nothing in the law of God that will rob you of happiness; it only denies you that which would cost you sorrow. We know that it is so, and therefore we stand here, and bow our head, and mourn that we should have been so foolish as to transgress, so wilfully and suicidally wicked as to do that evil thing which God hates and which so grievously injures us. We have nursed vipers when we have nursed sins, we have hatched the cockatrice's egg when we have thought upon iniquity; wherefore let us be truly sorry for our sin and for our folly.

You remember that I am talking to those of you who are saved, to those of you whose sins are forgiven. In my heart, I think that I can hear some others say, "Will you not let us join with you in repenting though we are not pardoned?" Bless your hearts, yes! God help you to join with us; and if you do, you will find pardon, too, for pardon comes in this way! A broken heart can never long be divided from the broken Saviour. You shall have peace with Him when you are at war with sin. But I am specially inviting the people of God now to sweetly grieve in this house of prayer, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite heart while they recollect that they have sinned against God's perfect law.

More than that,—and this is a very tender point,—

let us grieve that *we have sinned against a Saviour's love.* I like that verse we sang just now,—

> " 'Tis I have thus ungrateful been,
> Yet, Jesus, pity take!
> Oh, spare and pardon me, my Lord,
> For Thy sweet mercy's sake! "

The greatest crime that was ever committed against high heaven was that crime of deicide, when men nailed the Son of God to the tree, and put Him to death as a criminal. Where are the wretches that did this awful deed? They are *here*; I will not say that they are before us, for each of us harbours one of them within his bosom. " 'Tis I," —" 'Tis *I* have thus ungrateful been." How can I speak to you thus? Well, perhaps, all the better, because from my very heart I ask that we may stand together at the foot of the cross, and count the purple drops, and say, " These have washed away my sins, yet I helped to spill them. Those hands, those feet, have saved me, yet I nailed them there. That opened side is the refuge of my guilty spirit, yet I made that fearful gash by my sin. It was my sin that slew my Saviour." O sin, thou thrice-accursed thing, away with thee! Away with thee! Come, let us be filled with mournful joy, with pleasurable sorrow, while we sit beneath the bloody tree, and see what sin has done, and yet see how sin itself has been undone by Him who died upon the cross on Calvary. Beloved, the more you love your Lord, the more you will hate sin. If you often sit at the table with Him, and dip your hand into His dish, if you lean your head upon His bosom with the blessed John, if you are favoured and indulged with the choicest brotherliness towards the Well-beloved, I know that you will often find occasion to seek a quiet place where you may shed tears of bitter regret that you should ever have sinned against such a Saviour as Jesus is.

Let me help you again, however, while I remind you, beloved, of *our sins against the Holy Ghost.* Oh, what do we not owe to the Holy Spirit? I speak to you who know Him. It is the Holy Ghost who quickened you, the Holy Ghost who convinced you of sin, the Holy Ghost who comforted you; and oh, how sweetly does that Divine Comforter still comfort! Yet we resisted Him, and grieved Him. Do you not remember, in your youthful days, how you strangled your convictions, how you held down conscience, and would not let it reprove you? That blessed Spirit, whom we vexed and spurned, might have left us, and gone His way, never to strive with us again; but He loved us so that He came and took up His abode with us, and now He dwelleth in us. Within the narrow cell of our poor heart He has condescended to find a temple for His perpetual indwelling. O my soul, how couldst thou ever grieve Him? How couldst thou ever have resisted that best and tenderest Friend? I do not ask you to torture yourselves, but I do invite you, beloved, now to indulge the joyful grief of sweet heavenly penitence as you remember the love of the Spirit.

Let us go a step further, and *set our sin in the light of God's countenance.* I speak to you, beloved, who are God's elect. He loved you from before the foundation of the world, and yet you have sinned against Him. He chose you from among men, of His own sovereign grace, and ordained you to belong to Christ, and gave you to Jesus to be His for ever. Alas, you knew it not, and you continued to sin against this distinguishing and discriminating grace! Oh, that even the elect of God should have done this! See that you crucify the sin that suffered you to act so shamefully. Then in due time you were redeemed. For you, beloved, Jesus shed His precious blood; He shed it not for all men, but with a special view to the redemption of His elect. Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for *it.* He hath redeemed us from among men. We have been the object of that special and peculiar redemption, and yet against that dear Christ, who loved us, and gave Himself for us, we rebelled and transgressed. Ordained to be of the blood-royal of heaven, and yet a rebel! Ordained on earth to have the love of God within your spirit, and in heaven to behold His face for ever, ordained by divine decree to this high destiny, and yet for many a year a rebel, a wilful rebel against such wondrous love as this! I do not know what to say to myself; I despise myself, I loathe myself, that I should thus have acted against such extraordinary love.

Then remember also that you are God's child, adopted into His family, His twice-born, divinely regenerated. You are an heir of God, a joint heir with Jesus Christ; and yet—and yet you have acted so sinfully! O God, Thou hast forgiven Thy servants; but we have never forgiven ourselves, and we never mean to, we shall always mourn, even amid our joy for pardoned guilt, that we, the favourites of heaven, should have so grieved the Lord!

Go a little further. I want you to *set sin in the light of your marvellous experiences.* Oh, there are some of us who, without boasting, can tell of answered prayer when we have come back from the top of Carmel, and we have cried, " I have won the day "; and yet to us who have been privileged thus to have power with God it was not always so. Perhaps the very lips that now prevail in prayer were once habituated to blasphemy. Oh, mourn, my brother, if it was so! Can you ever help mourning? When John Newton wrote the *Cardiphonia*, or voice of the heart, when he left us that choice treasure, I am sure that he must often and often have smitten upon his breast, and grieved over the thought that he was once in Africa, a blasphemer, and everything that was foul and bad. Oh yes, wonders of grace have been ours! Wonders of grace! Wonders of grace! We have tasted the wines on the lees well refined; yet once we drank of the wine of the clusters of Sodom and Gomorrah. What has grace not done for us, brothers and sisters? You and I have been in the King's banqueting house, and His banner of love has waved over us, and our Beloved has caught us away " from the top of Amana, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards," and manifested His love to us in the secret places where no eye saw except our own and His. There did He reveal to us His great love. Yet we were the very ones who once despised Him, broke His Sabbaths, refused to read His Word, neglected prayer, perhaps ridiculed holy things. We were proud, covetous, unholy; but we are washed, but we are sanctified. Oh, let us sit here, and sweetly repent, and present to our God the sacrifices of a broken and contrite spirit!

Besides, dear friends, think of *the injury you have done to others by your example.* What a powerful preacher a mother is to her boy! What an influential preacher is a father to his son! What a mighty preacher one workman may be to another, especially if he is a man of stronger mind than his fellows! Whatever any of us do, we are sure to have some

who will copy us; it cannot be avoided. You are all writing copies every day, even though you are not schoolmasters; and there are some who will learn either bad or good writing from you, for they will copy your handwriting; I mean, that they will imitate what they see in you. In years to come, when you have forgotten what you did, some may be following your former example. I would urge young men,—and I am glad to see a great many of them present,—to pray that they may begin life in such a way that they may not have much back reckoning. Suppose a man to be converted after his children are born, if those children have seen the father do wrong, they will perhaps remember the evil better than the good example of their converted father. When your children have once left your roof, what opportunities of influencing them aright you have lost! Though you may yourselves be saved by faith in Christ, yet you cannot call back the boys and the girls from those sinful ways into which you yourself led them in the days of your ungodliness. This thought has a sharp sting in it for any who, by word or by example, have taught others to do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord. If this is your case, beloved, while you praise God that He has forgiven your sin, yet mourn that you ever led any astray by your wrongdoing.

If that is not enough, I want to lead you a little further, and bid you think of all *the opportunities that we lose whenever we fall into sin.* I do repent of sin unfeignedly because it has hindered my progress. I am now speaking only to the people of God, mark you. If any of you sinners want to creep in among them, you may; still, I am specially addressing them. There is one here who, not long ago, was a pilgrim on the road to the Celestial City, and he went part of the way up the hill Difficulty, climbing splendidly on his hands and knees. He made the best of his way up, but it came to pass that, when he had gone about half-way up the hill, he found a little arbour by the road-side. It was built there by the Lord of the way that he might rest himself a little in it, and then go on his way; but this brother sat down in the arbour, and he sat on till he went to sleep; and he slept there I do not know how long. Just lately, he has been awaked, and he has gone on his way again, climbing up, but he has discovered that he has lost the roll that he used to carry in his bosom. It was a roll that he had when first he started at the head of the way, and he meant to present it to the Lord of the Celestial City when he came to his journey's end. But he had lost his roll. You know what Mr. Bunyan says of this matter. It was getting late, but Christian had lost his roll, so he had to go back; and he wisely went back to the place where he had fallen asleep, all the way moaning and sighing and crying to himself, "I have lost my evidences, I have lost my roll. Where shall I find it?" He was so glad, when he looked under the settle, to see the roll there. I warrant you that he quickly picked it up, and put it in his bosom again; but then, you see, he had to go over that part of the road three times. If he had not lost his roll, and had to go back, he might by that time have been much further on the road. There were lions in that region, and that was ugly for him. If he had got into the House Beautiful earlier in the day, he would not have suffered the fears he now had; so he went along in a very sad state of mind, and all through that careless sleeping in the arbour. Oh, what some of you might have been if it had not been for your sins since conversion! What a preacher I might have been! What workers in the Sunday-school you might have been! Oh, what winners of souls you might have become by this time! But you have been asleep, and had to go back, perhaps, and so you have missed many opportunities of serving Christ.

Let us sit and think this matter over, and begin to say, "Lord, we do present to Thee a broken and contrite heart, mourning and lamenting, for if we are straitened, we are straitened in ourselves, and not in Thee. If we are mourning in darkness, we ourselves made the darkness. If we are desponding, we have in a large measure created the despondency. Lord, we grieve and sorrow for all this." Since I have been in this house to-night, I have heard of a dear brother, whose prayers I remember among the first I heard when I came to be a pastor of this church. He has passed away to-day, and gone to his reward, an old man and full of years. That brother is where you and I will be very soon. Do not talk about years; they go so quickly, and our friends pass away quickly, too. But the other day, a man of God sat at his table writing; he had dipped his pen in the ink, but he never laid it on the paper, for he fell asleep there and then, and he was gone home. We, too, shall soon pass away. "Perhaps in a few days I shall be among the angels,"—say that to yourself, my brother. "Perhaps in a few weeks I shall behold the face of Him I love,"—say that, my sister. It will come true. Perhaps in a few years; nay, drop the "perhaps" now, and say, "Certainly, within a few years, I shall behold the beatific vision."

> "Father, I long, I faint to see
> The place of Thine abode."

I see myself walking over that street of gold that shines like glass. Earthly gold is dull, you cannot see into it. If you could, you would see the tears of the oppressed and sometimes the blood of crushed-down men in it; but the gold of heaven is good, and you can see into it, as you could into a sea of glass. I think I am walking there. I hardly know myself, and there I meet one and another of you whom I knew here, and we go together down that golden street, and look in at the many mansions, whence come out many to welcome us; and we thread our way into the centre. There is no temple there, no tabernacle of worship there; but we get into the centre, and we stand upon the glassy sea, into which all the streets seem to run; and as we look around, we see angels and elders bowing there before the throne of the Infinite Majesty, and we are there ourselves, and we bow with them; and when we lift up our eyes to that light we sing, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Now I want you to *think of your sins in the light of that glory.* Oh, how could those who are predestinated to these heavenly seats ever have wandered into sin? What! Was it so—that we, who were born to behold the face of God, ever loved the theatre, and all its abominations? What! Did we, who were ordained to be peers with cherubim and seraphim, ever love the race-course and all its gambling? What! Were we, whom God has made to be conformed to the image of His firstborn Son, ever seen to be drunken, and staggering through the streets,

defiled with unchasity, or polluted with gluttony, or guilty of covetousness, or cursed with pride? What! We whom the Lord has loved with an everlasting love, and without whom Christ Himself will not be content to reign in heaven, grovelling in iniquity? Oh, I think these questions must have helped to make sin seem contemptible and loathsome! I point at it the finger of scorn. O dear children of God, scorn your sins, lament your sins, weep over your sins! Indulge that feeling, and God will accept it when it is mixed with faith in His dear Son; for "the sacrifices of God"—that is, all sorts of sacrifices put together, sin-offerings, burnt-offerings, peace-offerings, scape-goats, and all together—"the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." One broken spirit is worth them all. "A broken and a contrite heart,"—though there be but one such,—"O God, Thou wilt not despise."

God bless you, beloved, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

A GOOD MAN IN AN EVIL CASE

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."—Psalm lv. 22.

THOSE of you who were here, last Thursday evening, will recollect that the sermon was concerning those sons of Gershon who were burden-bearers in connection with the tabernacle in the wilderness. They were not appointed to preach; they were not ordained to fight; but their service consisted in bearing burdens. There were some here, on that occasion, whom I had never known before, who had been, by the space of thirty years, great sufferers; they were carried into this place last Thursday evening, I did not know of their presence until afterwards, when they told me that the sermon seemed to have been made for them, and that it had given them great comfort.

I thought I would follow up that sermon about burden-bearers by a discourse upon another text, which shows us that there are some burdens which we need not carry. Burdens of service, or burdens which come through our consecration to the Lord Jesus Christ,—these we will never lay down so long as we live. It shall be our joy to take up our cross daily, and follow Jesus; but there are certain burdens of care and sorrow of which the text speaks, especially the burdens which come from the slander, and reproach and oppression of ungodly men, which we need not carry. David says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

Beloved friends, the very best men in the world may be slandered; and if you should hear them evil spoken of, be you not among those who straightway condemn them. There are some who say, "Where there is smoke, there is sure to be fire"; and, although it is well known that "common fame is a common liar," yet there are some, who are so fond of hearing or telling lies, that they are sure to believe such a lie as this, expecially if it be spoken concerning a servant of God. Be you not, therefore, ready to believe all the reports that you hear against any Christian people. The best of men, as I have already reminded you, have been worst spoken of, and there are some who turn upon them directly, like lions scenting their prey.

I may be just now addressing some who are the victims of the malice of ungodly men or women. I am sorry, dear friends, that this should be your lot, for it is among the bitterest of human afflictions; but, at the same time, I would remind you that nothing unusual has happened to you. You remember the three brave men who were cast alive into Nebuchadnezzar's burning fiery furnace when it was heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated. You are scarcely enduring such a fiery trial as that; and, certainly, you are not suffering as did your Master, the Lord of all pilgrims who have made their way to heaven. But if, in any degree, it should happen that you are bearing a burden of this kind, the text will have a special message for you.

In speaking upon this passage, I want to keep it in connection with the whole Psalm. I do not think it is dealing properly with the Bible to pick out one verse here, and another there, without looking to see what the connection of the passage is. If men's books were treated as God's Book is often treated, we should make many a grand and noble literary work to appear to be an insane production. It is true that God's Book can endure even such treatment as that. It is such a wonderful Book that, even a sentence torn out of it will convey most precious truth; but it is not fair to the Book, and it is not fair to yourself, to treat the Bible so. A text of Scripture should always be viewed in the setting in which God has placed it, for there is often as much that is admirable in the gold which forms the setting as there is in the jewel itself.

I. So, looking at our text in that light, I shall begin by saying that, WHEN WE ARE MUCH TRIED AND BURDENED, THERE IS SOMETHING THAT WE ARE TEMPTED TO DO. The text does not mention it, but the psalm does; and the text is an antidote to the malady which the psalm describes or implies. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord," is an injunction concerning that which we are to put in the place of something else which more naturally suggests itself to our poor foolish minds.

And, first, when we are in very severe trouble, *we are tempted to complain.* The Psalmist says, in the second verse, "I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise." I am not sure that our version is quite fair to David in this instance, but it suits my present purpose admirably. As the children of God, we ought to avoid even the semblance of a complaint against our Heavenly Father; but when our faith is sorely tried, when some sharp reproach is stinging our spirit, we are all too apt to begin thinking and saying that God is dealing hardly with us. You know how Job, that most patient of men, became very impatient when his so-called "friends" poured

vinegar instead of oil into his wounds. Smarting under their cruel treatment, he said some things which he had far better have left unsaid. O brethren, pray that, whenever the Lord lays His rod heavily upon you, your tears may have no rebellion in them! Whatever His providential dealings with you may be, may you be enabled to say, with Job, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Let the worse come from His hand that can come, still say, with the patriarch, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." May you even join Job in his triumphant declaration, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." It is grand faith that enables a believer to say, "Though I should die at God's altar, I will die like the lamb that is brought to the slaughter, or be like the sheep that is dumb before her shearers, and makes no complaint."

The next natural temptation is that of *giving up altogether, and lying down in despair.* You get that in the fourth and fifth verse: "My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me." Have not some of you been sometimes tempted to say, "There, I can do no more; I must give all up; that last cruel blow has utterly broken me in pieces, and I feel that I can only lay me down, and die in the bitterness of my spirit"? Brothers and sisters, this is a temptation against which you must strive most earnestly. As no living man should complain so no living man should despair, and especially no child of God. Up with thee, poor heart; thou hast not yet come to the end of God's delivering mercy, even though thou hast come to the end of thy poor puny strength. The Lord shall light thy candle now that thy light is so dark. Thou shalt yet sing for very joy of heart though now thou canst only, like David, mourn in thy complaint, and make a noise. God will understand thy moaning, and thy mourning, and He will bring thee again from Bashan, and from the depths of the sea if thou hast sunk as low as that. Wherefore, talk not of dying before your time. Yet, if you do so, you will not be the first who has talked like that, for there was one, who never died, who said, "O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." That was Elijah, the prophet of fire; yet, just then he seemed as if he were only cold ashes rather than a vehement flame—another proof that the best of men are but men at the best.

The next very common temptation is, *to want to flee from our present trials.* You get that in verses six to eight: "I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." Possibly you are the pastor of a church, and things do not prosper as you could wish; I wonder where they do. But, in your case, you think there is such a little prosperity that you must give up your position, and run away. Young gunners, before they have become accustomed to the smell of gunpowder, and the noise of cannons, have often been known to desert their guns, and even old soldiers have sometimes felt what the "trembles" are. But, my brother, if this is your case, I beseech you not to run away. If you did flee, where would you go? You think you will run away, as Jonah did, do you? I warrant you that Jonah was very sorry that he had run away when he found himself, in the whale's belly, at the very bottom of the mountains, in the depths of the sea; and you and I will be sure to get into greater trouble if we run away from the path of duty. Fight it out, man; stand your ground in the name of God, and in the strength of God. It may be that there are better days just now coming, and that Satan is seeking to drive you away just as you are on the brink of success. Dr. Watts has a good paraphrase of this psalm, and also writes wisely concerning the temptation to flee from the post of duty. He says,—

"Oh, were I like a feathered dove,
And innocence had wings!
I'd fly, and make a long remove
From all these restless things.

"Let me to some wild desert go,
And find a peaceful home;
Where storms of malice never blow,
Temptations never come.

"Vain hopes, and vain inventions all,
To 'scape the rage of hell!
The mighty God, on whom I call,
Can save me here as well.

"God shall preserve my soul from fear,
Or shield me when afraid;
Ten thousand angels must appear,
If He command their aid."

Possibly, the special case in point is not that of a minister. It is some Mary, weeping at home because her brother Lazarus is dead. Martha is not a very congenial sister to her, so she does not even go with her when she goes to meet the Lord; yet, strangely enough, each of the sisters says the same words to Jesus, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." In due time, the Master sends for Mary, and soon she has the joy of welcoming Lazarus back from the grave. Some of us get queer ideas into our heads at times; we resolve that we will go we know not where, and do we know not what. Ah, my dear friends, he whose great trouble lies in his own heart cannot run away from it, for he bears it about with him wherever he goes. The old man of the mountain, who sits upon your shoulder, and clings so tightly to you, if he be your own self, is not to be shaken off by your running away. Far wiser will it be for you to do as the text says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." Then thou wilt want no wings like a dove, nor wilt thou wish to fly away to the wilderness; but thou wilt be willing to stay in the very midst of the battle, and even there thou wilt be in perfect peace,—

"Calm 'mid the bewildering cry,
Confident of victory."

I have often enjoyed the greatest solitude amid the crowds in Cheapside, and I believe that there is many a Christian who has experienced the deepest peace in the midst of the wildest turmoil. Some of us know what Madame Guyon meant when she wrote—

"While place we seek or place we shun,
The soul finds happiness in none;
But with a God to guide our way,
'Tis equal joy to go or stay."

Trust thou in Him, cast thou thy burden on Him, for so thou wilt escape from this temptation of want-

ing to flee away from the place where He would have thee to be.

There is one other temptation that this psalm suggests to me, and that is, *the temptation to wish ill to those who are causing us ill.* Perhaps mistaking the meaning of the passage, we are apt to pray the prayer in the ninth verse, "'Destroy, O Lord!' Our foes have slandered us, they have spoken ill of us, and we wish that they were dead, or that some great judgment might overtake them." It will never do, dear friends, to indulge such a feeling as that. We shall be ourselves injured if we desire that others should be injured. Slander has indeed stung thee when thou harbourest the wish to sting another. Someone said, in my hearing, attempting to justify revenge or retaliation, "But if you tread on a worm, it will turn;" and I answered, "Is a poor worm, that only turns because of its agony through man's cruelty, the pattern for a Christian man to follow? Will you look down to the dust of the earth to find the example that you are to imitate?" Wicked men trod upon Christ—who even compared Himself to a worm—yet He did not turn upon them, except to cry, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Let that be the only kind of turning that you ever practise towards your enemies. Do not be driven, by their evil speaking or their cruel deeds, into harshness of speech or even harshness of thought. I have known some persons, under sore trouble, who have at last become quite soured and bitter of spirit; that is all wrong, and very sad, and no good can ever come of such a state of heart as that. The bruising of the sycamore fig results in its growing sweeter, let thy bruising produce a similar effect upon thee. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, in His wondrous Sermon on the Mount, "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." If you do not act thus, which is the right thing for you to do, you will almost certainly do the wrong thing in some shape or other. Therefore, God help you to do what is right! Child, is thy father rough to thee? Then, love him until he becomes tender and gentle. Wife, is thy husband unkind to thee? Then, win him back by thy sweet smiles. Servant, is thy mistress harsh to thee? Even good women have sometimes dealt as hardly with their servants as Sarah dealt with Hagar. Well, if that is thy case, be not thou like Hagar, who despised her mistress. Submit thyself to her, for so shalt thou yet win her, as many a Christian slave of old, far worse treated than thou hast been, won his master or his mistress to Christ in those earliest and happiest days of Christianity. What is there for a Christian man to do but love his enemies? This is the most powerful weapon that we have in our armoury. We shall be wise as serpents if God teacheth us wisdom, and we shall also be harmless as doves if the Holy Spirit like a dove, rests upon us, and makes us also to abound in gentleness. By this sign we shall conquer, for it is love that always wins the day.

Thus I have shown you what we are tempted to do when we are like this good man who was in such an evil case.

II. Now I am going to show you, from the text, as the Holy Spirit shall help me, WHAT WE ARE COMMANDED TO DO. That is, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." Thou hast a burden upon thy back, it is too heavy for thee to bear, so cast it upon the Lord.

"How shall I do that?" someone asks. Well, if you are a child of God, I invite you, first of all to *trace your burden back to God.* "But it comes from the treachery of Ahithophel, or from the rebellion of Absalom." I grant you that it does: but those are only the second causes, or the agents, trace the matter back to the Great First Cause. If you do that, you will come, by a mystery which I will not attempt to explain, to the hand of divine providence, and you will say of every burden, "This also cometh from the Lord." You have probably seen a dog, when he has been struck with a stick, turn round, and bite the staff that smote him. If he were a wise dog, he would bite the man who held the stick that dealt the blow. When God uses His rod upon one of His children, even a godly man will sometimes snap at the rod. "But, sir, surely you would not have me turn upon my God?" Oh, no! I know you will not do that, for you are His child; and when you see that God is holding the rod in His hand, you will cease to be rebellious, and you will say, with the Psalmist, "I was dumb with silence. I was going to speak, but I opened not my mouth, because I saw that it was in Thine hand that the rod of chastisement was held." It is well always to trace our trials direct to God, and say, "It may be Judas Iscariot who has betrayed me; but still, it was planned in God's eternal purpose that I should be betrayed; so I will forget the second cause, except it be to pray God to forgive the malice of the betrayer, and I will look to the Lord who permitted the trial to come upon me for His own glory and for my good."

The next thing thou hast to do is this. Seeing that the burden is from God, *patiently wait His time for its removal.* There are some people, who, if they had a task set them by some great one whom they respected and revered, would cheerfully perform it. If, in the middle of the night, you were called up by a Queen's messenger, and bidden to do something for Her Majesty, you would be glad to rise and dress, even though it might be a cold night, and you might have far to go to fulfil your commission; and if you feel that your burden is from the Lord—if the King's arms are stamped upon the affliction or trial that comes to you, straightway you will say, "As the Lord wills it, I will bear it without complaining. When it is His time to deliver me, I shall be delivered; and so long as it is His time for me to suffer, I will suffer patiently." I wish that all Christians could be like that good old woman who was asked whether, as she was so very ill, she would prefer to live or die, said that she had no preference whatever, she only wished that the will of the Lord might be done. "But, still, if the Lord said to you, 'Which will you have?' which would you choose?" She said, "I would not even then choose, but I would ask the Lord to choose for me." You see, whenever anything comes to us from God, we have not the responsibility of it; but if it came through our own choice, then we might say to ourselves, "What fools we were to choose this particular trial!" You say that you do not like the cross God has sent you. Well but, at any rate, it is not by your own choice that you have to carry that particular cross. It is God who chose it for you; whereas, if you had selected it, you might well say, "Oh, dear me, what

a mistake I made when I chose this burden!" Now, you cannot say that; and I pray that you may have grace to see that "the whole disposing" of your lot is, as Solomon says, "of the Lord." The Hebrew of our text would bear such a rendering as this, "Cast on the Lord what the Lord gives thee. Cast on Him what He casts on thee. See the marks of His hand on thy burden, and thou wilt be reconciled to thy load. Know that God sends it to thee, and patiently wait till He takes it away." F. W. Faber very sweetly writes,—

"I have no cares, O blessèd Lord,
For all my cares are Thine;
I live in triumph, too, for Thou
Hast made Thy triumphs mine.

"And when it seems no chance nor change
From grief can set me free;
Hope finds its strength in helplessness,
And patient, waits on Thee.

"Lead on, lead on, triumphantly,
O blessed Lord, lead on!
Faith's pilgrim-sons behind thee seek
The road that Thou hast gone."

One blessed way of casting our burden upon the Lord is to *tell the Lord all about it.* It is a high privilege to get away alone, and talk to God as a man talketh with his friend. But I know what you often do, my brothers and sisters. When you get into a cleft stick, and cannot tell what to do, then you begin to pray. Why do you not, every morning, tell the Lord about all your difficulties before they come? What! will you only run to Him when you get into trouble? Nay, go to Him before you get into trouble. Half our burdens come from what we have not prayed over. If a man would take the ordinary concerns of life distinctly to God, one by one, it is marvellous how easily the chariot of life would roll along. Things over which we have not prayed are like undigested food that breeds mischief in the body; they breed mischief in the soul. Do thou digest thy daily bread by praying first, "God give it to me, and then God bless me in the use of it, and then God bless me afterwards in the spending of the strength derived from it to His praise and glory." Salt all your life with prayer, lest corruption should come to that part of thy life which thou hast not thus salted. Tell the Lord, then, thy griefs, just as, when a child, you told your troubles to your mother.

"I cannot find words," says one. Oh, they will come! They come fast enough when you complain to man, and they will sweetly come if you get into the blessed habit of talking to God about everything. A friend said to me, not long ago, "I was on the Exchange, and I saw that I had made a mistake in a certain transaction. I had lost money by it; and if I had gone on dealing in the same fashion, I should have been ruined. I just stepped aside for a minute or two into a quiet corner of my office. I stood still, and breathed a prayer to God for guidance. Then I went back, and felt, 'Now I am ready for any one of you.'" "So I was," he said, "I was not confused and worried, as I should otherwise have been, and so liable to make mistakes, but I had waited upon God, and I was therefore calm and collected." There is much wisdom in thus praying about everything; although, possibly, some of you may think it trivial. I believe that the very soul of Christianity lies in the sanctifying of what is called secular—the bringing of all things under the cognizance of our God by intense, constant, importunate, believing prayer.

When you have told the Lord everything, the next thing for you to do, in order to cast your burden upon Him, is to *believe that all will work together for your good.* Swallow the bitter as readily as you do the sweet; and believe that, somehow, the strange mixture will do you great good. Do not look out at thy window, judging this, and that, and the other, in detail; but, if God sent it to thee, open the door, and take it all in, for all that has come from Him will be to His glory and to thy profit. Believe thou that, if thou shalt lose certain things, thou wilt really be a gainer by thy losses. Even if they dearest one is taken from thee, all shall be well if thou hast but faith to trust God in it all. If thou thyself art stricken with mortal sickness, it will still be well with thee; and if thou dost still steadfastly trust in the Lord, thou shalt know that it is so. "We know," says the apostle Paul; he does not say, "We think, we suppose, we judge," but, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." If thou dost know this, my brother or my sister, it shall help thee to "cast thy burden upon the Lord."

When thou hast done this, then *leave thy burden with the Lord.* In the process of trusting God with thy burden, get to this point, that thou hast done with it. If I cast my burden upon the Lord, what business have I to carry it myself? How can I truthfully say that I have cast it upon Him if I still I am burdened with it? Throughout my life, which has not been free from many grave cares, there have been many things which I have been able to see my own way through; and, using my best judgment, they have passed off well. But, in so large a church as this, there sometimes occur things that altogether stagger me. I do not know what to do in such a case as that; and I have been in the habit, after doing all I can, of putting such things up on the shelf, and saying, "There, I will never take them down again, come what may. I have done with them, for I have left them wholly with God"; and I wish to bear my testimony that, somehow or other, the thing which I could not unravel, has unravelled itself. When Peter and the angel "came unto the iron gate," it "opened to them of his own accord"; and the same thing has happened to me many a time. "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" asked the holy women when they came to the tomb of their Lord; "and when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away." Learn to say, "My God has made this difficulty, and there is some good result to come of it; I have done the little I can do, so now I will leave it all with Him." Ah, but I know what some of you do; you say that you have left it all with God, and then you lie awake all night fretting about it. Is that casting your burden upon the Lord? Oh, for a blessed literalism about the promises of God, and our faith in them, so that we take them to mean just what they say, and act upon them accordingly! Now, if some poor woman here were sadly in debt for her rent, and she met with a Christian brother who said to her, "Do not fret, my good sister, I will see it all paid to-morrow"; do you think she would go running about, and saying, "Oh dear, I shall lose my things, my rent will not be paid"? No; she would say, "Mr. So-and-so,

whom I know and trust, said that he would pay it for me, and I feel perfectly quiet about it." Now, do thou so with thy God if thou knowest Him. David said, "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." If thou truly lovest the Lord, it will be a proof of thy love to repose thy care upon Him, it will prove the truth of thy having done so if thou art unburdened, and thy heart is at rest. If He beareth my burden, why should I also bear it? If He careth for me, what have I to do to vex myself with fretful, anxious cares?

I have thus done my best to show you what we are commanded to do: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord."

III. And now thirdly, and very briefly, WHAT WE SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO DO.

If I read the text aright, we here have David talking to himself; and what we are to endeavour to do is, *to talk to ourselves, just as David talked to himself.* He says of his enemy, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart"; and so on, and then he seems to say, "Come, David, do not fret yourself like this; but cast your burden upon the Lord." Have you not noticed how often David seems as if he were two Davids, and one David talks to the other David? It was so when he said to himself, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me?" And I want thee, dear friend, to chide thyself, and say, "Come, fretful heart, what art thou at? Cast thy burden upon the Lord. What art thou doing? Has God forsaken thee? Has God refused to help thee? Begone unbelief, take thyself off. Come, faith, and dwell in my soul, and reign over my spirit, swaying thy gracious sceptre of peace."

And when you have thus been chiding yourself, *argue with yourself about the matter.* Say to yourself, "See how the text puts it: 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord.'" Well, if it is *thy* burden, and God meant it for thee, then do not thou quarrel with it. And as it is thy burden, so is God thy God, the covenant-keeping God, thy Father and thy Friend. Come, my soul, cast thy burdens upon thy God; where else shouldst thou put thy burden when He bids thee cast it upon Him? Thou canst not sustain thyself under such a load, but God will sustain thee and thy burden, too. Think of the righteousness of God, and say, "It is impossible that the righteous God should leave the righteous to perish. If they are slandered, that is a further reason why God should take up their cause. He is their Advocate and their Defender. Come, my heart, it shall never be truly said of the Judge of all the earth that He leaves His people to perish, especially when their good name is assailed because of their fidelity to Him."

I want you, dear friends, to talk thus with yourselves, especially those of you who are rather apt to give way to despondency. There are some such here, I know. You come to me, sometimes, with your griefs, and I do the best I can to cheer you; but I have often said to myself, "That dear sister had a father who was a member with us; he used to come to me in just the same way as she does. This despondency seems to run in the blood." Some of you must have been born in December, and you never seem to get out of that month; it is always winter with you. But now I want you just to take the language of the text, and say to yourself, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved"; and, possibly, God will bless thine own sermon to thyself more than He would bless my sermon to thee. At any rate, try it.

IV. Lastly—and here I want the time for a whole sermon—let us think of WHAT WE MAY EXPECT IF WE FULFIL THE COMMAND OF THE TEXT: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord."

There are two grand things in the text,—sustenance and sufferance. The old Puritans would have made a book about those two words, and we might preach a dozen sermons upon them, and still not exhaust their meaning. What does the Lord do with His people when they cast their burdens upon Him? *He gives them sustenance.* "He shall sustain thee." The word "sustain" is the same that is used when God told Elijah to go to Zarephath, saying, "Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee,"—that is, "to feed thee," "to nourish thee." Perhaps that would have been a better rendering of the original: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord," and what will He do? Deliver thee out of thy trouble? No; but He will feed thee up till thou canst carry it; and that will be an even better thing than relieving thee of the burden. Here is a dear child that has but a little load to carry, yet he staggers under it. It would be a kind thing for his father to pick up the child, and his load, too, and carry both him and his burden. But the wise father says, "I will so provide for that child that he shall grow in strength, and at last shall be able to carry his load." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee"; that is, "He shall feed thee; He shall nourish thee." I believe that, when Paul was attacked by that viper that came out of the sticks, it looked a very ugly thing indeed, but Paul just shook it off into the fire. Why do you think that snake came? Why it came to feed them all! "No," say you, "that serpent did not do it." It did, for the islanders said that this man was a god, and straightway they began to gather around him and his companions, and to provide for their wants with all the greater alacrity because of the reverence that they felt for the apostle. So you shall often find that what looks like a horrible thing will be the best way in which God could bless you.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord." "It will crush me." No, it will not; you shall grow under it, and then grow out of it; and you shall prove the truth of those precious lines,—

> "From all their afflictions my glory shall spring,
> And the deeper their sorrows, the louder they'll sing."

Only by faith leave thy trouble with thy God, and He will nurture thee. Even out of the very rock of trouble will He feed thee, and give thee oil out of the flinty rock of thine afflictions.

Then, the other point is *sufferance.* I am obliged to hurry over these truths, and leave you to meditate upon them afterwards. "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Learn, from this declaration, that nothing will happen to you but what God permits. There are some things which are very grievous, which God does suffer to happen to His people; but there are other things which He will not suffer; He will never allow them to come. "No," says He, "My child, who has walked uprightly before Me, My righteous one, the man who spoke the truth, the man who did the right thing, I will

not suffer that man to be moved. He may be moved as the boughs of a tree sway to and fro in the breeze, but not as the roots of a tree are torn up by a storm. He may be moved a little, like a ship riding at anchor, which just swings with the tide; but he shall not be driven out to sea, or drift on to the rocks to his destruction."

"He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Do you catch the Psalmist's idea? It is as if God interposed, and said, "No, I will not permit that." A father may see his child somewhat put upon, yet at first he may not interfere; but, at last, a cruel blow is struck, and he says, "No, I will not stand that. While I have an arm to defend my child, he shall not be treated in that fashion." Well, then, leave everything with your Heavenly Father, for He will not suffer you to be moved. If you are really righteous, trusting in the Righteous One, justified by the blood and righteousness of Christ, and are doing what is right in His sight, He will not suffer you to be moved. The next time you are sorely vexed by the tongue of slander, go and tell your Father, just as the little boys tell their big brothers. Go and tell your Father all about it, and do not fret over it. If somebody has done you a great wrong, you may say to him, "I shall be obliged to refer you to my solicitor." But after you have done that, I hope you do not go writing letters to him on your own responsibility. Refer everything to God, and leave all with Him; for, so, a blessed peace will bedew your spirit, making your life on earth like the beginning of life in heaven.

In closing my discourse, I must just say that I do feel, in my inmost soul, the deepest pity for those of you who have no God to go to when you are in trouble. You will have a burden to bear, but you cannot cast it on the Lord. He will suffer you to be moved, for you do not cry unto Him to help you. I feel that I would rather be a dog than be a man without God. I think I could make myself happy if I were only a mouse in its hole; but if I were a prince in a palace, without God, I should be utterly miserable. O poor hearts, if you really want Him He is to be had! If you are longing for Him, His door is open to receive you. If you will come to Him, He will come and meet you much more than half way; yes, all the way will He come to everyone who wills to come to Him. As soon as you say, "I will arise," He has already arisen, and is on His way to meet you. Practically, there is no distance for you to go, for He is there, waiting to welcome you. Believe in His dear Son, and live. First cast your great burden of sin upon the Lord, and then cast upon Him all other burdens that He is willing to take from you; and, soon, He will put a new song into your mouth, and establish your goings. The Lord grant it, for His dear Son's sake! Amen!

AMONG LIONS

"My soul is among lions."—Psalm lvii. 4.

SOME of you cannot say this, and you ought to be very thankful that you are not obliged to do so. Happy are you young people who have godly parents, and who dwell in Christian families. You ought to grow like the flowers in a conservatory, where killing frosts and biting blasts are unknown. You live under very favourable circumstances. Your soul, I might almost say, is among angels; for you dwell where God is worshipped, where family prayer is not forgotten, where you can have a kindly guidance in the hour of difficulty and comfort in the time of trial. You dwell where angels come and go, and God Himself deigns to dwell. Happy young people to be thus circumstanced! How grateful and how holy you ought to be! I want all who dwell where everything helps them to recollect the many gracious ones who dwell where everything hinders them. You who live near the Beautiful Gate of the temple must not forget the many who are sighing in the tents of Kedar. If your soul is not among lions, praise God for it; and then let your sympathies go out towards those who mournfully complain—

> "My soul with him that hateth peace
> Hath long a dweller been;
> I am for peace; but when I speak,
> For battle they are keen."

It is a Christian duty to "remember them that are in bonds as bound with them"; and whenever our own favoured circumstances lead us to forget those who are persecuted and tried, our very mercies are working mischief to us. "We are all members one of another." If one member suffers, all the rest should suffer with him; and therefore, we will turn our thoughts towards our persecuted brethren to-night, that our united supplications may sustain them under their difficulties, and, if the Lord be so pleased, may even deliver them.

When may a Christian man truly say, "My soul is among lions." Such is the case when, either from our being members of ungodly families, or from having to gain our livelihood amongst unconverted and graceless people, we are subjected to reproach and rebuke, and to jest and jeer for Jesus Christ's sake. Then we can say, "My soul is among lions." Many in this congregation known to me are the only ones in their family whom God has called. I bless His name that He is often taking one of a household, and a lone one of a family, and bringing such to Jesus. Some quite un-Christian person who thinks not of God drops in here out of curiosity, and God meets with him and he becomes the first of his kith and kin to say "I am the Lord's." Frequently when converts come to cast in their lot with us they will say, "I do not know one in all my family who makes any profession of godliness: they are all of them opposed to me." In such a case the soul is among lions, and it is very hard and trying to be in such a position. Well may we pity a godly wife bound to an ungodly husband. Alas! full often a drunkard, whose opposition amounts to brutality. A tender, loving spirit, that ought to have been cherished like

a tender flower, is bruised and trodden under foot, and made to suffer till the heart cries out in grief, "My soul is among lions." We little know what life-long martyrdoms many pious women endure. Children also have to bear the same when they are singled out by Divine grace from depraved and wicked families. Only the other day there came under my notice one who loves the Lord. I thought that if she had been a daughter of mine I should have rejoiced beyond all things in her sweet and gentle piety, but the parent said, "You must leave our house if you attend such-and-such a place of worship. We do not believe in these things, and we cannot have you about us if you do." I saw the grief which that state of things was causing, and though I could not alter it I mourned over it. Woe unto those who tyrannize over my Lord's little ones.

Nobody knows what godly working men have to put up with from those among whom they labour. There are some shops where there is religious liberty; but frequently the working men of this city are great tyrants in matters of religion. I tell them that to their faces. If a man will drink with them, and swear with them, they will make him their companion; but when a man comes out to fear God they make it very hard for him. And pray, sir, has not a man as much right to pray as you have to swear? And has he not as much right to believe in God as you have to disbelieve? It is a wonderfully free country, this! A wonderfully free country! Almost as free as America in the olden time when every man was free to lick his own nigger; for now the working man claims freedom to laugh and swear at every other working man who chooses to be sober and religious. There are large factories all over London where a Christian man has to run the gauntlet from morning to night of sneers which never ought to come upon the face of honest men—which never would come if Britons were as fond of freedom as they profess to be. They declare that they never will be slaves; but *they are slaves*—slaves to their own ungodliness and drunkenness—the great mass of them; and only where Divine grace comes in and snaps the chain do men become free at all. If one serious man sets his face steadfastly to serve God the baser sort seem as if they must get him under their feet, and treat him with every indignity that malice can devise. It may be all in sport, but the victim does not think so. Do not tell me that persecution ceased when the last martyr burned. There are martyrs who have to burn by the slow fire of cruel mockings day after day; and I bless God that the old grit is still among us, and that the old spirit still survives, so that men defy sneers and slander and hold on their way. I could tell stories, which would both shock you and delight you, of what is said and done by the common order of English working men against those who profess religion and how courageously the righteous and the true bear it all, and, in the long run, conquer too, and oftentimes win their mates to confess the selfsame faith. They call us all cants and hypocrites, and the like, but they know better, and if they had a grain of manliness they would cease from such lying. A true Briton gives that liberty to others which he claims for himself, and if he does not choose to be religious himself he stands up like a man to defend the rights of others to be so if they choose. Now, then, ye British workmen, when shall we see you doing this?

The text speaks of a soul among lions. Why did the Psalmist call them lions? "Dogs" is about as good a name as they deserve. Why call them lions? Because at times the Christian man is exposed to enemies who are very strong—perhaps strong in the jaw—very strong in biting, rending, and tearing. Sometimes the Christian man is exposed to those who loudly roar out their infidelities and their blasphemies against Christ, and it is an awful thing to be among such lions as those. The lion is not only strong but cruel; and it is real cruelty which subjects well-meaning men to reproach and misrepresentation. The enemies of Christ and His people are often as cruel as lions, and would slay *us* if the law permitted them. The lion is a creature of great craftiness, creeping along stealthily, and then making a sudden spring; and so will the ungodly creep up to the Christian, and, if possible, spring upon him when they can catch him in an unguarded moment. If they fancy they spy a fault in him they come down upon him with all their weight! The ungodly watch the righteous, and if they can catch them in their speech, or if they can make them angry, and cause them to speak an unguarded word, how eagerly they pounce upon him. They magnify his fault, put it under a microscope of ten thousand power, and make a great thing of it. "Report it! Report it!" they say, "So would we have it!" Anything against a true-born child of God is a sweet nut for them. Such as are daily watched, daily carped at, daily abused, daily hindered in everything that is good and gracious, go with their tears before the God they serve and cry to Him, "My soul is among lions."

Now, it is to such that I am going to speak to-night, a little at first *by way of comfort*, and then a little *by way of advice*.

I. First, BY WAY OF COMFORT. You are among lions, my dear young friend, then *you will have fellowship with your Lord and with His Church*. Every Lord's-day, and every time we meet, this benediction is pronounced upon you, that you may enjoy the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Fellowship with the Holy Ghost brings you into fellowship with Jesus, and this involves your being conformed to His sufferings. Now, your Lord was among lions. The men of His day had not a good word to say for Him. They called the Master of the house Beelzebub, they will never call you a worse name than that. They said that He was a drunken man and a wine-bibber; possibly they may say much the same as that of you, and it will be equally false. You need not be ashamed to be pelted with the same dirt that was thrown at your Master; and if it should ever come to this, that you should be stripped of everything, and false witnesses should rise up against you, and you should even be condemned as a felon, and taken out to execution, still your lot will not be worse than His. Remember that you are the followers of a Crucified Lord, and cannot expect to be the world's darlings. If you are Christians, the inspired description of the Christian life is the taking up of the cross. Do you expect to be dandled on the knees of that same ungodly world which hung your Master upon the gibbet? No; you know that he who is the friend of this world is the enemy of God. This truth is unchangeable. It is just as certain to-day as it was in years gone by, that "the evil hateth the righteous, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth." You may pick up a fashionable religion, and get through the world with it very comfortably; but if you have the true faith you will have to fight

for it. If you are of the world, the world will love its own; but if you are not of the world, because the Lord has chosen you out of the world, the world will hate you. When a villager goes up the little street the dogs do not bark at him, for they know him well: but when a stranger rides along they set up a howl. By this shall you know whether you are a citizen of the world or a pilgrim towards the better land.

Nor was your Master alone. Recollect the long line of prophets that went before Christ. Which of them was it that was received with honour? Did they not stone one and slay another with the sword, cut one in pieces with a saw, put others to death with stones? Ye know that the march of the faithful may be tracked by their blood. And after our Lord had gone to heaven, how did the world treat the Church? In the streets of Rome, and all large cities, the fierce cry was often heard, "Christians to the lions! Christians to the lions! Christians to the lions!" At dead of night men cry "Fire!" when a house is blazing; or a mob will cry "Bread!" when they are starving; but *the* cry of old Rome that was dearest to the Roman heart, and most expressive of their horrible enmity to goodness, was "Christians to the lions!" Of all the gallant shows the Roman Empire ever saw, that which excited the populace beyond all things else was to see a family—a man and his wife, perhaps, and a grown-up daughter and son, and three or four children—all marched into the arena, and the big door thrown up, that out might rush the lion and spring upon them, and tear them to pieces. What harm had they done? They had forgiven their enemies. That was one of their great sins. They would not worship the gods of wood and stone. They would not blaspheme the name of Jesus whom they loved, for He had taught them to love one another, and to love all mankind. For such things as this men raised the cry, "Christians to the lions! Christians to the lions!" All along this has been the cry of the world against all who have faithfully followed in the steps of Jesus Christ. Just now the merciful hand of Providence prevents open persecution, but only let that hand be taken away, and the old spirit will rage again. The seed of the serpent hates the seed of the woman still; and if the old dragon were not chained he would devour the man-child, as he has often tried to do. Do not deceive yourselves, in one form or other the old howl of "Christians to the lions!" would soon be heard in London if Almighty power did not sit upon the throne and restrain the wrath of man.

You who have to suffer a measure of persecution for Christ's sake ought to be very glad of it, for you are counted worthy not only to be Christians, but to suffer for Christ's sake. Do not, I pray you, be unworthy of your high calling, but endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. In these afflictions you are having fellowship with your Head and with His mystical body, therefore be not ashamed.

Here is another thought. If you are among lions *you should thereby be driven nearer to your God.* When you had a great many friends you could rejoice in them; but now that these turn against you, and the truth has come home to you—"A man's foes shall be they of his own household,"—what ought you to do? Why, get closer to God than ever you were before. Jesus Christ so loved His Church that He said as He looked at His poor disciples, "These are My mother, and sister, and brother." You should do what your Master did—make His Church your father and mother and sister and brother; nay, better still, make Christ all these to you and more. Take the Lord Jesus to be everything that all the dearest of mortals could be and far more. Sing that charming verse, which is a great favourite of mine, for it was very precious to me in days gone by—

> "If on my face, for Thy dear name,
> Shame and reproaches be,
> All hail reproach, and welcome shame,
> If Thou remember me."

Be sure that you live near to God. All Christians ought to do so, but you especially should be driven by every false accusation, by every caustic remark, by every cutting sentence, nearer to your Father's bosom. The more they rebuke you the more constantly should you abide under the covert of His sacred wings, and find your joy in the Lord.

And, getting close to Christ, let me say to you now by way of advice, and by way of comfort too, *endeavour to be very calm and happy.* Do not mind it. Take as little notice of the scoff as ever you can. It is a grand thing to have one deaf ear. Mind that you keep yourself very deaf to slander and reproach, as the Psalmist did when he said, "I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." One blind eye towards the folly of enemies is often of more use to a man than two that are always looking about with suspicion. Do not see everything, do not hear everything. When there is a hard word spoken, do not notice it; or if you must hear it, forget it as quickly as ever you can. Love others all the more the less they love you: repay their enmity with love. Heap coals of fire upon them by making no return to a hard speech except by another deed of kindness. Very seldom defend yourself: it is a waste of breath, and casting pearls before swine. Bear and bear again. Recollect that our Lord has sent us forth as sheep among wolves, and sheep cannot defend themselves. The wolf can eat all the sheep up if it likes; but, do you not see, there are more *sheep* in the world now than there are wolves, ten thousand to one? Though the wolves have had all the eating, and though there never yet was a sheep that devoured a wolf, yet still the sheep are here and the wolves have gone. The sheep have won that victory: and so will Christ's little flock. The anvil is struck by the hammer, and the anvil never strikes in return, and yet the anvil wears the hammer out. Patience baffles fury and vanquishes malice. The non-resistance principle involves a resistance which is irresistible. The steady patience that cannot be provoked, but which, like Jesus, when reviled reviles not again, is certain of conquest. This is what you persecuted ones need to learn—to get more near your God the more you are among the lions, and so to be the more calm and patient the more men rage against you.

A third piece of comfort is this. Please to recollect that, although your soul is among lions, *the lions are chained.* When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den the lions were hungry and would soon have devoured him; but you know why it was that they could not touch him. Ah, the angel came. Just as the fierce lions were about to seize on Daniel, down he came swift from heaven, and stood in front of them. "Hush!" said he, and they lay as still as a stone. So says the text: "My God hath sent His

angel and shut the lions' mouths." They had fine teeth, but their mouths were shut. If the Lord can easily shut a lion's mouth, He can quite as easily shut the mouth of an ungodly man. He can take off all trouble from you, if He wills it, in an instant, and He can give you a smooth path to heaven when it pleases Him; only remember that if everything on the road to heaven were smooth, heaven would not be so sweet at the end, and we should not have an opportunity of displaying those Christian graces which are brought out and educated by the opposition of the world. God will not quench the fire of persecution, for it consumes our dross, but He will moderate its power so that not a grain of pure metal shall be lost. The lions are chained, dear friend; they can go no farther than God permits. In this country the most they can do, as a rule, is to howl, they cannot bite; and howling does not break bones; why, then, be afraid? The man who is afraid of being laughed at is not half a man, but almost deserves the scorn he receives. Never mind what is said. Talking will not hurt you. Harden your spirit against it, and bear it gallantly. Go and tell your Lord of it if your heart fails you; and then go forward, calm as your Master was, fearing nothing, for God will bear you through. The lions can roar, but they cannot rend—fear them not.

Another fact for your comfort is this: *when your soul is among lions, there is another Lion there* as well as the lions that you see. Have you never heard of Him? He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. How quietly He lies! How patiently He waits by the side of His servants! The jest, the jeer, the noise continue, and He lies still. If He only would—if He thought it wise, if it were not for His superlative patience—He has only to rouse Himself for one moment, and all our enemies would be destroyed. Our great Lord and King could have had twenty legions of angels when He was in the garden for the lifting of His finger, but He continued a lone, a suffering man. If He willed it at this day He could sweep the ungodly away as chaff before the wind: His long-suffering is for their salvation, if haply they may turn and repent. If your faith be as it should be, it will be a great joy to you to know that He is always with you, that He is always near you. If He is ever absent from others of His servants, He is never away from His persecuted servants. Ask the Covenanters amongst the mosses and the hills, and they will tell you that they never had such Sabbaths in Scotland as when they met among the crags, and set their scouts to warn them against Claverhouse's dragoons. When Cargill or Cameron thundered out the Word, with what power was it attended. How sweetly was the blessed Bridegroom with His persecuted Church among the hills. There is never such a time for seeing the Son of God as when the world heats the furnace seven times hotter. There is the flaming furnace, go and stand at the mouth of it and look in. They threw three men bound into it in their hosen and in their hats, and the flame was so strong that it killed the soldiers who threw them in. But look! Can you not see? Nebuchadnezzar himself comes to look. See how greatly he is astonished! He calls to those around him, and he demands, "Did not we cast three men bound into the furnace? Look ye, there are four. A strange, mysterious form is that fourth. They are walking the coals as if they walked in a garden of flowers. They seem full of delight, they are walking as men converse in their gardens in the cool of the day; and that fourth—that mysterious fourth—is like the Son of God!" Ah, Nebuchadnezzar, thou hast seen a sight that has often been seen elsewhere. When God's people are in the furnace, God's Son is in the furnace also. He will not leave those who will not leave Him. If we can cling to Him, rest assured that He will cling to us, even to the end. Fear not the lions, then. Our Samson would turn upon them, and rend them in a moment if their hour were come.

"Jesu's tremendous name
Puts all our foes to flight;
Jesus, the meek, the angry Lamb,
A Lion is in fight.

By all hell's host withstood,
We all hell's host o'erthrow;
And conquering them, through Jesu's blood
We still to conquer go."

Again, I want to comfort you with this word: you whose souls are among lions should recollect that *you will come out of the lions' den unharmed.* Daniel was cast into the den. Darius could not sleep that night, and when he went in the morning he did not expect to find a bone of Daniel left, and so he began crying out to him. How surprised he must have been when Daniel replied that his God had preserved him. How thankful he was to fetch him out of the den. You, too, dear child of God, will come out of the den all right. There will be a resurrection of God's people's bodies at last, and there will be a resurrection for their reputations also. The slanderer may belie the character of a true man, but no true man's character will ever be buried long enough to rot. Your righteousness shall come forth as light, and your judgment as the noonday. You need not be afraid but that, as Daniel rose from the den to dignity, so will every man who suffers for Christ receive honour and glory and immortality "in that day."

Recollect that if you are among the lions now, *the day is hurrying on with speed when you shall be among the angels.* Our Lord and Master, after being in the wilderness with the wild beasts, found that "angels came and ministered to Him." Such a visitation awaits all the faithful. What a change those martyrs enjoyed who took a fiery breakfast on earth, but supped with Christ that very day after riding to glory in a chariot of fire. If you have now to suffer all that can possibly be wreaked of vengeance upon you for Christ's sake, you will think nothing of it when you have been five minutes in heaven. Indeed, it will be a subject of congratulation that ever you were permitted in your humble measure to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. Therefore, be ye comforted, you young people, and march on with heroic step.

I see a soldier or two here to-night, and I am right glad that we have generally a block of red coats in the congregation. I know that often in the barrack-room it is hard for a Christian man to bear witness for Jesus Christ. Many and many a soldier has found his path as a Christian to be extremely difficult; he has had to sail very carefully, like a ship among torpedoes, and only Divine grace has kept him safe. Some of you who reside in large establishments, where you sleep in rooms with a great many others, find it difficult even to kneel down to pray. Mind that you do it, though. Do it at first right bravely, and keep it up. Never be

ashamed of your colours. Begin as you mean to go on; and go on as you begin. If you begin parleying you will soon lose all their respect, and make it worse for yourself; but in the name of Jesus Christ let me beseech you to be firm and steadfast even unto death. Be comforted, for there has no new thing happened to you. It is no novelty for the followers of Jesus to be ridiculed and despised. He came to send fire on the earth, and it has been kindled well nigh two thousand years. The fiery path is the old road of the Church militant; therefore tread it, and be glad that you are permitted to follow the heroes of heaven in their sacred way.

II. Now, a few words BY THE WAY OF ADVICE. Of course this does not deal with all of you who are now present—I hope that many of you dwell among the godly. Still there are some whose soul is among lions, and to them I give this counsel.

First, if you dwell among lions *do not irritate them.* If I happened to be among lions I would not tease them: I would take good care that if they were cruel and fierce I did not make them so. I have known some, who I hope were Christians, who have acted very unwisely, and so have made matters bad for themselves. There is such a thing as ramming religion down people's throats, or trying to do so; and you can put on a very long face, and try to scold people into religion. This will not do. Never yet was anybody bullied to Christ, and there never will be. Some are very stern, and make no allowances for other people: these may be good, but they are not wise. What is a rule to you and to me may not be a rule to everybody else. We said the other Sunday that we should not think of eating what we give to swine; but we do not, therefore, say, "These swine must not have their wash." No, no; it is good enough for them. Let them have it. And as to worldly people and their amusements, let them have them, poor things. They have nothing else, let them have their mirth. I would not touch their joys, nor would you, for they would be no pleasure to you; but do not, as a new-born man, go and set yourself up as the standard of what the ordinary sinner, dead in sin, is to be. He cannot come up to our standard. Do not be perpetually finding fault: that is pulling the lions' whiskers, and the creatures are very likely to growl at you. If your soul is among lions, be gentle, be kind, be prudent, be tender. Sometimes be silent: a good word is on your tongue, but there are times when you must not say it: for the life of you, you must not say it, for it would rouse the lions and make more sin than need be. Sometimes a truth needs defending; but, my inexperienced and untaught brother, do not try to defend it, for you have not the strength. The champion of infidelity will challenge one who is weak and uninstructed, and he overthrows him, and he who came forth valorously is beaten in argument. He was not up to the mark in knowledge, and so he was vanquished: and then, what do the adversaries say? Why, they boast that the truth is disproved and that Christ is beaten. Nothing of the kind. The British empire was not defeated when a regiment of our soldiers were slain at Isandula; and the truth and cause of Christ is not defeated when some weak champion full of zeal rushes to the front when he ought to have kept in the rear. I do not say much on this point, because we have not much rash zeal nowadays, and it would be a pity to check what honest zeal there is; but still there is such a text as "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Put your finger on your lips when you are irritated. You cannot speak to the purpose when you are perturbed, and are likely to be angry. Be quiet and bide your time. Many a man would do more good for the cause of God if he would not irritate ungodly people. Let them alone: seek their salvation lovingly and tenderly; but when your efforts to do them good only provoke them to sin, try another way. Do not go on with that which angers them; invent another method. I do believe that some Christians make half the opposition which they get from the world by their own ill tempers and stupidity. They challenge conflict: their actions seem to say, "Who will fight me?" and then, of course, somebody takes up the cudgels. Do not act foolishly; but if your soul is among lions, and they are inclined to be quiet, do not needlessly excite them.

Secondly, if your soul is among lions, *do not roar yourself*, for that is very easy to be done. We have known some, who we hope were Christians, who have met railing with railing, hard words with hard words, bitter speeches with bitter speeches. The ungodly are lions, and you are not; do not try to meet them in their own line. You will never roar as well as they do. If you are a Christian man, you have not the knack of roaring. Leave *them* to do it. Your way of meeting them is not by losing your temper and abusing your antagonists, and so becoming a lion yourself; but you must conquer them with gentleness, patience, kindness, love. I pray you, dear brothers and sisters who have to bear a good deal for Christ's sake, do not get soured in spirit. There is a tendency in a martyr age to become obstinate and pugnacious. You must not be so. Love, love, love; and the more you are provoked, love the more. Overcome evil with good. I think it necessary to mention these cautions, because I know many require them.

Again, your soul is among lions: then, *do not be cowardly.* Have you never heard that a lion is afraid of a man if he looks him steadily in the face? I am not sure about that piece of natural history; but I am quite certain that it is true with regard to the ungodly world. If a man will bear himself calmly—if he will be unmoved, determined, resolute, steadfast—he will overcome the adversary. "When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." If you give way a little, you will have to give way a great deal. If you give the world an inch, you will have to give it an ell, as sure as you are alive. If you will not yield an inch, nay, nor yet a barleycorn, but stand steadfast, God will help you. Courage is what is wanted. The world, after a while, says of any man, "It is of no use laughing at him; he does not mind it. It is of no use calling him hard names; he only smiles at you. It is useless to be his enemy, for he will not be yours. He will only be your friend." Then the world whispers, "Well, after all, he is not so bad a fellow as we thought he was; we must let him have his own way." There is a big human heart somewhere down in men if you can but get at it, and after a while, when truth and righteousness have suffered, and been denounced, men turn round and are almost ready to carry on their shoulders with hosannas the selfsame person whom a little while before they longed to crucify. Do not be a coward! Do not be a coward!

"Stand up! stand up for Jesus!
The fight will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song."

Even if the fight were long, for such a Master as Jesus it were worth while to endure ten thousand years of scorn, and moreover the reward at the end will repay us a thousandfold.

If your soul is among lions, then *do not go out among them alone.* "Then whom shall I take with me?" says one, "there is not a Christian in the shop." Take your Lord with you. Be sure that you do that. Now, my dear friend, I know what they said yesterday, and how they bantered you; and you were tart and short with them, because you had not been in prayer in the morning as you ought to have been. If your mind had been more calm and gentle as the result of prayer you would not have minded it one-half so much. Take your Master with you, and whenever you have to speak think that He is standing at your side, and try to say what you would like Him to hear; and then, when you have made your defence you will be able to say, "Good Master, I think I have not dishonoured Thee, for I have spoken Thy words." Oh, live near to Christ if you live among lions. Those of you who endure opposition make the best Christians. Many that have been distinguished for Christ in after life have had to rough it a little at first. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." If I could bring a garden-roller and roll the grass for you all the way from here to heaven do you think that I would do it? Certainly not. A rough place or two is good for you, it tries and strengthens pilgrim feet. A child will never become a man if he is carried about all his life like a baby. You must run alone. You must learn the arts of holy warfare, or else you will not be fit to be a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb. May His good Spirit help you to keep in fellowship with Christ, that He may guard and protect you from every temptation and persecution.

Further, let me say to you that if your soul is among lions, and you feel very weak about it, you are permitted to *pray the Lord to move you in His providence to quieter quarters.* A Christian man is not bound to endure persecution if he can help it: "When they persecute you in one city flee to another." You are quite warranted in seeking another situation. There may be reasons why you should remain under the trial, and if so, take care that you do not overlook them. Prudence may make you avoid persecution, but cowardice must not mingle with the prudence. That prayer which says, "Lead us not into temptation," gives us, as it were, a permit to remove from places where we are much tempted; and sometimes it is the duty of the Christian to seek some other sphere of labour, if he possibly can, where he will not be so much tried.

One thought more: *the braver thing is to ask for grace to stop with the lions and tame them.* "My soul is among lions." Well, if the Lord makes you a lion-tamer, that is the very place where you ought to be. In some of our districts in London as soon as ever a man is converted he feels that he cannot live there any longer, and this makes the district hopeless. My dear friend, Mr. Orsman, working in Golden Lane, as it used to be, told me that his was an endless task, because as soon as ever the people were converted they said, "Would you have me live here any longer, in such a horrible place as this?" They naturally feel that as they have grown sober, and decent, and respectable, they should move into a different locality, and they do so: but the result is that the old spot does not improve. Sometimes the Christian man should say, "No: God has made me strong in grace; and I will stop here, and fight it out. These are lions, but I will tame them. I believe that God has put me here on purpose to bring my fellow-workmen to the Saviour, and by His grace I will do it." Now, if I were a lamp I daresay that, if I had my choice of where I should burn, I should choose to blaze away in a respectable street. I should like to scatter my light in front of the Tabernacle; but surely if I were a really sensible lamp I should say to myself—"If there are only a few lamps, and all the streets have to be lit, there is more necessity to light up a back slum or a blind alley than to adorn a main street, therefore let me shine in the dismal courts. In a lonely, dark place where murder may be done, there let me act as guardian of the night and detective of the villain." A wise lamp would say, "I came into the world to give light, and I should like to give light where light is most wanted. Hang me up in Mint Street, or in St. Giles's, or away there by the back of Kent Street, where I may be most useful."

And now, Christian people, is there not sense about this advice? Is there not reason in it? Would not your Master have you go where you are most wanted, and should you not, therefore, if your soul is amongst lions, say, "Thank God it is so. These people are not going to conquer me, but I am going to conquer them"? What a beautiful spectacle was that which was exhibited by the Moravian Brethren in their grand times! They could not land on one of the West Indies to preach the gospel to the negroes, for the planters would not have anybody there but slaves; and two brethren sold themselves for slaves, and lived and died in bondage, that they might teach the poor negroes. It is said that there was a place in Africa where persons were shut up whose limbs were rotting away through leprosy and other diseases. Two of these brethren climbed up the wall and saw these poor creatures—some with no legs, and others with no arms. They asked to be allowed to go in to win their souls for Christ, and the answer was, "If you enter you can never come out again, because you would bring contagion. You go in there to die, to rot away as the lepers do." These brave men went in and died that they might bring the lepers to Christ. I hope that we have some drops of that grand Christian blood still in our veins; and if we have, we shall feel that we could go to the gates of hell to win a sinner. You are not like your Master unless you would die to save men from hell. You will bear jests and jeers, and count them nothing if you can but win souls. So stop where you are, my stronger brothers and sisters; if your souls are among lions, tarry and tame the lions. It will be a grand thing for you to come one day to the church-meeting with two or three of your neighbours whom you have been the means of converting to Christ. I like to see a man march, if he can do it, with a tame lion on each side. When a man has by God's grace brought some of those that were drunkards and swearers to the feet of Jesus, oh, it is a grand triumph. It has been my business for many years to be a lion-tamer, and I delight in it. If there is any lion of the sort here, I wish the Master would tame him, and

make him lie down and crouch at His feet. There is the place for us poor sinners, at the feet of Christ. But do not be afraid of sinners, dear friends, for how can you tame them if you tremble at them. Go forth to win them in the strength of the living God, and you shall yet see the lion lie down with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them. Amen and Amen.

A SINGULAR TITLE AND A SPECIAL FAVOUR

" The God of my mercy shall prevent me."—Psalm lix. 10.

A LIFE without trouble would be very uninteresting. Our opportunities for greatness would be narrowed down if trials were gone. I watched a glorious sunset, marvelling at the beauty wherewith the evening skies were all ablaze, and adoring Him who gave them their matchless colouring. On the next evening I resorted to the same spot, hoping to be again enraptured with the gorgeous pomp of ending day, but there were no clouds, and, therefore, no glories. True, the canopy of sapphire was there, but no magnificent array of clouds to form golden masses with edges of burning crimson, or islands of loveliest hue set in a sea of emerald; there were no great conflagrations of splendour or flaming peaks of mountains of fire. The sun was as bright as before, but for lack of dark clouds on which to pour out his lustre his magnificence was unrevealed. A man who should live and die without trials would be like a setting sun without clouds; he would have scant opportunity for the display of those virtues with which the grace of God had endowed him. In the case of David we have much cause for thankfulness that he did not lead a life of unbroken tranquillity. It is well for us that his was not a flowery path of continuous prosperity. Over him the waves and billows dashed full often; both within and without he was assailed daily, so that he became the epitome of all the temptations and the aspirations, the graces and the weaknesses, the joys, and the sorrows of our humanity, and hence his life became so wondrously instructive. David owed much to the Philistines, to the tracks of the wild goats, to the cave of Adullam, and to persecuting Saul; his hunted life, and a thousand trying circumstances, trained him for a grand life, and made him for us a mirror in which we see ourselves reflected in all our varying moods and passions. None of us can know what we are till we are tried, nor will the good within us increase to any degree of betterness unless it be exercised. The arm unused loses muscular force, put it to stern labour and it gathers strength; soldiers are made by war and mariners by storms; the scholar may think it hard to be severely examined, but he becomes the wiser by the searching test. Our trials and troubles, while they test and develop us, do also by divine grace strengthen and improve us, and ever have we great cause to bless God for them when grace sanctifies them to our highest good. Had not David been a man of many afflictions he would never have penned such a verse as our text, a confident utterance of unstaggering faith, full of meaning, rich with consolation, the very cream of assured hope in God.

There are three things in the text: the first is David's *looking to his God*, for God is the theme of the verse; secondly, David's *appropriating divine mercy*—" the God of my mercy;" and then, thirdly, David's *confidence in merciful help from God*—" The God of my mercy will prevent me."

I. First, then, let us think for awhile of David's LOOKING TO HIS GOD. " The God of my mercy," saith he. Note that this psalm was composed by him upon the occasion of his being shut up in the house of Michal, Saul's daughter, and surrounded by his adversaries. The messengers of the bloodthirsty king watched the house all night long, to kill him, and when they had not effected their purpose, Saul demanded that he should be brought, on his bed, into his presence, that he might slay him. It was not easy for a man, when his enemies were watching the house, to escape out of their hands. David, however, does not appear to have been at all disturbed, but with perfect confidence in God he expected that a way of escape would be made for him. He could not hope that Saul would relent, nor could he expect his friends to come to the rescue, neither did he rely upon his own valour or cunning for the means of escape, but calmly prayed, " Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God; defend me from those that rise up against me." He rested quietly, feeling sure that God had his enemies in derision, and could as readily break the line of watchers as a man can drive off a pack of prowling dogs, to whom indeed he compares his foes. Now, brethren, this looking above, this having our eye upon the Lord, is a practice which should be habitual with all believers, and needs to be learned by us all.

David looked to God on this occasion because he had before this habitually waited upon Him. His faith had realised the existence of God, and his soul had felt the power of that realised truth. This is a thing unknown to the unconverted, and unfelt to any high degree by large numbers of those who profess to know the Lord. That there is a God is a doctrine which we all receive, but that God *really* exists is not grasped by us as it should be. Other existences are more real to us, whereas God's being should be the most real of all. We look upon His existence as a mystery, a light and airy thing, proper to be believed, but not a matter of every-day fact which can influence our lives to any great extent. This unreal view of God arises from a secret deep-seated unbelief. We dare not say that God is a fiction, but we act as if He were so. The faith which David had, and which I trust we have in our measure, makes God a fact to the mind and heart, intensely and superlatively real. An eye anointed with faith looks upon men and women as if they were shadows, for they are soon to dissolve and cease to be; but it views the Lord as the only real substantial existence, and all that concerns Him as being alone sure and vitally important. God is unseen, but none the less present and energetic in our lives; He is unheard by the ear, but none the less

perceived by the heart; He is certainly at work accomplishing His purposes, although our coarse and earth-bound senses cannot discover Him. Faith has a far greater perceptive power than the senses, it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." While carnal men say "seeing is believing," we assure them that to us "believing is seeing." We turn their saying upside down, our faith is eye and ear, and taste and touch to us, it is so mighty in us that we do not only know that there is a God, but we regard Him as the great motive force of the universe, and daily calculate upon His mighty aid. Hence it is the Christian's habit to fall back upon God in all time of faintness, to cry to God in all time of danger: he does not pray because he thinks it a pious though useless exercise, but because he believes it to be an effectual transaction, the potent pleading of a child with its Parent, rewarded with loving grants of blessing. The believer does not look up to heaven because it is a natural instinct to hope for better days, and to cheer one's self with a pious fiction about Providence, but he looks up to heaven because God is actually there, truly observant, tenderly sympathetic, and ready with a mighty arm to come to the rescue of His people. So, then, because it is our wont to wait upon the Lord, we go to Him in troublous days as a matter of course. We do not make Him an occasional resort to be used only when we cannot help it, but we dwell in Him, and morning by morning pour out our hearts before Him; and so when adversity comes, we fly to God as naturally as the dove to its dovecote, or the coney to the rock, or the weary child to its mother's bosom. The nautilus, when disturbed, folds up its sails and sinks into the depths, and even so in every hour of storm we descend into the deeps of divine love. Blessed is that man whose spirit looks to God alone at all times. Let us each one ask his own heart—is this my case? And if we can answer aright, let us sing with Madame Guyon—

> "Ah, then! to His embrace repair;
> My soul, thou art no stranger there;
> There love divine shall be thy guard,
> And peace and safety thy reward."

On this special occasion *David was driven more closely to his God by the peculiar trouble with which he was environed.* To no other helper could he look, he was shut up to his God. Michal, Saul's daughter, proved faithful to him, but he could not have been sure that she would dare to incur her father's displeasure for his sake. Outside the house there might be friendly hearts, but they were far away, and the watchful myrmidons of the tyrant shut up every avenue: but lo, there was a broad highway upwards to the throne of the Most High, and the believing prayers of David traversed the shining road and brought him assurances of deliverance. To whom could he look but unto God? Every other door was closed, save that door which is opened in heaven. See, then, how the bow of trouble shot him like an arrow towards God! It is a blessed thing when the waves of affliction wash us upon the rock of confidence in God alone, when darkness below gives us an eye to the light above. The Psalmist says in the verse preceding the text, "Because of his strength"—that is, the strength of the foe—"will I wait upon Thee, for God is my defence." Because the enemy is too strong for me, therefore will I turn to my God, and invoke His omnipotence as my defence. Are any of you, this morning, in trouble so deep that you know you must sink in it, so far as material help is concerned? That is a glorious position to be in if your faith proves equal to the occasion, and leads you to cast yourself upon God and swim to shore. It is nothing for a man to walk down here upon the ground, but to walk aloft upon yonder slender thread, which the eye can scarcely see, is a feat of skill at which men gaze with admiration; and to walk on what the eye cannot see at all, or the foot feel, needs a yet higher art: such is the walk of faith. To lean upon God's invisible arm, which the carnal mind knoweth not of, and accounts as little worth, is grand work. If you can walk where there is no visible pathway, you belong to the race of the immortals, a God-given faith proves your lineage to be divine. Perhaps you have a task set before you which is much too heavy for you; well, brother, you have the honour of being placed where you can, to the full, display your trust in God. What you can do you must do, but what you cannot do and yet must do, you may confidently expect the Lord to enable you to perform. He will elevate your weakness into a platform for His power. To come to the end of yourself is to get to the beginning of your God. Blessed is that extremity which is God's opportunity. Such was David's case.

As soon as David had looked alone to his God his trials grew small. In his own esteem they grew to be nothing, for he says, "Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them, Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision"; and methinks something of the laughter of God penetrated David's spirit; and in that house wherein he was enclosed as a prisoner he smiled in his heart at the disappointment which awaited his foes. You may look at your troubles till your spirits sink within you; you may watch the adversaries of God till your soul within you is heavy even to despair; but if you then lift up your eye to Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His will, across whose brow serene no cloud can ever pass, who speaks and it is done, who commands and it stands fast, who bears up the unpillared arch of heaven, and unaided wheels the ponderous orbs along their trackless courses; then difficulties vanish, impossibilities end, and perils and dangers cease to be. To get away from man and nestle beneath the wing of God is to exchange doubt for certainty, and fear for confidence. Faith laughs at that which fear weeps over; it leaps over mountains at whose feet mere mortal strength lies down to die.

Reliance upon God, dear friends, is a virtue to which I would urge every believer; may the Holy Spirit work it in you. We have fallen upon evil times, this is the age of little men and cowards; but wherein does our littleness lie? Whence comes our cowardice? I believe that both are caused by our faith. If the Son of man should come at this hour, would He find faith on the earth? If any one could find it He could, for He is the author of it, and wherever there is any faith His eye quickly discerns it; but yet if He were to come would He find it? Alas! it is sadly rare. Yet, my brethren, faith is the bread on which heroes feed, the air which gives breath to great souls. Believe in God and all things are possible unto you. Whenever there has been a revival of faith in the saints of God, they have been potent against all adverse forces. Why, even a wrong faith is mighty when thoroughly received. Have you not been astonished to hear of late that Mahometanism has made great headway in the world, that in India especially Mahometan proselytes have been vastly

more numerous than Christian converts? What has been the reason? Why, because you never saw or heard of a Mahometan teacher who did not believe every word of the Koran. The teachers of the book believe in the book and believe in their prophet; hence their success, false though their faith be. On the other hand, nowadays it is easy to find a Christian teacher who believes next door to nothing of the very thing that he is set to teach, and who in his secret heart does not reverence the doctrine which officially he declares. The worm of unbelief, the cursed dry rot of infidelity and scepticism among professional teachers is eating out the heart and force of Christianity. He can never be strong for God who does not believe, aye, and believe with all his heart and soul, and strength, in the very marrow of his being. Christianity can never be strong till her disciples have strong convictions, till those who believe in revealed truth believe in it as assuredly as they believe in their own existence.

As it is on the large scale, so it is with each one of us: we can bear any burden when we believe in God; we are crushed like moths when unbelief betrays us. We can attempt any labour, and make any sacrifice when we have confidence in the Lord, but if we doubt whether we are His children, and whether His gospel be indeed the victorious gospel of the olden times, our strength evaporates, and we are like Samson when his hair was lost. We must possess strong faith in God, or we shall be unstable as water. O brethren and sisters, if in this church we shall have men and women who habitually live as seeing Him who is invisible, relying never upon mere opinion, either their own or that of others, but ascribing to the Word of God sovereign authority, and accepting it as infallibly true, knowing it to be divine; if we have among us men of principle because men of experience, men of forceful lives because those lives have struck their roots into eternal verities; if we have men and women who take trials, difficulties, everything in fact, to the one only God, and wait only upon Him, we shall have heroes among us again, who will be pillars in the Church which cannot be moved, bulwarks for our Israel against which the assaults of the enemy shall never avail. God make each one of us such! I long in my own soul to get right away from everything but the Lord, and to do His will and preach His truth as in His sight only. Policy, let it be abhorred! The pleasing of men, let it be scouted! The attempt to gratify the tendencies of the age, let it be loathed! All aiming at our own personal interests, may God deliver us from it! But for the truth as it is in Jesus may we live, and if need be die; for God's honour may we feel that we could sacrifice everything; and in His strength may we be sure that the battle is not doubtful, but the triumph must come to God and to the right. "My soul, wait thou upon God." That is our first point; would God we had learned its lesson.

II. The second part of the text is to notice David's APPROPRIATION OF THE DIVINE MERCY. "The God of my mercy." This is quite a unique expression; it occurs only in this psalm. God is the God of mercy, and is frequently called so; He is also styled "The God of all grace," but you will find none but David calling Him "The God of my mercy."

Notice that the pith of the title lies in the appropriating word "my." Luther used to say that the very soul of divinity lay in the possessive pronouns; another divine said that all the stir there ever has been in the world has been caused by *meum* and *tuum*, mine and thine. "It is mine," says one man; "It is mine," cries another man, and then comes a conflict. "It is mine," says one king; "Nay," says another, "it is not thine," and then fierce war begins. Nothing influences a man so much as that which he calls his own. "The God of *my* mercy." Now it is clear that *David appropriated to himself a portion of divine mercy as being peculiarly his*; and we shall never advance in the divine life unless we do the same, for the mercy which is in common to all men, of what avail is it to any man? But the mercy which any one man by faith grasps for himself, this is the mercy which will bless him and which he will prize above all things. When Gideon's men went out to fight they had not a whole row of pitchers between them, but every man held a pitcher in his own hand, and a trumpet too, and so the Midianites were routed. Solomon represents his armed men as having each man his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night; a thousand swords hung up in the armoury of David had been of little value, they only availed when each man had his own sword ready to his hand. In heavenly things it is always so: we may pray in the plural, but we must believe in the singular. Notice how the Lord's prayer runs: "*Our* Father which art in heaven." but if we would repeat the apostles' creed we must not say "we believe in God the Father," but "I believe." Believing must be in the first person singular; praying should have a width and compass about it to embrace all the saints, but believing must be by each one for himself—"The God of *my* mercy." What do you know about this, my dear hearers? Is a portion of the divine mercy really yours, so that another cannot seize it? Is there a lot in which you must stand in the end of the days, even as by faith you stand in it now, and call it all your own? Happy David, to be able to make this appropriation! Happy Christian, if God's grace has taught you to do the same!

I think he meant, too, that *there was a portion of mercy which he had already received*, which was, therefore, altogether his own. The "God of my mercy"—he meant the God of the mercy he had already experienced. Look at this for a minute. Well may it bring the tears into your eyes to think of it. The mercy which nursed you in your infancy, when you were dandled upon the knee of kindness; the mercy which watched over you in your youth and kept you when you were apt to stray; the mercy which restrained you from many a deadly sin; the mercy which guided you into that road where happy and holy teachings were waiting for you; the mercy which influenced you for the right; the mercy, above all, which decided you for Christ, and cleansed you in His blood; the mercy which has followed you to this day, and still follows you. Oh, bless the Lord that it has all come from Himself, and think of Him as the God of your mercy. Too little do we prize our mercies till they are removed from us. I have heard of a person who at fifty years of age was murmuring that he had suffered two long years of sickness, but one reminded him that he had enjoyed forty-eight years of perfect health, in which he had never spent a single hour in bed through illness; and then he said to himself, "I will bless God, who might have given me forty-eight years of sickness and only two of health; that He has been pleased to reverse that allotment. My mercies have been very great—far larger is the number of His favours than the tale of my sufferings." Bless, then, the Lord this moment, beloved, and take Him

to yourselves under that sweet name, "The God of my mercy."

And, remember, that all the mercy you have had is little compared with *the mercy you have yet to receive.* There is a portion of mercy laid up and labelled for you. As the rich father thinks, "This will I give to my eldest son, and that to the second, and that to the third," and so he puts by a portion for each of his children; so has God mapped out and allotted for each one of us some choice and special mercy fitted for our peculiar case, which no one can receive but ourselves, but which we must and shall obtain. Is not our hymn delightfully suggestive where it sings—

"And a new song is in my mouth,
To long-loved music set;
Glory to Thee for all the grace
I have not tasted yet.

"I have a heritage of joy
That yet I must not see:
The hand that bled to make it mine,
Is keeping it for me."

Blessed be God for His reserves of mercy, for the blessing yet to be revealed, which is as sure as if we had it, kept in a better hand than ours, preserved by Him who bought it till the time appointed shall arrive. "The God of my mercy," that is, of the mercy I have had, and also of that which is treasured up for me in the covenant purpose and decree, among the sure mercies of David.

But I think David made a larger grasp than this, for when he said, "The God of my mercy," he felt as if all the mercy in the heart of God belonged to him. Let me utter a great saying, worth your treasuring up—if any one saint should have all the wants of all the saints in the world put upon him, and if his necessities should be so great that nothing would supply them but the whole of the infinite mercy which fills the heart of God, that child of God should have all the mercy which the Lord Himself can dispense. Great as your necessities may be, my dear brethren, all the mercy that is in God belongs to you, and is engaged to meet your case. Let me put it in another light; if there were no other person in the world but you, and God loved you infinitely and alone, would He not be able to do much for you if all His omnipotence was devoted to your good, and if all the thoughts of His grace centred upon you, and you were the focus of all His wise and loving purposes? "Oh, yes," say you, "I should be favoured indeed." You are just as favoured as that, for the multiplicity of the objects of divine love necessitates no diminution to any one. God can love a million and love each one as intensely as if there were but one to be favoured. Our little minds are distracted with many objects. We cannot concentrate upon many, we are therefore straitened; but the full concentrated love of the Eternal God is set upon each one of His dear children. God is entirely yours, and not half of God; the Saviour is yours, not a part of the Saviour; God is all, and that all belongs to you in Jesus Christ. Is there not comfort here? "The God of my mercy."

One other word about it, and it is this: when God is called "the God of my mercy," we may read it as being the *Guarantor of mercy* to me. If we say such a person is the guardian of a child, that child is then particularly under his care. If God is the God of my mercy, then He stands in a particular relationship to my mercy, and binds Himself to secure it to me. The constable of the Tower of London stands in relationship to it, and is concerned for its preservation. Now the Lord is not only the keeper and guarantor of my mercy, but the God of it, and therefore He is peculiarly interested in my mercy, and will see that it comes to me, and is by no means suffered to fail. He is more than the trustee of it, the security for it, the guarantee of it, the giver of it, the source of it, the security of it, He is the God of my mercy. What condescension is this! He is the God of heaven, is not that His grand title? Aye, but He is "the God of my mercy," as surely as He is the God of heaven and earth. He is the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth, the God of angels, and "God over all, blessed for ever." He is all this, but He is also with equal truth "the God of my mercy." There is a command which says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," and if He would not have us take it in vain, we may rest assured He will not make it vain Himself; and if He calls Himself, as He does here, "the God of my mercy," He cannot allow it to be an empty title, He will surely make it good. What is an offence in the creature will not be performed by the Creator, He will not make vain any one of those august titles which He has been pleased to take to Himself. Your mercy is sure, O Christian, for God is the God of your mercy.

Now I want you all to pause a moment, and ask whether you really have appropriated by faith the mercy of God, and the God of the mercy. Why did not that unhappy *artiste* fly the other day? Why did he fall to the ground a mangled mass? Because his wings were not his own, or a part of himself. The smallest bat which ventures out in the evening twilight can fly, because it has its own wings, and the tiniest humming-bird which dives into a flower bell can fly, because its wings belong to it; but this man had only a borrowed contrivance, a mechanical invention, which he could not appropriate to his own being; another might use it as well as he, if indeed it could be used at all. If you wish to fly, you must have wings of your own. Many religious professors have a mechanical religion; they have the baptism of babyhood, and the priestly efficacy of sacraments—a mere flying machine! It will not serve their turn, they must have faith and grace of their own; personal faith in a personal God. Those who have such appropriating faith shall mount up with wings as eagles, but no others can. Wings which are not your own wings will be of no use to you, but ensure your destruction; but if you are the humblest, weakest, and most obscure of all God's children, if you have a real faith of your own, so that you can say, "My God, my Saviour!" and can cry, "Abba, Father!" you shall mount aloft to His abode, and make your nest for ever hard by the throne of love. God grant us power to appropriate His precious things, and call Him—"the God of my mercy."

III. The last and practical point is, we see in the text, thirdly, David CONFIDING IN GOD. "The God of my mercy shall prevent me." Prevent is an old English word, and it has shifted from its original meaning, so that the uninstructed reader is apt to be misled by it. Its old meaning is to go before, and that is indeed the root meaning of the word. Here it means to anticipate, to be before, to go before as a guide to make a way easy, to be beforehand. "The God of my mercy will prevent me," or anticipate me by His mercy. Now, it so happens that the Hebrew word

may be read in all three tenses, and some have said it should be understood, "The God of my mercy *has* prevented me"; others "*does* prevent me"; and a third party, like our translation, read it, "*shall* prevent me." Whichever tense you choose is true, and the whole three put together may be viewed as the full meaning of the passage.

"The Lord *has* prevented me." Brethren, this is one of the grand doctrines of the gospel, the doctrine of eternal love, spontaneous, self-generated, having no cause but itself. God loved us before we loved Him—He prevented us with love. Before His people were born God had elected and redeemed them, and prepared the gospel, by which in due time they are called. He is before us in all good things. Loving ere our first parent had broken the covenant of works, the covenant of grace had been "ordered in all things and sure." In the eternal purpose the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world: the provision for atonement was made before sin actually existed. Before there was any defilement, there was an arrangement for cleansing us from all iniquity; in the volume of the Book it had been written that Christ would come and do the Father's will, by the which will we are sanctified. Sin is a thing of time, but mercy is from everlasting. Transgression is but of yesterday, but mercy was ever of old. Before you and I sought the Lord, the Lord sought us. The first thought of reconcilation was not with man, but with His God. Some theologians dream that the sinner takes the first step, but I never met with a child of God who would say that he himself did so; they all, speaking from experience, declare "we loved Him because He first loved us." The grace of God is preventing grace, unsought, undesired, unmerited, preceding all good impressions and emotions, and coming to us when we are yet ungodly, and dead in trespasses and in sins. Before we thirsted the living water gushed from the smitten rock; before we hungered the oxen and the fatlings were killed; before we were wounded the oil and wine were ready to be poured into the gashes; our Father knew that we should have need of these things, and He prevented us with the blessings of goodness by laying them up in store for us from of old. O Lord, Thou hast the first hand with Thy people; they seek Thee early, but Thou art up before them, Thou hast distanced them in the race of affection: Alpha art Thou indeed!

The Lord has prevented us, but the meaning of the passage is that *He does still prevent us.* Is He not daily doing so? You have many wants, but they are anticipated. Before you can feel the pinch of want the mercy is given. God goes before you day by day, and His paths drop fatness. You have been often fretting about what is to happen in a month's time, when you expect to be in distress when the month has come there has been no distress because the supply has been provided. You have gone to the sepulchre, saying, "Who will roll us away the stone?" but when you have come to the spot the stone has been already removed; your troubles have been ended before they began. So, also, has the Lord prevented your sins. How often when you have sinned has the pardon for the sin, and the deliverance from its consequences, come upon you there and then, and restored you at once? while even yet more frequently the blessed God of your mercy has forestalled the temptation and prevented the sin altogether. Look at David with his heart angry, and his naked sword in his hand, attended by his furious followers. "I will go," says he, "and slay this fellow Nabal, and leave not a man of his house by the morning light. How dares he say, there be many servants that run away from their masters nowadays? I will let him know that if a man cannot be generous to David he shall at least be civil, or his head shall answer for it." David marches in hot passion, but at the moment when David puts his foot outside his tent God leads forth from Nabal's house a wise and gentle woman to be an angel of mercy to him. Abigail meets him half way, and turns him back from his design by telling him that if he would restrain his wrath, in after days it would be no grief to him that he had not avenged himself. Truly, David might say, "The God of my mercy hath prevented me. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me." Even in the common acceptation of the word "prevent" God has often so gone before us that He has prevented us from the commission of many sins, into which otherwise we should have fallen to our sorrow and damage.

Again, how often has He prevented our prayers? Before we have asked we have had; while we were yet calling we have received. I have asked the Lord sometimes for blessings, which have been on the road while I was asking, and I did not know it, and they have come almost before the words escaped my lips. Have you not known it so? "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear." The desire of the righteous is granted oftentimes as soon as it takes shape, and before it is expressed.

Brethren, it will always be so. *God will prevent us.* A good captain, when he is marching an army through a country, takes care to make provision for every emergency. It is time for the soldiers to camp, and they need tents. Bring up the baggage wagons, here are the tents which you ask for! The men must have their rations. Here they are! Serve them out! The meat needs cooking. See, there are the portable kitchens and the fuel! The army comes to a river by-and-by, how will they pass it? Why, the engineers are ready, and pontoons are very soon thrown across. It is wonderful how the well-skilled commander foresees every possible emergency, and has everything ready just at the nick of time. Much more is it so with our God. If any child of God be placed in a position where never a child of God was before, he shall get new light upon another part of God's character, and the world and the church shall be the wiser because of the man's peculiar difficulties. "The God of my mercy shall prevent me." March on, child of God, for God goes before you. Be assured of this, His angels fly around you, and you may hear the rustling of their wings if you have but faith enough, since the eternal God Himself leads the van, march where He clears the course and your path shall be one of happiness and peace.

The Lord will prevent us if we seek more grace and higher attainments. Let us go from strength to strength, for at each halting place our table shall be spread. Let us climb the hill, for grace sufficient for the day awaits us at each stage of progress. Let us rise into spiritual manhood, for the blessings peculiar to that state are waiting for us. Let us endeavour to do more for Jesus than ever we have done, let us put forth greater effort, for God's Spirit will go before us to prepare the way. There is a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees at the very time when we begin to bestir ourselves. When we preach, Jesus is with us, according to His

promise. If we lift our hand in holy service, a hand unseen but omnipotent is lifted at the same instant. Strike, then, feeble one, for God strikes too. Advance, for God is with thee, and will give thee the victory.

We shall arrive at old age before long, and perhaps with old age will come decrepitude or sickness, but the God of mercy will go before us to prepare the land Beulah, in which we shall rest till He shall call us across the stream. As to death, when that shall come, I know, beloved, that the Lord will prevent you, for Jesus has gone before for the very purpose of preparing a place for you. When we expect friends we set open the gate, that when they come they may know that they are welcome. Christ has set heaven's gate open for us, and none can shut it. He awaits the coming of His people, and when they enter heaven they shall not be unexpected guests, but shall find each one his mansion furnished and ready for him. Our Forerunner is where we soon shall be; we shall cause no bustle of preparation when we arrive, but we shall be welcomed home as our children are when on a set day they return to us. The God of my mercy will through the trackless ether precede me, and into the glory He will beckon me, and up to His throne He will conduct me.

So let us close with these three practical reflections. If He prevents us with mercy let us not hesitate to come to Him. Loiter not, O soul, if thou wouldst have the mercy of God. Is God so quick? Wilt thou be slow? Does He go first, and wilt thou not follow? If any man, or woman, or child in this place this morning desires salvation and eternal life, let him not hesitate to believe in Jesus, for the God of mercy has gone before him. Come, and welcome; all things are ready, come ye to the gospel supper!

The next reflection is, is God so quick in mercy? Let us who are His people be very quick in service. Do not let us wait to have suggested to us by others what we should do. That is true love to Christ which does not need reminding, forcing, or exciting. When a man says to himself, "God has given me these mercies unasked, what shall I render to Him? I will not turn to the law and say, 'This is what I ought to do,' neither will I require some good and earnest brother to stir me up to an unwilling duty, but I am eager to serve God—what can I do? What will He permit me to bring?" Some saints have thought of one offering, and some of another, and the Lord has been pleased with each one. Imitate the readiness of love which shone in the woman who had but one costly possession in the world, an alabaster box of precious ointment. Nobody expected or advised her to take it and pour its contents upon the head of Jesus; indeed, there were those who reckoned such a gift an idle waste, but her own love bade her do it, and she consulted not with flesh and blood, she brought it out and broke it, and filled the house with perfume, while she poured the sacred nard upon the head of Him she loved so well. Does no special act of consecration occur to you? Have you not some sacrifice to present? Can you not think out some design which shall be a memorial of your gratitude? Say in your heart, "My God, since Thou dost prevent me, I cannot hope to keep pace with Thy mercy, but at any rate I will not lag further behind Thee than I must. When I have done all I can for Thee, how little it is, but that little shall be done." George Herbert once described the good man as resolved "to build a spital, or mend common ways," and in his day these were acts of charity which piety delighted in; other good deeds are more fitting for these days. Houses for worship are wanted in many a populous district, and orphan children need to be fed. He who can buy no sweet cane with money, can bring time and zeal and effort, and these are precious. What then, my brother, will you do?

And now finally, believer, cast yourself into your Lord's arms. Have done with fretting; have done with anxiety and doubt. If you came in here this morning burdened, go out happy as the birds of the air. Mount like the lark to your God, and sing as you mount. Shower down your song among the grovelling sons of men while your eye is upon your Father's home, and your wings of faith bear you heavenward. God bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE HIGH ROCK

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I."—Psalm lxi. 2.

IT is supposed by many that David wrote this psalm at the time when he fled from his son Absalom. That trial was one of the most grievous of all the afflictions of David's greatly-chequered life. It was but a little thing for him to be hunted by Saul like a partridge upon the mountains; it was a small matter for him to have to take refuge with Achish, and to sojourn among the Philistines an alien from his mother's children; nay, all the afflictions of his preceding life were but light trials compared with the revolt of Absalom. He was his father's favourite son, one in whom his soul delighted, for he was a comely personage in his outward appearance, and he had a lordly and kingly bearing; he was David's darling, although, in his moral character, utterly unworthy of this distinction. This child of his, who was the nearest to his heart, had the greatest opportunity to cut him to the quick. Those things which we allow to take the chief place in our bosoms have the most power to give us grief. Absalom, first of all, kills his brother, and then, by dint of courtesy and such pretended generosity as demagogues always know how to use, won the affections of David's people from their rightful monarch, and then blew the trumpet, and set himself up as king in opposition to his father. Nay, more than this, he sought his father's life; it was not sufficient for him to seize the crown, but he longed to smite the head that should have worn it. His father was driven from his house, and was made to cross, with a few attendants, over the brook Kedron, and to go away from the sanctuary of God; he had to dwell in the midst of a wood,

and sleep among his armed men, and, at other times, to camp out upon the open plain. Who can tell the griefs of this monarch? Wave after wave had rolled over him. He had often said that he desired to be like a sparrow and the swallow, dwelling beneath the eaves of God's sanctuary; and now his great trouble is that he is driven far away from God's house to what he calls "the end of the earth." As he thought of the cause of his exile, how grieved must he have been! For his son, his darling son, the son whom he had pardoned, the son whom he had honoured, the son whom he had recalled from the banishment he richly deserved,—this son had smitten him. We know that old quotation from Shakespeare, which is repeated many and many a time, and is always true,—

> "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child!"

Yet here was one who was not only unthankful, but who drove his father into exile, and sought his life. David always clung to this child of his even in the time of his greatest iniquity. When at last he was compelled to send out his army against the rebel, you remember how he commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom;" and when he was killed, you know how David lamented over him, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Now, from the very fact that David loved this young man so much, his sorrows must have been peculiarly poignant. If a man can bring his mind to thrust out from his bosom one who has proved ungrateful, then half the battle is over. If love can cut the link,—can say, "I have done with thee, I will reckon thee now no more my child,"—then the heart steels itself against its deepest sorrow, and the arrow rattleth only against the harness. But it was not so with David, he still opened wide his breast to his unworthy son.

Let us, who stand in the relation of children to our parents, remember that it is in our power to give them the greatest possible grief; and yet would we not, each of us, sooner die than that those who brought us forth should have to lament on account of us? Yet, haply, there are some of you who are bringing your parents' grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. O ye who are cursing your father's God,—who are desecrating the day that your parents reckon to be holy,—ye who despise the gospel which your father and mother love, remember that ye are not only grieving God, but you are grieving your parents also! Push them not into the tomb before their time, lest their ashes testify against you; and lest, in the hour of *your* trouble, when *your* children treat you in like manner, you should have to learn the bitterness of rearing in your own bosom the serpent that shall sting you with the deadliest venom. Let each of us take heed that we deal gently with our parents, and always treat kindly those who have tenderly fostered us.

With this preface, let us now turn to our text, and I think we shall understand it all the better from this little reference to David's history. There are three truths here. The first is, that *prayer is always available:* "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." The second truth is, that *sometimes even the believer cannot get to Christ as he could wish,* but that then there is a way provided for leading him to Christ: "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Then, in the third place, we shall consider *Christ under the aspect of a rock that is higher than we are.*

I. In the first place, let us recollect that PRAYER IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE,—in every place, and in every condition of our spirit: "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee."

Suppose it is possible for us to be banished to the uttermost verge of the green earth, to "rivers unknown to song;" suppose us to be hastened far away, where dwindling daylight dieth out, and where the sun's bleak ray scarcely scattereth light on the world,—where vegetation, dwarfing and declining, at last dies out; suppose us to be banished into exile, without a friend and without a helper,—even there, from the end of the earth, we should find that prayer to God was still available. In fact, if there be a place nearer than another to God's throne, it is just the end of the earth, for the end of the earth is the beginning of heaven. When our strength ends, there God's omnipotence begins. Nature's extremity is God's opportunity. If wicked monarchs should banish all God's people, their banishment would be an object of contempt, for how can they banish those who are strangers wherever they may be? Is not my Father's house a large one? Yon dome, the blue sky, its roof; the rolling seas, the swelling floods, the green meads, the huge mountains,—are not these the floors of His house? And where can I be driven out of the dominions of my God, and beyond the reach of His love? Banishment may seem a trouble to the Christian; but if he looketh up, and seeth his Father's house, and beholdeth the smile of his God, he will know that such a thing as banishment is to him an impossibility. But supposing us to be exiled from everything that is dear to us, even then we should not be shut out from access to God's throne.

I think David meant, by the expression "the end of the earth," a place where he should be far away from his friends, far away from human help, and far away from God's sanctuary.

God's people are sometimes brought into such a condition that they are *far away from friends.* Such an one walks the streets of London, and thinks, I might find some relief! But amidst all the myriad faces that hurry like a stream along the road, I see not one that tempts me to tell my tale. I look around, and find myself a stranger amidst multitudes of my countrymen." Perhaps you know what it is to have a trouble which you are compelled to bear yourself, which you could not describe even to those in your own house, though your friends would have been ready to help you if they had known; yet it was such that, with all their readiness, they would not have had ability to assist you in it, the biggest words could not have told it, and the bitterest tears could not have spelled it out. You were far away from friends in reality, though they were all round you. Now this is what David meant by "the end of the earth,"—far away from friends,—yet even then, when friend and helper and lover failed, did he cry unto his God.

Again, he meant, by "the end of the earth," *far away from human help.* There are difficulties, into which the true believer is brought, that no human hand can remove. His spiritual affairs are weights too heavy for human strength to lift; though all the giants of earth should come and strain their

backs until their shoulders should give way, and their limbs should totter beneath the enormous load, yet the spiritual necessities of the Christian could not be carried by them,—they are a burden intolerable for human shoulders; none but God can sustain them. There are times when we are sighing after spiritual mercies, when we are groaning under the withdrawal of God's countenance, when our sins are hunting us like packs of wolves, when afflictions are rolling over us like huge billows,—when faith is little, and fear is great, when hope is dim, and doubt becomes terrible and dark,—then we are far away from human help; but blessed be God, even then we may cry unto Him.

> "When anxious cares disturb the breast,
> When threatening foes are nigh,
> To Him we pour our deep complaint,
> To Him for succour fly."

Nay, more, even in temporal affairs, there are times when the Christian gets into such a place that no earthly friend can help him. He has made some mistake, perhaps; in the ardency of his zeal to do right, he has done wrong; in the attempt to run in the ways of God, he overshot the road, and got into another place, and found himself in the path of evil when he hoped to be in the way of right. Such things have happened; business men, with all their carefulness, have made miscalculations, and have found themselves plunged into difficulties from which they see no way of escape. In vain do others offer help; wealth would not avail, for character is at stake; yet even then, "from the end of the earth," when human help has failed them, they have cried unto God; and if they have cried in faith, they have never found that God has ceased to hear as long as they have continued to cry unto Him.

By "the end of the earth," I think, too, David means *at a distance from the means of grace.* Sometimes, by sickness, either personal or the sickness of our relatives, we are detained from the house of God; at other times, in journeying by land or upon the sea, we are unable to be in God's sanctuary, and to use the means of grace. This is a great deprivation to God's people. You will find that a true Christian had rather miss a meal than lose his daily portion of Scripture, or his frequent resort to the house of prayer. That man is no child of God who does not value the means of grace. I tremble for that man's piety who professes himself able to maintain the vital spark of grace within him when the means of grace are at hand, and he lives in neglect of them. Some people, if they go to a watering-place, or a little way out of town, say, "Well, there is nobody here who preaches my sentiments, so I shall not go anywhere." I would remind them that the apostle Paul said, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is. If there is no place of worship specially dedicated to God, we bless Him that—

> "Where'er we seek Him, He is found,
> And every place is hallowed ground";—

but if there is a building that is open for the worship of God, even if I could not enjoy the preaching of the minister, I would go there to join in the singing of Christ's praises, and to offer my prayer with the multitude that keep holy-day. Still, there must be, in our lives, different times when we are away from the sanctuary of God; and to the Christian, that will be like being at the end of the earth; but then, thanks be to God, we may still cry unto Him. When no Sabbath bell shall summon us to the house of prayer, when no servant of the Lord shall proclaim, with happy voice, the promise of pardoning mercy, when there shall not be seen the multitude on bended knee, and when the sacred shout of praise is unheard, and we are far away from the gatherings of God's house,—yet we are not far away from Him, and we may still say to him, "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee."

It seems, however, that the Psalmist was in a worse plight than this; for a man might be at the end of the earth, and still be happy; for it is not the place that makes the man, but the man that makes the place. A man might be in paradise even in hell itself, if his heart were right with God. Let a man have his heart full of peace and joy and happiness, and it is impossible to make that man miserable. I have often thought that, when people find fault with their station in life, they are making a great mistake; they should find fault with themselves. Many a man is miserable whose head wears a crown, and many are happy whose heads have no place of repose. Some who are in rags have rich hearts, while many who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day, have starving spirits; for, after all, it is the mind that is the standard of the man, and if the mind be happy, the place where the man is does not signify at all.

But, alas for poor David! he had been wrong without and wrong within, too, so that he had to cry, "My heart is overwhelmed," I find, in Calvin's notes on this text a most extraordinary translation, and, as he says, a very harsh one: "While my heart is turned about; that is, tossed hither or thither, or agitated." There is an expression of a similar character where John Bunyan says that he was exceedingly tumbled up and down in his mind. It does seem that one meaning of this text may be, "When my spirit is tumbled about,"—when it is out of order, when it is brought into a kind of chaos and confusion, when, to use another word which expresses closely the idea of the Hebrew, "My spirit is wrapped over and over,"—when it is covered as a man covers his face in the day of grief, because his sorrow is so great that he shuns the sun, and would not have his fellow-creature's eye behold the anguish of his soul;—"even then," says he, "when my spirit is overwhelmed, will I cry unto Thee." Turn the heart upside down, and then you will get the idea of its being overwhelmed. Even then, what saith the Psalmist? "Ye people, pour out your heart before Him." If your heart is turned over, let it be emptied before the Lord. David says, in another Psalm, "I pour out my soul in me." How foolish that was! It did him no good, it was the wrong place for his soul to be poured out; he was much wiser when he said, "Pour out your heart before Him." It is a happy way to pray, when the heart is turned upside down, to spill all its contents at the foot of the throne of grace. Perhaps, sometimes, the overwhelming of our heart is only meant to empty all its dregs out of it, that the last particle of self-righteousness, and self-reliance, and self-confidence, may be drained out at the mercy-seat, that there may be room for an overflowing abundance of divine grace.

Imagine a vessel at sea, and you can get an idea

of the meaning of our text. It has been labouring in a storm; sometimes lifted up to heaven, as though its masts would sweep the stars; then again descending until its keel seemed dragging on the ocean bed; first staggering this way, and then that way, reeling to and fro, now rushing forward and now starting back,—like a drunken man, or like a madman who has lost his way. At last, a huge sea comes rolling on; its white crest of foam can be seen in the distance, and the sailors give up all for lost; on comes the wave, gathering up all its strength till it dashes against the ship, and—down the vessel goes, it is overwhelmed. The decks are swept, the masts are gone, the timbers are creaking, the ship descends, and is sucked down as in a whirlpool; all is lost. "Now," says David, "that is the case with my heart; it is overwhelmed, drawn into a vortex of trouble, borne down by a tremendous sea of difficulty, crushed and broken; the ribs of my soul seem to have given way; every timber of my vessel is cracked and gone out of its place. My heart is overwhelmed within me." Can you now get an idea of the extreme sorrow of the Psalmist's spirit? "Yet," says he, "even then, will I cry unto Thee." Oh, noble faith, that can cry amidst the shrieking of the tempest, and the howling of the storm! Oh, glorious faith, that from the bottom of the sea can shoot its arrows to the heights of heaven! Oh, masterpiece of faith, that from a broken spirit can present prevailing prayer! Oh, glorious triumph, that from the end of the earth can send a prayer which can reach all the way to heaven!

And now, Christian, may God help thee to make up thy mind to this, that where'er thou art, thou wilt never leave off praying, whatever the devil says to thee. If he should urge thee to forsake the mercy-seat, say to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan." If he should say that you have sinned too much to pray, tell him his argument proves the reverse: the more you have sinned, the more you should pray. If he tells you that your difficulties are tremendous, tell him that the very greatness of the difficulties in which you are involved should bear you nearer to God. Never cease to cry whilst thou hast breath; and when thou hast no breath, still cry. As long as thou canst speak, cry unto Him; and when thou canst not speak, let groanings that cannot be uttered still go up before God's throne. Cease not to pray in every difficulty, and in every strait betake thyself to thy closet, for there thou shalt find God, if thou canst not find Him anywhere else.

Let me also say this word to anyone who has begun to pray, but who has not yet found peace with God, although he is overwhelmed by a sense of his guilt. My dear friend, if God has overwhelmed you with a sense of sin, and if you feel as if you were far away from mercy,—at the very end of the earth,—yet, I beseech you, cry unto Him. Mark, our text says, "Cry." Oh, what power there is in that simple act of crying! As I rode here, this evening, I saw a boy sitting down upon the pavement, crying with all his might about something or other he had broken; and I observed a lady, who was going by, stop a moment, for the poor fellow's face was so much awry, and the tears were flowing so plentifully that she seemed as if she must give him something; and, indeed, I felt inclined, if I had not been in a hurry to come here, to stop and ask him what he was crying for, for one cannot bear to see a fellow-creature weeping. All beggars, who want to deceive, take to crying, for they know that has an effect upon susceptible ladies who are passing by; there is great power in tears, and these people know it. The best style of prayer is that which cannot be called anything else but a cry. Now, if you cannot pray as many do,—if you cannot stand up in a prayer-meeting, and pray fluently and eloquently like others do,—so long as the Lord enables you to cry, I beseech you do not leave off crying. Cry, "Lord, have mercy on me"; "Lord, save, or I perish"; "Lord, appear unto me"; "I the chief of sinners am; Lord, manifest Thyself to me." Cry, cry, cry, poor sinner; and He that heareth the young ravens when they cry will hear thee. Do not think that the voice of thy crying shall be lost. The voice of boasting dies away unheard, but the voice of crying penetrates the ear of God, reaches His heart, and moves His hand to give a plentitude of blessings. Above all things, sinner, if thou feelest thy need of a Saviour, keep on crying; Satan can never harm thee while God helps thee to cry. So long as thou hast a word of prayer on thy lip, the law has not a word of condemnation to utter against thee. If thou canst cry at God's mercy-seat, then that is a proof that Christ is crying on thy behalf at His Father's glory-seat. Be thou instant in prayer, and thou shalt be successful in it. When thy heart is overwhelmed, from the end of the earth cry unto God.

II. I must speak very briefly upon the second point, which is this. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN EVEN A BELIEVER CANNOT GET TO CHRIST AS HE DESIRES.

Then, thank God there is the prayer of our text: "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." Some people make out faith to be a marvellously easy thing, and so it is in theory, but it is the hardest thing in the world in practice. If men are to be saved on the condition of their repenting and believing, they can be no more saved than on the condition of their being perfect, unless there is added to this condition the promise that the God who requires faith will give faith, and work repentance in them. I have been astonished to find, in this age, that there are great preachers, and men who, I have no doubt, gather many around them, who tell the people that the condition and the ground of the sinner's justification are his faith, his repentance, and his obedience. Why, the ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ; and as to conditions, there is no condition at all, for God gives justification freely, and He gives faith, and He gives repentance, too; it is all His gift. There never was a man saved by faith or repentance which he performed as a matter of duty. Albeit that the Word of God demands of every man that he should submit himself to God by repentance, and lay hold of Christ by faith, yet no man ever will or ever can do this of himself; it is only the sovereign will of God and the sovereign grace of God that give repentance and faith.

Sometimes God, in His sovereignty, is pleased to show a man his sin, and not to show him his Saviour for a season; He strips the sinner, perhaps He leaves him to shiver in the cold before He clothes him, just to let him know what a boon that robe of Christ's righteousness is. He kills him, pierces him through and through with the law, and there lets him lie in utter inability for a season, before He quickens him again, and makes him spiritually alive. The fact is, God acts as He chooses with those whom He saves. He sometimes gives repentance and faith

at the same time, just as the thunder sometimes follows the lightning at once; at other times, He gives repentance, and then He makes us tarry for many a day before He gives us full assurance of our interest in Christ; but they are sure to follow one another, sooner or later. God never gave conviction without at last giving faith, He never led a man out of himself without at last leading him to Christ; if He brought him down to despair, He afterwards lifted him up to hope; but, still, there may be a gap between the two, and during such a period it is our business to use this blessed prayer, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. Oh, help me to believe! Lord, enable me to see the need of Thy Son, give me the power to look unto Him who was pierced, and, as Thou hast given me eyes to weep, so give me eyes to look on Him, and grace to rejoice in Him as mine." So, you see, if we cannot believe, if doubts so overwhelm us that we cannot get to Christ to our own satisfaction, remember that it is the Holy Spirit's office to draw us to Christ; and we may therefore pray to Him, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

III. We are now coming to that part of the text which most of all delights my soul, the thought of JESUS CHRIST, WHO IS THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN WE ARE.

We have all various standards for measuring things; and, after all, men must measure by themselves. If you hear a man praising another, you will generally find that the reason he praises that other is because he sees in him something very much like what he possesses himself. "There," says he, "I love a man who is honest and outspoken." He means, all the while, that he thinks himself a remarkably honest and outspoken man, therefore he loves to see himself reproduced in another. After all, we generally measure with our own measuring-rods; we take ourselves to be the standard for other people. A few nights ago, I proved this in my own case. Going along Bermondsey, I looked in at the shop-windows to see what time it was; one clock said ten minutes to seven, another said seven o'clock, and another said ten minutes past. Then I began to think what a pity it was I had not my own watch with me,—what was that but a belief that my own watch was infallible, and that all the clocks were probably wrong? There is a great deal of trying ourselves on the touchstones of our own infallible selves, and even the Christian is not altogether free from this practice till he gets to heaven. So the Lord graciously adapts His Word to our poor littleness, and speaks of Jesus as the Rock higher than we are.

Come hither, beloved, and let us measure the Rock Christ Jesus so far as we can by comparison. Here is a man who is a great sinner. "Ah!" he says, "I am indeed a great sinner; my iniquities reach so high that they have ascended above the very stars; they have gone before me to the judgment-seat of God, and they are clamouring for my destruction." Well, sinner, come thou here, and measure this Rock. Thou art very high, it is true; but this Rock is higher than thou art. Estimate thyself at the greatest thou possibly canst; set thy sins down at some inconceivable height; if thou hast thought thyself to be a very Goliath in sin; if thou sayest, "I am as big a sinner as Saul of Tarsus was," put thy sin pile on pile, tier on tier, nay, borrow thy neighbour's sins; take them all, and then recollect that—

"If all the sins that men have done
In will, in word, in thought and deed,
Since worlds were made, and time began,
Were laid on one poor sinner's head;
The blood of Jesus Christ alone
Could for this mass of sin atone,
And sweep it all away."

However high thy sin may be, there is the covert of a Rock in a weary land higher than thou art, and under this thou mayest shelter thyself.

Here comes another forward; he is not a man full of doubts and fears, but he is a man of hopeful spirit. "Oh!" says he, "I have many sins, but I hope that the Lord Jesus Christ will take them all away. I have many wants, but I hope that He will supply them. I shall have many temptations, but I hope that He will ward them off. I shall have many difficulties, but I hope He will carry me through them." Ah! man, I like to see thee have a good long measuring-rod, when it is made of hope. Hope is a tall companion; he wades right through the sea, and is not drowned; you cannot kill him, do what you may. Hope is one of the last blessings God gives us, and one that abides last with us. If a man is foodless, and without covering, still he hopes to see better days by-and-by. Now, sinner, thy hopes, I would have thee to see, are very tall, and very high; but remember, this Rock is higher than any of thy hopes. Hope whatever thou pleasest; let thy hope expand itself; let it climb the highest mountain, and stand on it; let it lift up itself higher and yet higher, but this Rock is higher still. Christ is a better Christ than thou canst hope for; He has more mercy than thou hopest for; He has more power to save than thou hopest to receive, more love than thou canst hope to have, He has a better heaven for thee than thou couldst hope to enjoy.

But here comes another, and he says, "Ah! my hope has grown strong, I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is a precious Christ. I can speak well of Him, for He has been my sure defence in every time of war, my refuge in every time of distress, my granary in every hour of famine, my light in every night of darkness. I can speak well of Him; and in consequence of what I know of Him, I can believe that He is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. I believe Him to be all that He says He is; I believe in His Word; I rejoice in Him; my faith scarcely knows a bound when I begin to think what He is, and what He has done for me." Aye, but He is a Rock higher than thy faith. I love to see thy faith mounting up very high, but Christ is better than thy faith, and higher than thy faith. Why, man, if thy faith were twice as great as it is, Christ would be a warrant for it all. Nay, if thy faith could be multiplied a thousandfold, so that thou couldst believe more of Him, and better things of Him, and higher things of Him, still He would be higher than thy faith could ever climb. I do hope to grow in faith, and get more and more of that celestial virtue. I think I believe my Master better now than I did once, though sometimes I think my faith faileth me. Yet sure I am that I do enjoy a quieter conscience than I did, and a more peaceful calm than at one time I experienced; and I hope to believe in Him still more. I pray that my faith may continually increase, so that, being rooted and grounded in Him, I may grow up to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus. But this I know, though you or I should

grow till our faith should be greater than that of Paul, till it should be such a faith that it should say to the fig tree, "Be thou plucked up by the roots," or to the mountain, "Be thou cast into the sea," and it should be done; still, even then, Christ would be higher than our faith. We might believe a great deal about Him, but would faith grasp all then? It has long arms, but not long enough to encompass Christ; He is greater than faith itself could conceive Him to be.

Here comes another; he says, "Ah! blessed be God, I have a golden measuring-rod here;—not that of hope, or fear, or faith, but, better still, the measuring-rod of enjoyment." "Ah!" says one, "how high have I been in enjoyment of Christ! He hath taken me to Calvary, and there I have seen the flowing of His precious blood,—

> "'With divine assurance knowing
> He hath made my peace with God.'"

"Not content with that, He has taken me to Tabor; there I have seen my Lord transfigured, and have beheld His glory, as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Nay, more, He has taken me to the top of Pisgah, and He has bidden me 'view the landscape o'er.' I have seen the joys which He has reserved for them that love Him." "But," says the believer, "Christ has said to me, 'Friend, come up higher.' When I first went to the feast, I sat in the lower room of repentance: He came in, and said, 'Friend, come up higher'; and He took me into another chamber called faith. And then He came in again, and said, 'Friend, come up higher'; and He took me to the upper room of assurance. Then He saw me again, and He said, 'Friend, come up higher'; and He took me to the upper room of communion. And sometimes He seems to me to say, 'Friend, come up higher, into the ecstatic bliss which the highest degrees of constant fellowship can give'; and I am now waiting only till He should say, 'Come up higher,' and take me to His own bosom, to tarry with Him for ever."

Ah, well! I am glad to hear thee talk thus; I would I had many of those whose pastures are in these high places, many who could say that they had grown tall in these delightful things; but, remember, this Rock is higher than thou art. All thou hast ever enjoyed of Christ is but as the beginning of a topless mountain. When I have been in Scotland, I have gone up some of the hills there; and I have thought, "This is a very high place indeed; what a fine view there is, what a height I have reached!" "Ah!" someone has said, "but if you were to see the Alps, this hill would only seem like the beginning, you would only have got to the foot when you had climbed as high as this"; and so it is with you. By your experience, your sweet enjoyment, you think you have reached the top of the mountain; but Christ comes and whispers to you, "Look yonder, far above those clouds; you have only begun to go up; this hill of communion is only one step; as yet, you have only taken a child's leap; you have farther to go, far higher than you could imagine or conceive." Ah! this is indeed a Rock higher than thou art, the highest in communion, and the next to the throne of God.

Well," cries another, "from what I have heard, and what I have read in God's Word, I am expecting very great things of Christ when I shall see Him as He is. O, sir, if He be better than the communion of His saints can make Him, if He be sweeter than all His most eloquent preachers can speak of Him, if He be so delightful that those who know Him best cannot tell His beauties, what a precious—what a glorious—what an inconceivable Christ He must be!" Ah, friend, I am glad thou art measuring Christ by thine expectation! But let me tell thee, high as thy expectations are, He is higher than thou art. Expect what thou mayest; but when thou seest Him, thou wilt say with the Queen of Sheba, "The half was not told me." You may sit down, and think of Christ's glories and splendours, of the happiness that He has provided for His people, till you lose yourself in a very sea of delightful meditation. The promise dropped into thy heart may go on widening in circles till thou hast grasped a whole universe of pleasure and delight in contemplating the name of Christ; but, remember, when thou hast conceived the most, Christ the Rock is still far above what thou hast conceived and imagined.

Let us pause here, and ask,—What shall we do with a hill that is higher than we are? Shall we lie for ever at its base, and not attempt to climb it? God forbid! Shall we pretend that we have climbed it? That were presumption; so let us press forward, evermore ascending it, ever crying when we get at the greatest height, "Lord, still lead me up, still lead me to the Rock that is higher than I am; lead me on, O Lord, till I come to heaven, and even then, still lead me beside the living fountains of water, still lead me to the Rock that is higher than I am; ever help me to be climbing, pressing forward, looking not on that which is behind, but on that which is before, pressing forward to the mark of the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus!"

Now, as some of you will be exercised with troubles, remember that the Rock is higher than you are; and when your troubles reach you, if you are not high enough to escape them, climb up to the Rock Christ, for there is no trouble that can reach you when you get there. Satan will be howling at you, and perhaps he will be nibbling at your heel, barking and biting at you; so climb into the Rock Christ, and he will not be able to reach you, and you will scarcely hear his howling; he will be low down in the valley when you are in the Rock higher than he is. Fears will arise, and doubts will come in like a flood; there is no place so safe in the time of a flood as a high rock, so climb to the Rock Christ, and then, though the waves of the sea roar, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, you will be secure if you are on the Rock that is higher than you are. And oh! while the world is dragging you down, for ever be seeking to be climbing up. If the devil says, "Come down again, and be worldly; come down, and be selfish," always cry, "Lord, lead me up, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I am. My country is in the skies, help me to be climbing upwards; never permit me to descend, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I am."

And as for you who are still under a sense of sin, who have not yet found the Saviour, let this be your prayer, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I am." Do not get measuring Christ by yourselves. As high as heaven is above the earth, so high are His thoughts above your thoughts, and His ways above your ways. O beloved, you should measure God's grace by the immeasurable; not by your nothingness, but by His infinity! Remember, God's mercy is

beyond all bounds, for it swelleth above the flood of our sins. If our sins be as mountains, Christ's mercy, like the stars, shines as much above the mountains as above the valleys. Cry out, sinner, when Satan is dragging thee down to the pit, "Lord, save me from the devouring flames, and lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." And then, thank God, Christ is a Rock, not a mound that is raised by man; and that Rock shall stand for ever; and if I get on it, there is no fear that the Rock will shake. I may shake on it, but it will never shake under me; and if my enemies try to attack me, I can hide myself in the clefts of the Rock, where they cannot reach me, and though ten thousand ages roll away, and many a stone is moved from its place, this Rock shall still abide,—

"When rolling years shall cease to move."

GOD ALONE THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE

"He only is my rock and my salvation."—Psalm lxii. 2.

HOW noble a title. So sublime, suggestive, and overpowering. "My Rock." It is a figure so divine, that to God alone shall it ever be applied.

Look on yon rocks and wonder at their antiquity, for from their summits a thousand ages look down upon us. When this gigantic city was as yet unfounded they were grey with age; when our humanity had not yet breathed the air, 'tis said that these were ancient things; they are the children of departed ages. With awe we look upon these aged rocks, for they are among nature's first-born. You discover, embedded in their bowels, the remnants of unknown worlds, of which, the wise may *guess*, but which, nevertheless, they must fail to *know*, unless God Himself should teach them what hath been before them. You regard the rock with reverence, for you remember what stories it might tell, if it had a voice; of how through igneous and aqueous agency, it has been tortured into the shape it now assumes. Even so is our God pre-eminently ancient. His head and His hair are white like wool, as white as snow, for He is "the Ancient of Days," and we are always taught in Scripture to remember, that He is "without beginning of years." Long ere creation was begotten, "from everlasting to everlasting," He was God.

"My rock!" What a history the rock might give you of the storms to which it has been exposed; of the tempests which have raged in the ocean at its base, and of the thunders which have disturbed the skies above its head; while it, itself, has stood unscathed by tempests, and unmoved by the buffettings of storms. So with our God. How firm hath He stood—how steadfast hath He been—though the nations have reviled Him, and "the kings of the earth have taken counsel together!" By merely standing still He hath broken the ranks of the enemy, without even stretching forth His hand! With motionless grandeur like a rock He hath broken the waves, and scattered the armies of His enemies, driving them back in confusion. Look at the rock again: see how firm and unmoved it stands! It doth not stray from place to place, but it abideth fast for evermore. Other things have changed, islands have been drowned beneath the sea, and continents have been shaken; but see, the rock stands as steadfast as if it were the very foundation of the whole world, and could not move till the wreck of creation, or the loosening of the bands of nature. So with God: how faithful He is in His promises! how unalterable in His decrees! how unswerving! how unchanging!

The rock is immutable; nought hath been worn from it. Yon old granite peak hath gleamed in the sun, or worn the white veil of winter snow—it hath sometimes worshipped God with bare uncovered head, and at other times the clouds furnished it with veiling wings, that like a cherub, it might adore its Maker; but yet itself hath stood unchanged. The frosts of winter have not destroyed it, nor have the heats of summer melted it. It is the same with God. Lo, He is my rock; He is the same, and His kingdom shall have no end. Unchangeable He is in His being, firm in His own sufficiency; He keeps Himself immutably the same; and "therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." The ten thousand uses of the rock, moreover, are full of ideas as to what God is. You see the fortress standing on a high rock, up which the clouds themselves can scarcely climb, and up whose precipices the assault cannot be carried, and the armed cannot travel, for the besieged laugh at them from their eminence. So is our God a sure defence; and we shall not be moved if He hath "set our feet upon a rock, and established our goings." Many a giant rock is a source of admiration from its elevation; for on its summit we can see the world outspread below, like some small map; we mark the river or broadly spreading stream, as if it were a vein of silver inlaid in emerald. We discover the nations beneath our feet, "like drops in a bucket," and the islands are "very little things" in the distance, while the sea itself seems but a basin of water, held in the hand of a mighty giant. The mighty God is such a rock; we stand on Him, and look down on the world, counting it to be a mean thing. We have climbed to Pisgah's top, from the summit of which we can see across this world of storms and troubles to the bright land of spirits—that world unknown to ear or eye, but which God hath revealed to us by the Holy Ghost. This mighty rock is our refuge, and it is our high observatory, from which we see the unseen, and have the evidence of things which as yet, we have not enjoyed. I need not, however, stop to tell you all about a rock, we might preach for a week upon it; but we give you that for your meditation during the week. "*He is my rock.*" How glorious a thought! How safe am I, and how secure: and how may I rejoice in the fact, that when I wade through Jordan's stream He will be my rock! I shall not walk upon a slippery foundation, but I shall tread on Him who cannot betray

grofeet; and I may sing, when I am dying, "He Paly rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." to We now leave the thought of the rock, and or ceed to the subject of our discourse, which is ars: that God alone is the salvation of His people. bc "He ONLY is my rock and my salvation."

d We shall notice, first, *the great doctrine, that God Ily is our salvation;* secondly, *the great experience, C know and to learn that "He only is my rock and ly salvation;* and, thirdly, *the great duty,* which ou may guess at, *which is, to give all the glory and ll the honor, and place all our faith on Him who only is our rock and our salvation."*

I. The first thing is, THE GREAT DOCTRINE—that God "only is our rock and our salvation." If any one should ask us what we would choose for our motto, as preachers of the gospel, we think we should reply, "God only is our salvation." The late lamented Mr. Denham has put at the foot of his portrait, a most admirable text, "Salvation is of the Lord." Now, that is just an epitome of Calvinism; it is the sum and the substance of it. If any one should ask you what you mean by a Calvinist, you may reply, "He is one who says, *salvation is of the Lord.*" I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this. It is the essence of the Bible. "He *only* is my rock and my salvation." Tell me anything that departs from this and it will be a heresy; tell me a heresy, and I shall find its essence here, that it has departed from this great, this fundamental, this rocky truth, "God is my rock and my salvation." What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the perfect merits of Jesus Christ—the bringing in of the works of the flesh, to assist in our justification? and what is that heresy of Arminianism but the secret addition of something to the complete work of the Redeemer? You will find that every heresy, if brought to the touchstone, will discover itself here, it departs from this, "He only is my rock and my salvation."

Let us now explain this doctrine fully. By the term "salvation" here, I understand not simply regeneration and conversion, but something more. I do not reckon that to be salvation which regenerates me, and then puts me in such a position that I may fall out of the covenant and be lost; I cannot call that a bridge which only goes half-way over the stream; I cannot call that salvation, which does not carry me all the way to heaven, wash me perfectly clean, and put me among the glorified who sing constant hosannahs around the throne. By salvation, then if I may divide it into parts, I understand deliverance, preservation continually through life, sustentation, and the gathering up of the whole in the perfecting of the saints in the person of Jesus Christ at last.

I. By salvation, I understand *deliverance* from the house of bondage, wherein by nature I am born, and being brought out into the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free, together with a putting "on a rock, and establishing my goings." This I understand to be wholly of God. And I think I am right in that conclusion, because I find in Scripture that man is dead; and how can a dead man assist in his own resurrection? I find that man is utterly depraved, and hates the divine change. How can a man, then, work that change which he himself hates? I find man to be ignorant of what it is to be born again, and like Nicodemus, asking the foolish question, "How can a man enter again into his mother's womb, and be born?" I cannot conceive that a man can do that which he does not understand: and if he does not know what it is to be born again, he cannot make himself to be born again. No. I believe man to be utterly powerless in the first work of his salvation. He cannot break his chains, for they be not chains of iron, but chains of his own flesh and blood; he must first break his own heart before he can break the fetters that bind him. And how should man break his own heart? What hammer is that which I can use upon my own soul to break it, or what fire can I kindle which can dissolve it? Nay, deliverance is of God alone. The doctrine is affirmed continually in Scripture; and he who doth not believe it doth not receive God's truth. Deliverance is of God alone; "Salvation is of the Lord."

2. And if we are delivered and made alive in Christ, still *preservation* is of the Lord alone. If I am prayerful, God makes me prayerful: if I have graces, God gives me graces; if I have fruits, God gives me fruits; if I hold on in a consistent life, God holds me on in a consistent life. I do nothing whatever towards my own preservation, except what God Himself first does in me. Whatever I have, all my goodness is of the Lord alone. Wherein I sin, that is my own; but wherein I act rightly, that is of God, wholly and completely. If I have repulsed an enemy, His strength nerved my arm. Did I strike a foeman to the ground? His strength sharpened my sword and gave me courage to strike the blow. Do I preach His word? It is not I, but grace that is in me? Do I live to God a holy life? It is not I, but Christ that liveth in me? Am I sanctified? I did not sanctify myself; God's Holy Spirit sanctifies me. Am I weaned from the world? I am weaned by *God's* chastisements. Do I grow in knowledge? The great Instructor teaches me. I find in God all I want; but I find in myself nothing. "He only is my rock and my salvation."

3. And again: *sustentation* also is absolutely requisite. We need sustentation in providence for our bodies, and sustentation in grace for our souls. Providential mercies are wholly from the Lord. It is true the rain falls from heaven, and waters the earth, and "maketh it bring forth and bud, that there may be seed for the sower, and bread for the eater"; but out of whose hand cometh the rain, and from whose fingers do the dew drops distil? It is true, the sun shines, and makes the plants grow, and bud, and bring forth the blossom, and his heat ripens the fruit upon the tree; but who gives the sun his light, and who scatters the genial heat from him? It is true, I work and toil; this brow sweats; these hands are weary; I cast myself upon my bed, and there I rest, but I do not "sacrifice to mine own drag," nor do I ascribe my preservation to my own might. Who makes these sinews strong? who makes these lungs like iron, and who makes these nerves of steel? "God only is the rock of my salvation." He only is the salvation of my body and the salvation of my soul. Do I feed on the Word? That Word would be no food for me unless the Lord made it food for my soul, and helped me to feed upon it. Do I live on the manna which comes down from heaven? What is that manna, but Jesus Christ Himself incarnate, whose body and whose blood I eat and drink. Am I continually receiving fresh increase of might? Where do I gather my might? My salvation is of Him: without Him I can do nothing. As a branch cannot bring forth

fruit except it abide in the vine, no more can I except I abide in Him.

4. Then if we gather the three thoughts in one. *The perfection* we shall soon have, when we shall stand yonder, near God's throne, will be wholly of the Lord. That bright crown which shall sparkle on our brow, like a constellation of brilliant stars, shall have been fashioned only by our God. I go to a land, but it is a land which the plough of earth hath never upturned, though it be greener than earth's best pastures, and though it be richer than all her harvests ever saw. I go to a building of more gorgeous architecture than man hath builded; it is not of mortal architecture; it is "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." All I shall know in heaven, will be given by the Lord; and I shall say, when at last I appear before Him,—

> "Grace all the work shall crown
> Through everlasting days;
> It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
> And well deserves the praise."

II. And now, beloved, we come to THE GREAT EXPERIENCE. The greatest of all experience, I take it, is to know that "He only is our rock and our salvation." We have been insisting upon a doctrine; but doctrine is nothing unless proved in our experience. Most of God's doctrines are only to be learned by practice—by taking them out into the world, and letting them bear the wear of life. If I ask any Christian in this place whether this doctrine is true, if he has had any deep experience, he will reply, "True! aye, that it is; not one word in God's Bible is more true than that, for indeed salvation is of God alone." "He only is my rock and my salvation." But, beloved, it is very hard to have such an experimental knowledge of the doctrine that we never depart from it. It is very hard to believe that "salvation is of the Lord." There are times when we put our confidence in something else but God, and sin by linking hand-in-hand with God—something besides Him. Let me now dwell a little upon the experience which will bring us to know that salvation is of God alone.

The true Christian will confess that salvation is of God alone *effectively*; that is, that "He works in him to will and to do of His own pleasure." Looking back on my past life, I can see that the dawning of it all was of God; of God effectively. I took no torch with which to light the sun; but the sun did light me. I did not commence my spiritual life—no, I rather kicked and struggled against the things of the Spirit: when He drew me, for a time, I did not run after Him: there was a natural hatred in my soul of everything holy and good. Wooings were lost upon me—warnings were cast to the wind—thunders were despised; and as for the whispers of His love, they were rejected as being less than nothing and vanity. But, sure I am, I can say now, speaking on behalf of myself, and of all who know the Lord, "He only is my salvation, and your salvation too." It was He who turned your heart, and brought you down on your knees. You can say in very deed, then—

> "Grace taught my soul to pray,
> Grace made my eyes o'erflow."

And coming to this moment, you can say,—

> "'Tis grace has kept me to this day,
> And will not let me go."

I remember, when I was coming to the Lord, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. One day when I was sitting in a house of God, I was not thinking much about the man's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "*How did you come to be a Christian?*" and I sought the Lord. "*But how did you come to seek the Lord?*" The thought flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to *make me* seek Him. I am sure you will not be many weeks a Christian, certainly not many months, before you will say, "I ascribe my change wholly to God." I desire to make this my constant confession. I know there are some who preach one gospel in the morning, and another at night—who preach a good sound gospel in the morning, because they are preaching to saints, but preach falsehood in the evening, because they are preaching to sinners. But there is no necessity to preach truth at one time and falsehood at another. "The word of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." There is no need to put anything else in it, in order to bring sinners to the Saviour. But, my brothers, you must confess that "Salvation is of the Lord." When you turn back to the past, you must say, "My Lord, whatever I have, Thou gavest it me. Have I the wings of faith? I was a wingless creature once. Have I the eyes of faith? I was a blind creature once; I was dead, till Thou madest me alive; blind till Thou openedst my eyes; my heart was a loathsome dunghill, but Thou puttest pearls there, if pearls there be, for pearls are not the produce of dunghills; Thou hast given me all I have"; And so, if you look at the present, if your experience be that of a child of God, you will trace all to Him; not only all you have had in the past, but all you have now. Here you are, sitting in your pew this morning; now, I just want you to review where you stand. Beloved, do you think you would be where you are now if it were not for divine grace? Only think what a strong temptation you had yesterday; they did "consult to cast you down from your excellency"; perhaps you were served like I am sometimes. The devil sometimes seems to drag me right to the edge of a precipice of sin by a kind of enchantment, making me forget the danger by the sweetness which surrounds it; and just when he would push me down, I see the yawning gulf beneath me, and some strong hand put out, and I hear a voice, saying, "I will preserve him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom." Do you not feel, that ere this sun goes down you will be damned, if grace does not keep you? Have you anything good in your heart that grace did not give you? If I thought I had a grace that did not come from God, I would trample it beneath my feet, as not being a godly virtue; I would guess it to be but a counterfeit, for it could not be right if it did not come from the mint of glory. It may look ever so much like the right thing; but it is certainly bad unless it came from God. Christian! canst thou say, of all things past and present, "He only is my rock and my salvation?"

And now look forward to the future. Man! think how many enemies thou hast; how many rivers thou hast to cross, how many mountains to climb, how many dragons to fight, how many lions' teeth to escape, how many fires to pass through, how many floods to wade. What thinkest thou, man?

Can thy salvation be of anything except of God! Oh! if I had not that everlasting arm to lean upon, I would cry, "Death! hurl me anywhere; anywhere out of the world." If I had not that one hope, that one trust, bury me ten thousand fathoms deep beneath creation, where my being might be forgotten! Oh! put me far away; for I am miserable if I have not God to help me all my journey through. Are you strong enough to fight with one of your enemies without your God? I trow not. A little silly maid may cast a Peter down, and cast you down too, if God do not keep you. I beseech you, remember this; I hope you know it by experience in the past; but try to remember it in the future, wherever you go, "Salvation is of the Lord." Do not get looking at your heart, do not get examining to see whether you have anything to recommend you, but remember, "Salvation is of the Lord." "He only is my rock and my salvation."

Effectively, it all comes of God; and I am sure we must add, *meritoriously*. We have experienced that salvation is wholly of Him. What merits have I? If I were to scrape together all I ever had, and then come to you and beg all you have got, I should not collect the value of a farthing among you all. We have heard of some Catholic, who said that there was a balance struck in his favour between his good works and his bad ones, and therefore he went to heaven. But there is nothing of the sort here; I have seen many people, many kinds of Christians, and many odd Christians, but I never yet met with one who said he had any merits of his own when he came to close quarters. We have heard of perfect men, and we have heard of men perfectly foolish, and we have thought the characters perfectly alike. Have we any merits of our own? I am sure we have not, if we have been taught of God. Once we thought we had; but there came a man called Conviction into our house one night, and took away our gloryings. Ah! we are vile still. I don't know whether Cowper said quite right, when he said,—

> "Since the dear hour that brought me to Thy foot,
> And cut up all my follies by the root,
> I never trusted in an arm but Thine—
> Nor hoped but in Thy righteousness divine!"

I think he made a mistake, for most Christians get trusting in self at times, but we are forced to own that "salvation is of the Lord," if we consider it meritoriously.

My dear friends, have you experienced this in your own hearts? Can you say "Amen" to that, as it goes round? Can you say, "I know that God is my helper?" I dare say you can, most of you; but you will not say it so well as you will by-and-by, if God teach you. We *believe* it, when we commence the Christian life; we *know* it afterwards; and the longer we live, the more we find it to be the truth—"Cursed is he that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, but blessed is he who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." In fact, the crown of Christian experience is to be delivered from all trust in self or man, and to be brought to rely wholly and simply on Jesus Christ. I say, Christian, thy highest and noblest experience is not to be groaning about thy corruption, is not to be crying about thy wanderings, but is to say—

> "With all my sin, and care, and woe,
> His Spirit will not let me go."

"Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." I like what Luther says: "I would run into Christ's arms if He had a drawn sword in His hands." That is called venturesome believing; but as an old divine says, there is no such thing as venturesome believing; we cannot venture on Christ; it is no venture at all; there is no hap-hazard in the least degree. It is a holy and heavenly experience, when we can go to Christ, amid the storm, and say, "O! Jesus, I believe I am covered by Thy blood"; when we can feel ourselves to be all over rags, and yet can say, "Lord, I believe that through Christ Jesus, ragged though I am, I am fully absolved." A saint's faith is little faith when he believes as a saint; but a sinner's faith is true faith when he believes as a sinner. The faith, not of a sinless being, but the faith of a sinful creature—that is the faith which delights God. Go, then, Christian; ask that this may be thy experience, to learn each day, "He only is my rock and my salvation."

III. And now, in the third place, we speak of THE GREAT DUTY. We have had the great experience; now we must have the great duty.

The great duty is—if God only be our rock, and we know it, are we not bound to put all our trust *in* God, to give all our love *to* God, to set all our hope *upon* God, to spend all our life *for* God, and to devote our whole being *to* God? If God be all I have, sure, all I have shall be God's. If God alone is my hope, sure, I will put all my hope upon God; if the love of God is alone that which saves, sure, He shall have my love alone. Come, let me talk to thee, Christian, for a little while, I want to warn thee not to have two Gods, two Christs, two friends, two husbands, two great Fathers; not to have two fountains, two rivers, two suns, or two heavens, but to have only one. I want to bid thee now, as God hath put all salvation in Himself, to bring all thyself unto God. Come, let me talk to thee!

In the first place, Christian, *never join anything with Christ.* Wouldest thou stitch thy old rags into the new garment He giveth? Wouldest thou put new wine into old bottles? Wouldst thou put Christ and self together? Thou mightest as well yoke an elephant and an emmet; they could never plough together. What! wouldst thou put an archangel in the same harness with a worm, and hope that they would drag thee through the sky! *How inconsistent!* how foolish! What! thyself and Christ? Sure, Christ would smile; nay, Christ would weep, to think of such a thing! Christ and man together? CHRIST AND CO? No, it never shall be; He will have nothing of the sort; He must be all. Note how inconsistent it would be to put anything else with Him; and note, again, *how wrong* it would be. Christ will never bear to have anything else placed with Him. He calls them adulterers and fornicators that love anything else but Him; He will have thy whole heart to trust in Him, thy whole soul to love Him, and thy whole life to honor Him. He will not come into thy house, till thou puttest all the keys at His girdle; He will not allow thee to give all the keys but one; He will not come till thou givest Him garret, parlour, drawing-room, and cellar too. He will make thee sing—

> "Yet if I might make some reserve,
> And duty did not call,
> I love my God with zeal so great,
> That I should give Him all."

Mark thee, Christian; it is a sin to keep anything from God.

Again, *Christ is very grieved* if you do it. Assuredly you do not desire to grieve Him who shed His blood for you. Surely there is not one child of God here who would like to vex his blessed Elder Brother. There cannot be one soul redeemed by blood who would like to see those sweet blessed eyes of our Best Beloved bedewed with tears. I know ye will not grieve your Lord; will ye? But I tell you ye will vex His noble spirit if ye love aught but Him; for He is so fond of you, that He is jealous of your love. It is said, concerning his Father, that He is "a jealous God," and He is a jealous Christ you have to deal with; therefore, put not your trust in chariots, stay not yourselves in horses, but say, "He only is my rock and my salvation."

I beg thee, mark also, one reason why thou shouldest not look at anything else, and that is, if thou lookest at anything else *thou canst not see Christ so well.* "O!" thou sayest, "I can see Christ in His mercies"; but thou canst not see Him so well there, as if you viewed His person. No man can look at two objects at the same time, and see both distinctly. You may afford a wink for the world, and a wink for Christ; but you cannot give Christ a whole look and a whole eye, and the world half an eye too. I beseech thee, Christian, do not try it. If thou lookest on the world, it will be a speck in thine eye; if thou trustest in anything but Him, betwixt two stools thou wilt come to the ground, and a fearful fall wilt thou have. Therefore, Christian, look thou only on Him. "He only is my rock and my salvation."

Mark thee, again, Christian, I would bid thee never put anything else with Christ; for as sure as ever thou dost, *thou wilt have the whip for it.* There never was a child of God who harboured one of the Lord's traitors in his heart, but he always had a charge laid against him. God has sent out a search warrant against all of us; and do you know what He has told His officers to search for? He has told them to search for all our lovers, all our treasures, and all our helpers. God cares less about our sins as sins, than He does about our sins, or even our virtues, as usurpers of His throne. I tell thee, there is nothing in the world thou settest thy heart upon that shall not be hung upon a gallows higher than Haman's. If thou lovest anything but Christ, He will make it to do penance; if thou lovest thy house better than Christ, He will make it a prison to thee; if thou lovest thy child better than Christ, He will make it an adder in thy breast to sting thee; if thou lovest thy daily provisions better than Christ, He will make thy drink bitter and thy food like gravel stones in thy mouth, till thou comest to live wholly on Him. There is nothing which thou hast, which He cannot turn into a rod, if thou lovest it better than Him; and rest assured He will do so, if thou makest it anything to rob thy Christ.

And mark thee, once again, if thou lookest at anything save God, *thou wilt soon go into sin.* There was never a man who kept his eye on anything save Christ, who did not go wrong. If the mariner will steer by the pole-star he shall go to the north; but if he steers sometimes by the pole-star, and sometimes by another constellation, he knoweth not where he shall go. If thou dost not keep thine eye wholly on Christ, thou wilt soon be wrong. If thou ever dost give up the secret of thy strength, namely, thy trust in Christ; if thou ever dalliest with the Delilah of the world and lovest thyself more than Christ, the Philistines will be upon thee, and shear thy locks and take thee out to grind at the mill, till thy God give thee deliverence by means of thy hair growing once more, and bringing thee to trust wholly in the Saviour. Keep thine eye, then, fixed on Jesus; for if thou dost turn away from Him, how ill wilt thou fare! I bid thee, Christian, beware of thy graces; beware of thy virtues; beware of thy experience; beware of thy prayers; beware of thy hope; beware of thy humility. There is not one of thy graces which may not damn thee, if they are left alone to themselves. Old Brooks saith, when a woman hath a husband, and that husband giveth unto her some choice rings, she putteth them on her fingers; and if she should be so foolish as to love the rings better than her husband; if she should care only for the jewels, and forget him who gave them; how angry would the husband be, and how foolish she would be herself! Christian! I warn thee, beware of thy graces; for they may prove more dangerous to thee than thy sins. I warn thee of everything in this world; for everything has this tendency, especially a high estate. If we have a comfortable maintenance, we are most likely not to look so much to God. Ah! Christian, with an independent fortune, take care of thy money; beware of thy gold and silver; it will curse thee if it comes between thee and thy God. Always keep thine eye to the cloud, and not to the rain,—to the river, and not to the ship that floateth on its bosom. Look thee not to the sunbeam, but to the sun; trace thy mercies to God, and say perpetually, "He only is my rock and my salvation."

Lastly, I bid thee once more to keep thine eye wholly on God, and on nothing in thyself, *because what art thou now, and what wast thou ever, but a poor damned sinner if thou wert out of Christ!* I had been preaching the other day all the former part of the sermon, as a minister; presently I thought I was a poor sinner, and then, how differently I began to speak! The best sermons I ever preach are those I preach, not in my ministerial capacity, but as a poor sinner preaching to sinners. I find there is nothing like a minister recollecting that he is nothing but a poor sinner, after all. It is said of the peacock, that, although he has fine feathers, he is ashamed of his black feet: I am sure that we ought to be ashamed of ours. However gay our feathers may appear at times, we ought to think of what we should be if grace did not help us. O! Christian, keep thine eye on Christ, for out of Him thou art no better than the damned in hell; there is not a demon in the pit but might put thee to the blush, if thou art out of Christ. Oh that thou wouldest be humble! Recollect what an evil heart thou hast within thee, even when grace is there. Thou hast grace—God loves thee; but recollect, thou hast a foul cancer in thy heart still. God has removed much of thy sin, but still the corruption remains. We feel that though the old man is somewhat choked, and the fire somewhat damped by the sweet waters of the Holy Spirit's influence, yet it would blaze up worse than before, if God did not keep it under. Let us not glory in ourselves, then. The slave need not be proud of his descent: he has the brand-mark upon his hand. Out upon pride! Away with it! Let us rest wholly and solely upon Jesus Christ.

Now, just one word to the ungodly—you who do not know Christ. You have heard what I have told you, that salvation is of Christ alone. Is not that a good doctrine for you? For you have not got

anything, have you? You are a poor, lost, ruined sinner. Hear this, then, sinner: thou hast nothing, and thou dost not want anything, for Christ has all. "Oh!" sayest thou, "I am a bond slave." Ah! but He has got the redemption. "Nay," sayest thou, "I am a black sinner." Aye, but He has got the bath that can wash thee white. Sayest thou, "I am leprous?" Yes, but the good Physician can take thy leprosy away. Sayest thou, "I am condemned?" Aye, but He has got the acquittal warrant signed and sealed if thou dost believe in Him. Sayest thou, "But I am dead?" Aye, but Christ has life, and He can give thee life. Thou wantest nothing of thine own—nothing to rely on but Christ; and if there be a man, woman, or child here, who is prepared to say solemnly after me, with his or her heart, "I take Christ to be my Saviour, with no powers and no merits of my own to trust in; I see my sins, but I see that Christ is higher than my sins; I see my guilt, but I believe that Christ is mightier than my guilt";—I say, if any one of you can say that, you may go away and rejoice, for you are heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

I must tell you a singular story, which was related at our church meeting, because there may be some very poor people here who may understand the way of salvation by it. One of the friends had been to see a person who was about to join the church; and he said to him, "Can you tell me what you would say to a poor sinner who came to ask you the way of salvation?" "Well," said he, "I do not know—I think I can hardly tell you; but it so happened that a case of this sort did occur yesterday. A poor woman came into my shop, and I told her the way; but it was in such a homely manner that I don't like to tell you." "Oh, yes, tell me; I should like to hear it," Well, she is a poor woman, who is always pawning her things, and by-and-by she redeems them again. I did not know how to tell her better than this. I said to her:—'Look here; your soul is in pawn to the devil; Christ has paid the redemption money; you take faith for your ticket and so you will get your soul out of pawn.'" Now, that was the most simple, but the most excellent way of imparting a knowledge of salvation to this woman. It is true our souls were pawned to Almighty vengeance; we were poor, and could not pay the redemption money; but Christ came and paid it all, and faith is the ticket which we used to get our souls out of pawn. We need not take a single penny with us; we have only to say, "Here, Lord, I believe in Jesus Christ. I have brought no money to pay for my soul, for there is the ticket; the money has been paid long ago. This is written in Thy Word: 'The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.'" If thou takest that ticket, thou wilt get thy soul out of pawn; and thou wilt say, "I'm forgiven, I'm forgiven, I'm a miracle of grace." "May God bless you, my friends, for Christ's sake.

A WILDERNESS CRY

"O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary."—Psalm lxiii. 1, 2.

CHRYSOSTOM tells us that among the primitive Christians it was decreed and ordained that no day should pass without the public singing of this psalm; and certainly, if we do not follow the ancient custom and actually sing the words every day, it is not because they are unsuitable, or because their spirit has died out among us. This psalm may be said or sung all the year round. Have we joyous days? Let us sing of the loving-kindness which is better than love. Do the clouds return after the rain? Let us sound forth His praise whose right hand upholdeth us. Is it summer time with our souls? Then may we express the full assurance of our faith by joyfully crying, "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee." Have we fallen upon the drought of autumn? Do the long hot days parch our spirits? Then may we chant the lay of our longing heart, "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Is it winter with our spirit, and does everything tend to chill us? nevertheless let us not be silenced or rendered sluggish by the cold, but let us say, "I will bless Thee while I live, I will lift up my hands in Thy name." Has the spring returned with all its wealth of fresh flowers and opening sweets? Then shall our glad voices sing aloud, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips." Is the day ended, and has the darkness of night settled down upon our mind? Then in the language of the psalm we will remember God upon our bed, and meditate upon Him in the night watches, and because He has been our help, therefore in the shadow of His wings we will rejoice. We may sing this psalm in the days of battle, when those are round about us who seek our soul to destroy it, for "they shall fall by the sword, they shall be a portion for foxes"; and we may chant it with equal appropriateness in the time of victory, when we return from the conflict with banners gleaming in the sunlight of triumph, for "the king shall rejoice in God: every one that sweareth by Him shall glory." I know of no time and no season in which this psalm would sound unsuitably from a believing tongue. Let us cultivate its earnestness let us endeavour to be baptized into its spirit, let us live while we live after the fashion of holy men like David, the psalmist, whose assurance of heart, sorrow could not shake, whose fertility of mind the desert could not wither, whose joy of spirit solitude could not destroy.

This psalm, however, especially belongs to any who by their circumstances or by their state of heart feel themselves to dwell in a desert land. There is a stage of Christian experience in which we are in Egypt, and we are brought up out of it with a high hand and an outstretched arm. This symbolizes conviction, regeneration, and conversion. Then we know the passover and the sprinkling of the blood, the enemies drowned in the sea and the new song put into the mouth. Happy are they who have come

thus far on their life journey. Then comes the stage of spiritual history which may be well described as wilderness experience, wherein we have little rest much temptation, and consequent proving of heart and discovery of inward weakness. Many remain in this condition far longer than there is any need; what might be soon ended is drawn out into forty years by unbelief. Then comes that blessed stage of experience in which faith begets peace and joy; then we have crossed the Jordan and entered into rest in Christ Jesus, "in whom also we have obtained an inheritance." In the Man who is our peace we obtain an earnest of heaven and begin to divide the land of promise; "for He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places." Each man claims his lot in covenant provisions, and sits under his own vine and fig-tree, none making him afraid. Yet even after we have been raised up together with Jesus, and have obtained citizenship in Zion, we may find ourselves in the wilderness. As David, though king in Israel, had to flee across the Jordan to escape from Absalom, so may the most assured and the most sanctified of God's people be driven for awhile into the dry and thirsty land, where no water is, and there hide himself from the offspring of his own flesh. There are songs for the Lord's banished ones to sing in a strange land, psalms with which to arouse the silent land, sonnets wherewith to charm the howling wilderness into a fruitful garden, and hymns to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. I purpose to address myself this morning to any of my brethren who feel themselves to be just now in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. It may be the Lord will give them deliverance by His word this morning; or if not delivered out of temporal trouble, they shall at least be made glad by His Holy Spirit and be led to magnify His name while yet in the land of drought.

I. Our first head this morning shall be this. TRUE SAINTS ARE SOMETIMES IN A DRY AND THIRSTY LAND WHERE NO WATER IS. Children of God are not always in the same happy state of mind. To hear some people talk, who know but little of religious experience, you would fancy that the Christian's life is all feasting and dancing. Children think that all there is in hunting is wearing a red coat and blowing a horn; they know nothing of the rough riding. We do, it is true, linger delightfully in the sweet valley of humiliation, where men have found pearls and met with angels. We know that spot of which the pilgrim's guide has said, "Behold, how green this valley is, also how beautiful with lilies," but we can never forget that in this quiet meadow Christian met Apollyon, and was hard put to it in the fight, and but a little farther in his journey he came to the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where there are deep ditches and quagmires, and a narrow pathway which runs hard by the mouth of hell. Sweet rest is to be had in the Palace Beautiful, but there is also a hill Difficulty to be climbed. Let not the young be deceived by flattering words for they may be sure of this, that there are bitters as well as sweets in the pilgrim life, and he who would be a Christian must not count upon unbroken joy.

All things are changeable. We live in a world which hourly varies. What mean our thermometers and barometers? Are they not measures of perpetual change? The things which live change even more than inanimate objects, and the more of life usually the more of sensitiveness, and the more of sensitiveness so much the more of change. Your man of marble may appear to sweat through the condensation of the vapour around him, but he cannot possibly know anything of that dew of toil which covers the labouring limb. The cast in plaster is ignorant of the joy and the sorrow which flash through the man of flesh and blood. Your painted picture, hanging on the wall, represents a smiling ancestor, who smiles on, although his estates may have been alienated and his family disgraced; but not so the living parent, who anxiously regards each turn in the affairs of his children; for him there are tears as well as smiles. A man of stone changes not, but a man of flesh feels the movement of the years; the plough of time gradually furrows his forehead, and the crow's feet of age appear in the corners of his eyes. Living men must mourn and suffer as well as laugh and rejoice, for minds and hearts must change. Wonder not, therefore, that the glad-hearted sons of Zion are not always in the temple, but sometimes are driven into exile and sigh in a desert land.

But beyond the fact of liability to change there are others reasons why God's people at times are wanderers in the wilderness. *In some senses to a Christian this world must always be a dry and thirsty land.* The new life which grace has implanted in us finds nothing here below upon which it can feed; the things which are seen are too gross, material, carnal, and defiled to sustain life which cometh by the Holy Ghost from the great Father. We are not carrion crows, else might we float upon the carcases which abound in the waters around our ark: we are doves, and when we leave the hand of our Noah we find nought to rest upon, and we must go back to Him if we are to find food and rest for our souls. I am not speaking now of the world under its sorrowful aspect only, but of the world at its best; it is a dry land for saints even when its rains are falling. When the world arrayeth itself in scarlet, and putteth on its silks and satins, it is still a poor world for us. She may paint her face and tire her head, but she is a Jezebel for all that. The world, should she come to us as she came to Solomon, would be still a deceiver; if she would indulge us with all her riches, and give us all her power and all her fame, she would still be a mere mocker to the heart which is born from above. If thou couldst stand on a high mountain and see all the kingdoms of the world before thee, and the glory thereof, and hear a voice saying, "All this will I give thee"; yet mightest thou turn round to Satan and say, "And all this is nought to me, a sop for a dog, but not food for a child"; and then thou mightest lift thine eye to the great Father above and say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee?" You shall take prosperity at its flood; you shall have health and strength; you shall have all that heart can wish; but, after all, if there is a spark of divine life within you, your heart will compute the sum total of all earth's joys and say, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." To a citizen of heaven this world is "a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." If it be so at its best, what is it at its worst? If its pillows of down cannot rest us, what shall we say of its thorns and briars? If its flood tide cannot bear us up, what shall we say of its neap and its ebb, when mire and dirt succeed a glassy sea? Ah, truly, best or worst, it is well for us to look above the world, and to fix our heart where our treasure is preserved, even in heaven.

But, dear brethren, we could bear up with this present state, and be well satisfied with it, if that were our only difficulty; but far more grievous is the fact that *we carry an evil within us which would cause drought in Paradise itself if it could come there.* The Christian gets into a land of drought because his own nature is dry; he finds a barren soil without because he has a barren heart within. Verily there is no doctrine more true to experience than this, that corruption remaineth even in the hearts of the regenerate, and that when we would do good, evil is present with us. Within us there is still a carnal mind which is not reconciled to God, neither, can be; and, as long as we have this about us, if it be permitted for a moment to get the upper hand (and who among us is so watchful that this will never happen), it is no wonder that the joys of grace seem to disappear, and we find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness. We carry about with us enough evil to make another hell, if the infernal pit were filled and its fires extinguished. "Oh, wretched man that I am," said the apostle Paul, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He said this, not because he was not a saint, but because he was so far advanced in the way of holiness. The more saintly a saint becomes, the more will he loathe and mourn over the remains of indwelling sin which he finds in his nature, and this will set him longing and thirsting after more grace. When our old unbelief begins to wither our faith, when our natural indifference commences to dry up our life, when our doubts parch the pastures of our hope, and our sins drain the wells of our consolation, it is little wonder if we come into a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

We may, dear friends, have been so unwatchful as to have brought ourselves into this condition by actual faults of life and conduct. I would make it a matter of personal enquiry among you by asking thoughtful answers to a few questions. Have you restrained prayer? Do you wonder that the land grows dry? Has the Word of God been neglected? Have you left off its study of late through pressure of other concerns? Do you wonder if you have left the streams that your soul thirsts? Have you been over much engaged in hunting after temporal gain, and has the hot simoom of worldliness parched your heart? Has there been anything about your spiritual life that has grieved the Holy Spirit? Have you been idle as a Christian? Have you been content to eat the fat and drink the sweet, and to do nothing to win souls? Or have you while you have fed upon the Word of God taken the sweet things of the gospel as a matter of course, and not blessed the Lord for them? Has there been a lack of humility or a deficiency of gratitude? If so, can you wonder that you are in a dry and thirsty land? Have you been careless in your walk? In domestic life has sin been permitted in the family? Have you been winking at evil in your children? Have you permitted it in yourself? If so, remember it is written, "He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and water springs into dry ground, a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." You may have fallen into a parched condition of spirit because you have forgotten Him of whom in happier days you sang, "All my fresh springs are in Thee." Because you have walked contrary to God, God is walking contrary to you; and it is your duty to repent and return at once to your Lord; only by so doing will peace return unto you.

If these various things do not account for the believer being in a dry and thirsty land there are still some other reasons which I will briefly mention. Sometimes Christians become very hungry and thirsty when they are *banished from the means of grace.* Poor as our ministry may be, yet there are many of God's children who would miss it more than their daily food if it were taken from them. God's servants whom He calls to the work of the ministry are bound to think little of themselves, and yet the loaves and fishes which they distribute to the multitude are by no means to be lightly esteemed—the people would faint by the way if they had them not. It is a severe trial to some saints to be kept away from sanctuary privileges. I know that, when you travel for pleasure or roam by the seaside for health, if you go to a place of worship on the Sabbath and find no spiritual bread, you fall into a miserable state of mind, and sigh to spend your Sabbaths where the children's portion is dealt out liberally, and all the servants have bread enough and to spare. David loved the very doors of the Lord's house; he thirsted and pined because he was shut out from sanctuary privileges, and it was especially for that reason that he speaks of himself as being in a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

The same may happen when we are *denied the sweets of Christian intercourse.* David had poor company when he was in the wilderness in the days of Saul; his friends were not much better than freebooters and runaways, whom he would never have selected as friends had not the necessities of his own condition and of the political situation rendered it necessary that he should become a captain over them. They were a strange band of men, made up chiefly of those who were in debt and discontented, the rebellious against Saul's wretched administration, men of broken fortunes and suspected loyalty. Few of them were fit friends for the man after God's own heart. I do not wonder that he looked even at the sons of Zeruiah who loved him best, and were his own kinsmen, and felt that as for holy intercourse his soul was in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. Believers are to keep out of worldly company, and yet it sometimes happens that providence throws the child of God among the ungodly, like Obadiah in the family of Ahab, Nehemiah in the palace of Artaxerxes, and Daniel in the court of Darius. Your lot is hard if you are called to dwell among worldlings, for they have power to injure your piety but they cannot help you. You look around upon a score of hard faces all eager after the almighty dollar, and none of them caring for the Almighty God, and I do not wonder that you feel yourself to be in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. We owe much more to Christian friends than we think, and especially the younger folk among us do well to value Christian associations, and to be much in the company of them that fear the Lord, and that think upon His name. If they are denied this refreshment they will find life to be a dry land, where no water is.

Yes, but the like may happen from other causes as well. Sometimes a believing man may be *treated with gross injustice and endure much hardship as the result.* David was blameless, and yet Saul hunted him as a traitor; he was upright, yet his people revolted from him. It tends to make a good man sour in spirit to be misrepresented and treated as guilty, when he knows that he is innocent, and this

bitterness is very apt to put away from us many sources of comfort, and leave us uncomfortable. Then many a spring becomes dry, and the heart shrivels as under a burning sun.

Sometimes, too, *domestic conditions may be so changed that we cannot feel as we would wish.* I do not know how you feel, but I think many must acknowledge that when they get away from their own room and from their regular habits, they are not always able to commune with God as usual. One likes to read from the very same Bible, and to kneel at the very same chair. When the time comes for meeting with God, you are, perhaps, roaming up and down amid the choicest scenery, and though you are reverent and adoring, yet you find it hard to reach the sweetness of fellowship with God which you have been accustomed to enjoy at home. Everything may be very lovely around you while you are tourists; everything may be attractive and delightful, and yet I should not wonder but what you will find it to be a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. I can well conceive that your hearts long for an hour of your accustomed quietude and familiarity with God; you would give anything to be back in the little room, looking out upon the hills, or to have an hour in that secluded little garden, where you have been accustomed to take your pocket Testament and sit down and hear the voice of Jesus speaking to your soul, and to speak to Him in return. Even hours and places have much to do with our heart's condition. I know not how it is, but such strange creatures are we, that in one place we cannot worship as we were wont to do in another; and therefore the soul finds its condition to be that of a wanderer in a dry and thirsty land.

Then, too, *much depends upon health and physical conditions.* In some forms of sickness the soul is apt to be grievously depressed and cast out of its proper condition. Some of you may remember the venerable Watts Wilkinson, the Golden Lecturer. I was reading his life the other day, and he tells us that after many years of health he suffered a season of sickness, and he learned by experience that sickness is not the best time, as he had formerly thought it was, for drawing near to God. The effects of sickness are often very beneficial under the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, but they are seldom so *at the time.* It is "afterwards" that these things work the fruits of righteousness, but at the time it is often with us as it was with Wilkinson, who says that he never in his life felt so dull in prayer and so heavy in reading the Scriptures as during his illness. I believe that often the condition of the body operates the condition of the mind, and that our being in a dry and thirsty land where no water is may be occasioned by a feverishness, or a feebleness of the flesh. Want of faith may sometimes be little other than a want of natural cheerfulness, and we may mistake infirmity for iniquity. We have our times of natural sadness; we have, too, our times of depression, when we cannot do otherwise than hang our heads. Seasons of lethargy will also befall us from changes in our natural frame, or from weariness, or the rebound of over excitement. The trees are not always green, the sap sleeps in them in the winter; and we have winters too. Life cannot always be at flood tide: the fulness of the blessing is not upon the most gracious at all times. We may always burn, but we cannot always flame; we may always grow, but we cannot always flower; and if we always bear fruit, yet is not the fruit always ripe, nor does the ripeness always wear the same delicate bloom. Till we are perfected we shall not be always at our highest point, else were earth turned to heaven, and time had forgotten itself, and merged its variableness in the immutability of eternity. So you see there are many reasons why the best of saints are sometimes in a dry and thirsty land where no water is

II. The second head is a very short but very comforting one, that GOD IS THEIR GOD STILL—"*O God, Thou art my God.*" Yes, He is just as much our God in the dry land as if we sat by Siloa's softly flowing brook, which glides by the oracle of God. O God, Thou art my God, when I see the fountain leaping from the rock in a cascade of cool refreshment, and Thou art just as much my God if every river bed be turned to a heap of stones, and the burning sand on all sides mock my searching eye. The Lord belongs to us by an eternal charter, which will never lose its force; for the Scripture saith, "this God is our God for ever and ever." This is a very sweet and precious truth, and should be remembered evermore. Of course, when a man falls into a dull dry state of soul, he may very well question his condition before God, and he ought not to rest till the question is satisfactorily answered; but where there is living faith the fact is certain, and all question may be dismissed. God is your God still, my dear brother, whatever condition you are in, if you can now come and grasp Him by faith, and call Him yours with the voice of love. Can you join me in words like these? Lord, I have lost my comforts, I have lost my assurances, I have lost my delights; but still I trust in Thee. I have no God but Thee, neither will I worship any other, nor repose my confidence elsewhere. Though Thou slay me yet will I trust in Thee. The wounds of Jesus for my sin are still my soul's one hope; the precious blood of Thy dear Son is my sole confidence. If such be your language you have not lost your God; all the other things you speak of may have gone for a while, but as long as you can still say, "O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee," thou art still amongst the living in Zion, and thy time to rejoice shall soon come. Just think a minute: it is not possible that God's love to His people should change with their condition; such a theology would represent God as very variable in His love; yea, it would do worse than that, for it would make the gospel into a law, and turn all evangelical truth into legality. Does God love me because I love Him? Does God love me because I am bright and happy? Does God love me because my faith is strong, and because I can leap like a hart in His ways? Why, then, He must have loved me because of something good in me, and that is not according to the gospel. The gospel represents the Lord as loving the unworthy and justifying the ungodly, and therefore I must cast out of my mind the idea that divine love depends on human conditions. Can it be true that God only loves His children when they are in good spiritual health? Is it so with me? Do I love my child when he is strong, and hate him when he sickens! When I see the spots of disease upon him do I put him away and say that he is no son of mine? If his poor eyes should fail him and he should become blind, should I cast him off? If his feet should fail him and he became a helpless cripple, should I disown him? If he lost his hearing and could not listen to my voice, would I discard him? Fathers, mothers, I speak

to you; come what may to your offspring, are they not yours still? and would you not love them still? Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? The Lord hath said, "they may forget, yet will He not forget His people." Be cheered, then, for into whatsoever state of unhappiness we may have wandered, the love of God does not depend upon our condition; it knows no ups and downs, nor winters nor summers, nor ebbs nor flows, but abides for ever sure. Even though the Lord should hide His face from us, He is our God still; for the Lord hath taught us to cry, "My God, my God," even when we have to add, "why hast Thou forsaken me?"

When the Lord first loved us we were in a worse state than we are in now, for though we feel dry and sapless we are not utterly dead as we were then. Remember "His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." We were enemies, and yet He reconciled us, and we are not enemies now, though we fear we are poor, cold-hearted friends. We are sadly sick, perhaps, but we are not actually under condemnation as we were when first of all His sovereign grace came forth to do the deed of redemption and deliver us from the wrath to come; and if the Lord loved us then why should He not love us now?

We have not fallen into any state which takes the Lord by surprise, for He knew well enough what we should be. However we may blame ourselves, and I hope we do blame ourselves severely for every evil within our hearts, yet He foreknew what we should be, and is by no means disappointed in us. There has nothing happened which our God did not foreknow, and if He chose us knowing all this, can it be possible that when it comes to pass He should turn from His purpose and change His mind? No, never.

Brethren, we have had great experience, some of us, of God's love in the past, and this makes us feel that He can help us, and will help us in the present. In the sanctuary we have seen His power and His glory. Oh the delight, the heavenly joys which we have known at times in His service. At prayer meetings I know we have had our hearts warmed within us, and felt that we could scarcely be happier in heaven. Sometimes under a sermon we have been fired as with new life, and we have felt that we could begin again with double strength. If this has happened to us in former times, when we were heavy and depressed, why can it not happen again? Doth not the Lord delight to revive the spirits of the faint and weary? Angels' visits may be few and far between, but not the visitations of the Spirit of God, for He dwelleth with us and in us for ever. Or ever we are aware He can make us like the chariots of Amminadib, for He has done it, and what He has done He is certainly able to do again. Wherefore comfort yourselves with these thoughts.

Besides, if we be in the wilderness, is not God the God of the wilderness? Were not His greatest marvels wrought when He led His people about through the howling wilderness, and fed them with manna, and revealed Himself in a fiery, cloudy pillar? Where did Hagar look to Him who saw her, but in the wilderness? Where did Moses see the Lord in the bush, but at the backside of the desert? Where did Elias hear a voice speaking to him, but away there in the wilderness; and where did David, the Psalmist, meet with his God, but in the lone, solitary land, where no water is? O my soul, if thou art in the desert now, expect thy God to meet with thee. Open now thine eyes and expect to see Him display His grace; now that thou art as the dry ground, He will pour floods upon thee; now that thou art empty, He will fill thee with His divine fulness. Thy poverty prepares thee to apprehend His riches; thine inward death prepares thee to receive His everlasting life; therefore, have hope and rise from thy depression and fear.

III. Thus much upon the second subject, by which we are led briefly to the third, namely, WHEN WE ARE IN A DRY AND THIRSTY LAND OUR WISEST COURSE IS TO CRY TO HIM AT ONCE. Now, brethren and sisters, I want to speak very practically to you, as I do to myself, for many of us are deeply and personally concerned in this matter. Very likely the warmth of the atmosphere on this warm summer morning may make you feel all the duller in devotion; you may not be enjoying the things of God, because the air is heavy and invites to slumber; let us then bestir ourselves and break the bonds of sleep asunder. We can only do this by crying at once to God Himself. Let us go straight away to Jesus, our friend and physician, and let us cry, "O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee." Observe, that he does not first pray for deliverance from the dry and thirsty land, and then say, there I will go and seek God; but no, in the desert itself He cries, "My soul thirsteth for Thee." Learn from this, and do not say, "I will get into communion with God when I feel better," but long for communion now. It is one of the temptations of the devil to tell you not to pray when you do not feel like praying. Pray twice as much then. When you feel least like praying, then pray the more, for you need it the more; and when you feel very little like coming near to God, then cry, "My God, I must be in a terrible state, or else I should have a greater longing after Thee. Therefore will I not rest till I find Thee out and come to Thee." Do not, any of you, practise the sinner's folly; he declares that he will tarry till he is better, and then he never comes at all. No, you children of God must not say, "We will seek the Lord when we are better"; but you must seek Him at once. Practise the gospel principle of "Just as I am" and come to Jesus just as you are. Lethargic, half asleep, almost dead in spirit, yet nevertheless come to Jesus. Make a plunge for it. Say, "I must have a sense of His love, and I must have it now. I must not lose this blessed Sabbath morning. I must enter into fellowship with God." Make a dash for it, and you shall have it. Do not wait till you are delivered, but in the dry and thirsty land sigh after God.

Neither, dear friends, pray so much for ordinances as for the Lord Himself. You see David does not say, "O God, Thou art my God, I will seek the sanctuary. My soul thirsts for a prayer-meeting, my flesh longs for a sermon." No, he sighs for *God*, he thirsts alone for God. I do believe that our Lord sometimes strikes all ordinances dry to make us feel that they are nothing without Himself. The means of grace are blessed breasts at which the soul may suck when God is in them, but they are emptiness itself when He is not there. The preacher who has best fed you will only disappoint you if his Lord be not with him, or if you are not prepared to look beyond the man to the Master. The Lord loves to

famish His people of all earthly bread and water, to bring them to wait upon Himself alone. I charge you, beloved, this morning, whatever your state may be, make a direct appeal to the Lord that He would immediately give you Himself by Christ Jesus. Nothing less than this can meet your needs, and this will meet your case, though all outward ordinances should be denied. What if no point of the sermon should impress or quicken you, yet can the silent power of the Spirit of God glide into your heart, and become life to your soul. Seek it, then, and seek it believing that it may be had, and had at once. The child of God may rise at once from slumber into earnestness, and may leap from lethargy into zeal. It is wonderful how speedily the Spirit of God works; He wants not hours and days and weeks in which to make us young again; He worketh with singular mastery over the lapse of time, and perfecteth in an instant His good work. It was darkness all, primeval darkness, thick and black as ebony itself, and Jehovah said, "Light be!" Then flashed the day, and all was brightness. So may it be black as hell with you at this moment, and an infernal night may brood over every faculty of your being, yet if the enlightening Spirit come forth day shall dawn, a day that shall surprise you, a day above the brightness of that which cometh of the sun.

Do not be afraid, dear children of God, you that have fallen into a mournful state, do not be afraid to cry out to God in the language of the Psalmist this morning. I know we sometimes feel as if we must not and dare not pray. We have become so dull, so lifeless, so unworthy, that we do not expect to be heard, and feel as if it would be presumption to cry. But our heavenly Father loves to hear His children cry all day long. Rutherford says, "the bairn in Christ's house that is most troublesome is the most welcome. He that makes the most din for his meat is the best bairn that Christ has." You may not quite agree with that as to your own children, but it is certainly so with our Lord. Rutherford says, "It is a good child that is always whining each hour of the day for a piece and a drink." He speaks of a hungry soul hanging around Christ's pantry door, and commends him for so doing. Assuredly the Lord wishes His children to have strong desires after Himself. Desire, then, and let those desires be vehement. If you can cry out to Jesus, He will joyfully hear you: if you will give Him no rest, He will give you all the rest you need. The Lord finds music in His children's cries. "Oh," say you, "I would cry, but mine is such a discordant and foolish cry." You are the very man to cry, for your sorrow will put an emphasis into your voice. Of all the cries your children utter that comes closest home to you which arises out of their pain and deep distress. A dying moan from a little one will pierce a mother's heart. See, she presses the babe to her bosom! She cries, "My dear dying child," and weeps over it. Thou too shalt be pressed to the bosom of everlasting love if thou canst only groan, or sob, or sigh.

Only be thou careful that thou be not happy in a dry and thirsty land; be careful that thou be not content away from God, for if thou wilt not rest till thou get at Him thou shalt soon have Him; if thou wilt groan after Him thou shalt find Him. A sigh will fetch Him. May there be much longing, panting, and pleading among us at this hour.

Do not let any one here be satisfied to remain in a dull state. Do not say, "Well, but he says a child of God may get there." Yes, I know I did; but I did not bid you fall into it, above all, I did not tell you to abide in it. One of your children may fall and cut his knees, but I should not recommend all his brothers to try a tumble, nor should I exhort him to lie on the ground. The dry and thirsty land is really a dry and thirsty land to the believer, but if you can be satisfied to dwell there it is not a dry and thirsty land to you. Now, child of God, if you have fallen into a dull state, I beseech you now to labour to rise out of it; and I do this first because you are not a fit person to be in such a state. Yours is the land that floweth with milk and honey; you are like David, driven out of Canaan for a time, but you must never be satisfied till you get back to Jerusalem. Oh, cry unto the Lord to bring you back that you may see the king's face and sit at the king's table, and delight yourself with the marrow and the fatness which you ought to feed upon every day. You are a king and a priest unto God; will you go about in sordid beggar's rags and forget your dignity and sit on a dunghill with the paupers of this miserable world? No, come away, come away; the dry and thirsty land is not for you, but the land of plenty and of joy. Think of your obligations to your Saviour. You have been bought with His precious blood, your sins are forgiven you, you are a joint-heir with Him, are you going to be cold and careless towards the Well-beloved of your soul? I was about to say three-fourths of all the Christian people in this world live in such a way as rather to disgrace the Redeemer than to honour Him. I have not said that, but if I had chanced to make the statement I would not retract it, for I am afraid it is true. I am afraid that many of us are no credit to Christ. If worldlings look at us they say, "Is that a Christian?" If my Lord were to send some of His sheep to a show, they would be far enough from winning a prize. If the prize were for joyous piety some would fail utterly; if the prize were for consistent courage and strength of heart, how few of us would be "highly commended." Many of His sheep are no credit to their Feeder, and reflect no honour upon their Shepherd.

Out of your dumps, my brethren! Why should you be sitting in darkness any longer with such grace to be had, and such a Saviour to give it. Bethink you, you are losing a world of joy! You are sitting like an owl in a haunted ruin, blinking your eyes, when you might be flying like an eagle straight up to the Sun of Righteousness, in full communion with the great Lord of day. Why are you down there, down in the dens and caves of the earth, among the dragons howling away, when you might be up there among the cherubim and seraphim magnifying the Lord, for "He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"? I said you were children of God, and therefore I am not condemning you, but I would brush you up if I could, and bestir you to walk somewhat more worthily of the obligations imposed upon you by the grace of God.

Think, my dear brothers and sisters, if you and I all get into a dull, sleepy state, what is to become of this poor world. You have to go to your class this afternoon, are you going there half awake and half asleep? Are you going to dream among your children all the afternoon? "Oh," say you, "we do not do that." Do not you? Why, many a preacher is not above half awake when he delivers

his sermon, and rather snores it than preaches it. Few of us ever were awake all through. We are awake half way. Oh that we were thoroughly awake, thoroughly alive, thoroughly in earnest. No wonder that sinners are given to slumber when saints sleep as they do. No wonder that the unconverted think hell a fiction when we live as if it were so. No wonder that they imagine heaven to be a romance, when we act as if it were so little a reality. O Lord, awake us, even if it be by thunder claps! O God, for Jesus Christ's sake, bring us out of the dry and thirsty land. Hast Thou not said that if we drink of the river of the water of life out of our belly shall flow rivers of living water, so that we shall neither complain of thirst ourselves not shall there remain a desert around us? Help us, then, to drink abundantly.

I have thus spoken to as many as believe in Jesus Christ, but to you that are unbelievers much of this may equally well apply, for you too are in a land more dry and thirsty still. Do not go about to sacraments and sermons, much less to priests, but go straight to God in Christ Jesus. Cry to Him! O sinner, cry to Him, "O God, though Thou be not my God, yet still early will I seek Thee. My heart longeth for Thee, come to me and save me." Jesus will come to you and save you, even you, to the praise of the glory of His grace. Amen.

EXPERIENCE AND ASSURANCE

"Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."—Psalm lxiii. 7.

IN their time of trouble the children of God turn to their Father. It is according to their new-born nature to seek Him from whom it came. The believing heart is like the needle in the compass: you may turn it round with your finger east and west, but when you withdraw the pressure, it will, beyond all doubt, tremble backward towards its pole. With God the regenerate heart is in its proper position. A mystic something draws the new life towards the source from whence it came. We may, alas! by the force of temptation, or by the demands of business, or by an overpowering lethargy, become indifferent to our highest love; but this cannot long continue: we can never rest except in God. The winds of trouble blow the dove of our soul back to the ark. Our heart repents of its wanderings when they bring it into a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. Then we long after divine refreshments, and cannot be quiet till we have them. Then we cry, "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee!"

The soul, in coming back to God, will be greatly helped by meditation. Hence the Psalmist says, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips; when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches." The soul feasts when it meditates. I am afraid these eager days leave little space for meditation; yet is there no exercise more nourishing to faith, and love, and all the graces. David says, "I remember Thee; I meditate on Thee." A transient thought of God may bless us largely, even as a touch of the hem of the Saviour's garment healed a woman of her plague; but to meditate upon Him is, as it were, to lean our head upon His bosom, and enjoy full fellowship in His love. Oh, for more meditation! It would mean more grace, more joy. The photographer can take an instantaneous photograph; and so can we, by ejaculatory prayer and vehement desire, obtain immediate help from heaven; but in a certain state of the atmosphere the object needs longer exposure—needs, in fact, that its image should rest longer upon the sensitive plate before it will completely imprint itself thereon. Meditation does, as it were, set the Lord long before the soul, so that it receives His image more completely. Happy is he who can say, "I have set the Lord always before me!"

Thoughts of God are as when a man climbs a hill, looks upon a landscape, and cries out exultantly, "How beautiful is this scenery!" But if you would have a figure of meditation, you must see that man standing on the hill-top for a long space of time, and marking the features of the landscape. See, yonder is the spire of a village church! Mark the cottages nestling around it! There flows a river; and, hard by, a broad sheet of water, like a looking-glass, reflects the sun. Mark the distant range of hills, and the woods and wilds which lie between. Note well the valley bronzed with a thousand fields of corn, divided like a garden by hedge-rows. Such a view as this is instructive, and abides in the memory. He understands the country best who has seen most of it; and we know the Lord, by His Spirit, far better by quiet meditation than by any other means. We not only remember our God once; but we remember, and remember, and remember, and remember again, till memory flowers into meditation. Thoughts of God crop the herbage, but meditation chews the cud; and it is the chewing of the cud which yields nourishment. Oh, that you and I may often cheer our sleepless hours by heavenly meditations; for thus shall the pure in heart see their God, and thus shall they enter into the closest fellowship with Him.

Among our subjects for meditation should be God's gracious dealings with us. David meditated upon his whole life in the light of its connection with God. He read his diary through, and specially dwelt upon the points wherein he had come into contact with the Invisible and the Infinite. He remembered the help he had received from Omnipotence. He knew God best by special times of gracious aid. After all, it is not what we read in the Book; but what we feel in the heart which actually gives us our best acquaintance with God. A hundred biographies of other men will not make so much impression upon us as the knowing of God in our own personal experience. If we can say of Him, "Thou hast been my help," we shall meditate upon Him to good purpose.

Once more: *when the heart comes back to God,* riding in the golden chariot of meditation, *the natural instinct is to speak to Him.* Hence my text is not only the word *of* God, but a word *with* God. The Psalmist does not direct the words of the text to us, but to God Himself: "Because Thou hast been my help, there-

fore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." Beloved, it is a delightful thing to converse with God. Do you indulge this habit? If the Lord be your Father, should you not, as a child, speak with Him day by day? If you are married to Christ, should not the spouse speak with her Well-beloved? It were very strange if she did not. Private devotion ought to be a dialogue between the soul and God; by the Scripture the Lord speaks to us, and by prayer we speak to Him. Sometimes, you know, in conversation with a friend, you have not much to say. Very well; you listen while your friend speaks. When prayer is not urgent, read your Bible, and hear what God the Lord shall speak; and when you have heard His voice, you will usually find it in your heart to pray unto Him. If the prayer be soon over, because you have expressed all your thoughts, then let the Lord speak again and do you hearken diligently. But do speak to the Lord. Realise His presence, and then speak to Him as a man speaketh with his friend. God has no dumb children, but He has some who hold their tongues to a fault when they are with Him. I fear that these same people use their tongues to a fault when they are away from Him. O brother, speak with God! this is the noblest use of speech. If half our talk with men were silenced, and our talks with God were multiplied tentimes, it would be well. May I ask a question of every professed Christian? Have you spoken with God this morning? Do you allow a day to pass without converse with God? Can it be right for us to treat the Lord with mute indifference? No; let us often turn our hearts and our lips heavenward, and say, "Thus will I bless Thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in Thy name." Does not our Lord love to hear us speak? Listen to His loving appeal in the sacred Canticle: "O My dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely."

With this as a preface, I now invite you to the text itself, which is a stanza of David's song unto the Lord. "Because Thou hast been my help"—This is *experience.* "Therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice"—this is *expectation*, or, viewing it in a still brighter light, "I will rejoice"—this is *assurance.* Here are three subjects to dwell upon. God help us to climb these three rounds of the ladder of light: experience, expectation, full assurance! If we stop at the top when we get there, it may not be amiss; but if we have to begin again, let us rehearse matters in the same order—more experience, clearer expectation, and fuller assurance.

I. First, then, EXPERIENCE: "Thou hast been my help." Experience is the child of faith, and, strange to say, experience is the nurse of faith. No man can expect to experience the fulfilment of the promise till he believes the promise; but they believe the promise best who have had most experience of God's faithfulness.

David had experienced divine help. He distinctly traced many of his deliverances to divine help. He says, "*Thou* hast been my help." David did not ascribe his success in life to a powerful patron, for he had none. I have heard men sigh for the bondage of patronage. One has cried, "If I were taken up by some great man, I should succeed in life." David had no patronage; but, on the contrary, encountered strong opposition. His brothers pushed him into the rear, and even his father kept him minding the sheep. In after life Jonathan was his friend, but he was not his patron; for that generous prince always felt that David was his superior. If you have God for your friend, you need not cringe before great men; for you shall joyfully say unto the Lord, "Thou hast been my help." Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm; but blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

Neither does David ascribe his success in life to himself. There is no doubt that he was a man of genius, cast in a poetic mould; and it is also clear that he was a valiant man, born for deeds of daring and high enterprise. He was also a man of judgment and counsel, and as apt for government in peace as in war. With all his faults, there is no more royal character upon the page of Scripture than David, King of Israel. But he does not sacrifice to his own sword, or magnify his own bow. We read no word of his about his being a self-made man; nay, rather, he sings, "It is God that subdueth the people under me." Brethren, have there not been instances in your lives, in which the Lord has evidently interposed to help you? I can see His hand clearly in places wherein no other help would have been sufficient. If any one had to sketch my life, he could not do it fully, unless I were, from my own secret thoughts, to supply certain gaps. Without God the believer's life is inexplicable. The Romans used to speak of *Deus ex machinâ;* God appearing in an unexpected manner in the midst of a history to rescue the hero, and change the scene. This is no figure of speech in the life of faith. Every now and then we have witnessed a distinct interposition, a stretching out of the divine hand, an inroad of the supernatural. To us has it been true, "He bowed the heavens also, and came down." Others might think our experience fanatical, if we were to tell it as we see it; but this we cannot help. To us it has been a real manifestation of the divine thoughtfulness on our behalf. Looking back upon our lives, we cannot help saying deliberately, and as cool statement of fact—The Lord has been our help. There, and there, and there, we mark certain turning-points in our life which cannot be accounted for to our own minds on any other theory than that here the Creator came into contact with His creature, the Redeemer stooped over His redeemed, and the Comforter wrought upon the soul which he indwelt. Yes, "O triune Jehovah, Thou hast been my help! David felt it was so, and he avowed it without hesitation.

Furthermore, these words imply that *David had often experienced this help.* He does not make this statement in reference to one solitary incident in his life, or he would have said, "Thou wast once my help"; but he sees a continuity in the loving-kindness of the Lord his God. He means, "Thou hast all along been my help." When he was a youth, and kept his father's flock, there came a lion and took a lamb out of his flock, and he, with dauntless courage, rushed upon the monster and saved the lamb from between his jaws. Another day a bear pounced on one of his helpless charges, and the brave youth killed it. God helped him in those days of solitude in the wilderness. None saw his daring deeds; but he communed with God, and wrought bravely, so as to prepare himself to be the shepherd and deliverer of the Lord's own flock. In his early youth the Lord was his strength and his song.

Anon, he was taken away from solitude, and introduced into public life, and the Lord was his help.

He had a strange introduction to the world; I might almost say that he was slung out into public life like a stone from his own sling. A gigantic Philistine stalked before the hosts of Israel, defying the servants of God to single conflict. Young David undertook to answer the champion's defiance; and then was fulfilled his brave word to King Saul, "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them." He ran to him in the name of the Lord Jehovah, the God of Israel, whom he had defied; and presently he returned to Saul bearing the braggart's gory head. "Because Thou hast been my help," was David's way of accounting for his slaying the lion, and the bear, and the giant.

In after life, David had to attend in the court of envious Saul, and he behaved himself wisely there. He would confess to the Lord the reason for his wise behaviour in these words, "Because Thou hast been my help." Put upon difficult enterprises, he achieved them; jealously envied by the king, he gave him no ground for a charge; for God was his help. Driven at length into exile, to become the leader of a band of men; hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, his life was still preserved: the Lord was his help. While yet a wanderer, he met with a great heart-breaking trouble. While he had been away from Ziklag, where his men were in residence, a band of marauders came upon the city, took the women and children captive, and burned the city with fire. When he and his band came back to the place, each man had to grieve over his ruined home and stolen substance, and wife and family carried off. The rough men spake of stoning David, for their hearts were bitter with a great sorrow. Then we read that "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God," and very soon his mourning was turned into dancing; the captives were recovered, the spoil was reclaimed, and the men-at-arms were glad. Truly David could say, "Thou hast been my help."

I cannot go through all the life of David, but I hope you are familiar with it. In doing his duty as patriot and king, God was his help, and enabled him to walk uprightly in his government. In his sufferings the Lord was his help, and enabled him to be calm and brave. In the time of danger God was his help, and kept him from the hand of the enemy. And now, in this psalm, though David is in the wilderness of Judah, and probably hunted by his own son, yet he sings unto the Lord, "Thou hast been my help." Beloved friends, I do not want you to stop with David any longer. I beg you, now, to come nearer home, and review your own lives. I cannot, of course, give a sketch of the histories of all here assembled, but many of them will run on this wise:—as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, your life was a hard fight in the beginning, and many a time you were ready to perish. Perhaps you began very low down in the scale, and when you were about to rise, misfortune dragged you down. Many things were against you, but the Lord was your help. In your own person you have suffered sickness; but when you have tossed upon the bed, in great anguish, God has been your help. You have experienced trial in your family. There are graves in the cemetery which you will never forget; half your heart lies buried beneath the sod. Yet the Lord has been your help. When you hoped, by industry, to succeed, the times suddenly turned and swept away your gains. It seemed as if you could not prosper. You can say to-day, "I was brought low, and the Lord helped me." You are not in the workhouse; you have not been through the bankruptcy court; you still find that promise true, "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy waters shall be sure." You joyfully say this day, "O Lord, Thou hast been my help." As for me, the very spot on which I stand bears witness to the loving-kindness of the Lord. On this platform I have endured deep distress of mind while preaching to you, and I have feared lest I should not be able to speak aright in the name of the Lord; but now, concerning these thirty-seven years of my ministry, I joyfully say, "Thou hast been my help." Most of you, in your various walks of life, will have had occasion, again and again, to bless the Lord, who has been your help.

These helps rendered to David had been very choice ones. He had often been helped in special ways. God had taken great care of him. He was the favourite of Providence, and the darling of heaven. Has it not been so with some of you? Have you not enjoyed choice morsels of experience? Are there not incidents in your life which you could scarcely tell, lest the hearer should smile at your credulity, and you should be found casting pearls before swine? To some of us most special mercies have been vouchsafed, and we have treasured them as choice things. I was rather astonished to learn that in the Hebrew the help is expressed by much the same word which is used in Genesis to describe the position of woman to man. God made Eve to be a helpmeet for Adam; and here the Almighty God has been to us as suitable a help as the helpmeet he made for man. Some of us have a dear one who has been our best earthly help, and that in the best and happiest manner conceivable—a help exactly answering to our heart's needs. David had found in his God a help of the kind which he needed—a help tenderly, wisely, divinely suited for his every want. The Lord had answered to his servant's wants and desires, and had been his very present help, yielding wisdom for his folly, and power for his weakness, and comfort for his sorrow. Wonder of wonders, that God the omnipotent and almighty should become a help in all things meet for man! Is not this a joyous thing? Have we not found it so? Confess this tender fact to your God, and rejoice every day in the quiet of your own soul, saying, "Thou hast been my help."

God has been to us a very timely help. Has He not appeared at the very nick of time? Had there been another moment's delay, it had been all over with us; but in our extremity the Lord found his opportunity How speedily He came—

> "On cherub and on cherubim
> Full royally He rode,
> And on the wings of mighty wind
> Came flying all abroad.
>
> And so deliver'd He my soul:
> Who is a rock but He?
> He liveth—Blessed be my Rock!
> My God exalted be!"

Just when our own life ebbed out, the divine life flowed in; just when joy died within us, hope was born, and our spirit revived.

God's help has also been continuous to us. Though at the present moment there may seem to be a break and we are in the wilderness of Judah, where the Lord is rather thirsted for than seen, yet this is only an apparent break. Beloved, hitherto there has been

no pause in the goodness of God to us. In the time of our darkness we could not see the link; but, looking back, we can see it now. Life has been to us a continuous chain of love, with every link well forged upon the anvil of power by the hammer of wisdom. The Lord has never failed us. Did He not say, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" and has it not been so? Up hill and down dale, in the dark and in the light, in summer and in winter, the constancy of God's help has been proved. His faithfulness is a fountain of delight to us. The Lord has always been our help.

Observe also that *the Lord has granted us educative mercy.* David says, "Because Thou hast been my *help.*" He says not, that He has wrought everything for us, but He has set us working also. You see, if you do a thing for a man, it is well; but if you help him to do it, it may be better for him, and thus he learns the way. It is true that in many deeds of grace, the Lord does not help, but He does all the work Himself. He chose us before we chose Him, and without our choice of Him He quickened us. We could not help in our own quickening. He renewed us: we could not help in our renewal. He, by His own power, made us new creatures and changed our hearts, and gave us His Holy Spirit: we could not help in this, for this must be God's own unaided work. God made the grass, the grass did not help in its own creation; but God helps the grass to grow, and the grass itself grows by the divine power. In the same manner, after we have come to spiritual life, then God helps us. Donne says, "God hath not left me to myself, He hath come to my succour, He hath been my help: but then, God hath not left out myself; He hath been my help, but He hath left something for me to do with Him, and by His help." We work because He makes us work, and helps us in it. We bring forth fruit as branches of the vine, but He supplies the sap; so that he says, "From Me is thy fruit found." Lord, Thou hast been my help: I began with stammering a few sentences for Thee; but Thou hast opened my mouth to show forth Thy praise. Did you not begin with a faint confession of Christ? and now you dare to stand in the front of the battle. The Lord has so helped you that you have been trained for the conflict: "He teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." Help not only promotes the work, but it blesses the man himself by stimulating his powers and developing them. Blessed be the name of the Lord, he has not carried us like babes; but He has taught us to walk with Him as men, and we are the stronger because we can say, "Thou hast been my help."

I close this first head when I have noticed *the personal experience* of the text: "Because Thou hast been *my* help." Oh, I like that word *my!* "*My* help." If David had said, "Because Thou wast Abraham's help," there would have been good argument in it; for the experience of another man ought to encourage our faith. Suppose he had said, "Because thou wast Jacob's help," or "Moses' help," it would have been good reasoning. But, oh, it strikes more surely and comes more closely home to a man's heart when he can say, "Because Thou hast been *my* help." An infidel once sneered at a poor woman, and said, "How do you know the Bible is true?" She answered, "I have experienced the truth of it." He replied, "Your experience! That is nothing to me." "No," she said, "that is very likely; but it is everything to me." And so it is. My experience may not convince another man, but my experience has rooted, grounded, and settled myself. "But," says one, "Surely, you are open to conviction?" Yes, I am always open to conviction; but there are some things upon which no man, nor angel, nor devil, will ever alter my convictions already formed. There are a few things which we know: I mean things which we have experienced. If we have experienced the truth of them, then we are past all argument to the contrary; we are sure and certain, fixed and rooted.

It seems to me that there are two books which a Christian man ought to study: the one is this big Book, the inspired Word of God; the other is the little book of his own life. If the believer lives long enough he will write into that little book all that there is in the great Book, only he will change the tense. When the great Book saith, "I will do this, and I will do that," we shall find in the little book, "God hath done so and so. In my own case the promise has been fulfilled." The little book will be the echo of the inspired volume, the record of the fact that the Lord has done according to His word of promise. Thus experience becomes a stay and a strength to the child of God in times of darkness or controversy. God grant that you may go on writing up your personal memoir, and thus confirming the witness of the Spirit! Are not our lives the proof of God's faithfulness? Is not this the sum and substance of them, "Thou hast been my help?"

II. And now, secondly, EXPECTATION. David naturally expected that as God *had been* his help, so he *would be* his help. I like a text which has a "because" in it followed up with a "therefore." The text becomes a syllogism, an argument, a sure statement: because such and such a thing is fact, therefore such another thing must be fact. God, who *has* helped us, *will* help us. Experience becomes argument, and the argument carries conviction with it.

What we have experienced of God's goodness is a revelation of Himself: God's actions are Himself in motion. If, then, we have experienced God's power, He is powerful; and we know that anything is possible to Him. If I have experienced His acts of faithfulness, I conclude that He is always faithful, and that He will keep His promise and His covenant, and will be true to all those who trust in Him. But suppose I have watched His ways for forty years, and have found Him to be the same yesterday, and to-day, then I conclude that He is immutable—the same in my age as in my youth, the same in my adversity as in my prosperity. I infer from the fact that God has been good to me, that He will be the same to me all my days. Very well, then; as I am the same person, at least as far as my weakness and my necessity are concerned, I will go to God in the same way. The Lord is the same God in every respect; my need is the same as ever it was; His supplies are the same as ever they were; His will to bless me is still the same; and His promise to bless me is the same, for it stands unrevoked in His blessed Word; therefore I will have the same faith and the same hope in God. Looking back and making sure that the Lord has been my help hitherto, I draw the conclusion that He will be my help to the end of the chapter.

This reasoning is good, since *you have to deal with an unchanging God.* You could not reason in that way in reference to man. No; you say, "I cannot go to my friend Brown for help, for I have been to him already." You do not argue that you may freely

go again because you have been already. Far from it. You say, " I have received as much from him as I could reasonably expect; and I must not become a burden to him." Or else it happens that your friend grows weary of you, and answers you coldly, and you feel that you can go no more to him. Earthly friends can be drawn upon so much that their generosity is exhausted, and they feel that you are unreasonable in your requests. If, therefore, you have changeable man to deal with, there will be no logic in your reasoning; but when you think of Jehovah who changeth not, then you may infer great things, and the severest logic will support you. He was my help, He is my help, and therefore He will be my help, even to the end.

This kind of argument is very sure to a man's own self, and he is the person most concerned. We know whom we have believed, and we are persuaded that He will not fail us. We know what we do know; and if we cannot tell it to others, we are none the less sure of it ourselves. The Lord has been our help in very remarkable ways, which put His graciousness beyond a doubt, and so our expectation is large and unquestioning: we look for endless, perfect, prompt, and final deliverance from all evil. There is a force about personal experience which, to the man himself, is irresistible; and the conclusion that comes from it is to him as certain as the existence of God. The hammer of Thor, which would have broken the globe, is not more mighty than the argument of personal experience, before which all difficulties of faith are dashed in pieces.

It is clear that *this is an accumulating argument.* The young man who has known the Lord twelve months, and experienced a great deliverance, is sure that the Lord is to be trusted. But when he has passed twenty, thirty, or forty years of the same experience, his assurance will be doubly sure. To a believer in Christ every day teems with providences and mercies. This tree beareth its fruit every month, and the fruit feeds faith wondrously. Every year is crowned with the loving-kindness of the Lord; and so, in old age, the faithfulness of God is a fact which is no more argued, but enjoyed. When the believer dies he has nothing to do but to die. He is assured by an argument which has grown out of forty years' observation. He knows that God will help him, for He has helped him. I stood by the side of a dear old friend and fellow-helper yesterday. He is in his ninety-second year, and has taken to his bed through weakness. Instead of seeking sympathy or speaking to me in a doleful style, he pleasantly observed, " You see I am higher in the world than when you came last time, for I have left the parlour and come upstairs. Very soon I shall not be higher in the world, but higher *than* the world." He said this with that same twinkle of the eye which I have noticed in him in the days of his strength when he was equally full of grace and wit. There was no fear of death to daunt or damp his spirit. He knew nothing of such a feeling: " Ah!" he said, " Isaiah was right when he described our experience in the passage, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.' He begins flying, then goes to running, and then to walking. But the prophet calls this renewing his strength. It looks like losing strength and speed, does it not? Ah! but (he said) you know flying is not a suitable thing for daily life: it is all very well for young people, but it does not suit every-day life. Running is for another period, but it is not a practical pace for a continuance. Quietly walking with God is a safe, lasting, every-day pace. You can keep on at that as Enoch did, till you walk away with God. I have now got to my walking days," said the grand old man. Then he went on to expound the Scripture by other Scriptures. " John says, 'I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you.' That makes them mount up with eagles' wings above the guilt of sin. To the young men he says, 'I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.' In that case there has been struggling and exertion, like the running without weariness. But when he gets to the fathers, he says, 'I write unto you, fathers', not concerning a high joy, or a successful struggle, but 'because ye have known Him that is from the beginning.' That is a walking, quiet, solid knowledge; and it is the best of all." What a happy talk we had! We were two merry men sitting on the brink of Jordan communing together with happy hearts—he of ninety-two talking to me concerning all the way whereby the Lord had led us both since we knew each other, these thirty-four years and more. Oh, yes, it is a blessed, blessed thing to grow in grace as we grow in years, and to increase our argument for faith as we increase our experience.

That argument will remain unchanged in death. When the earth shall rock, the stars shall fall, and the heavens shall be rolled up by the hand of God like a worn-out vesture; when the great white throne shall be seen and the sentence of the righteous Judge shall be heard, our confidence will be still the same: " Thou hast been my help, and nothing shall separate me from Thy love."

III. Lastly, and somewhat briefly, ASSURANCE. Here comes the richest cluster which grows out of our subject. The Psalmist says, " Therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

Here is, first, *contented assurance.* David does not say, " I am in trouble, and I must get out of it somehow; and therefore I must needs sin rather than fall under the hand of the enemy." No, he is quiet and patient. He does not make haste and demand immediate deliverance: he quietly waits the Lord's time and rests under the all-covering wings. You hear no loud outcries from him, as of one struggling against fate. The children of God, like sheep, are dumb, before their shearers. David, grateful for past help holds himself still, and happily awaits the purpose of the Lord. He manifests no fear, no fret, no hurry, no worry. Neither does he cast his eyes towards man. " *Thou* hast been my help," saith he; and he looks that way. " My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him." But where is Joab? Where are the three mighties? Where are all the royal body-guard? The enemy is cruel, and thirsting for blood: does David piteously beseech his watchmen to keep well their ward? No, he is calm and peaceful, and sweetly says, " Thou hast been my help; therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

David exhibited a very *patient assurance.* He likens himself to a young eagle beneath the mighty wings of its mother: " In the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." You thought he would have said, " Thou wilt drive Thy mighty talons into my adversaries, and tear them in pieces"; or, " Thou wilt strike them as an eagle destroys its prey." No, he is not eager for the Lord to act: he is biding his time;

nay, waiting the Lord's time, quite content to be under His wing. What the great eagle may do he leaves to the future, while he nestles down in perfect quietness. May God give us patience always to possess our souls in Him! It is not ours to hasten the divine vengeance, nor to wish for a personal triumph; but it is ours to feel the bliss of safety in nearness to God.

Note, next, that it is *the assurance of faith.* "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore"—what? "In the light of Thy countenance will I rejoice?" No: he had then but little light; he was "in the shadow." The wilderness cut him off from beholding God in the sanctuary. If you cannot see the face of God, His shadow may give you peace. Lord, I will pray to Thee to lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me; but if Thou dost continue to hide Thyself, I will still trust Thee, and be sure that Thou art the same God of grace. Knowing that Thy shadow is full of defence for me, I will rejoice therein.

Notice also, it is *continued assurance.* We read not, in the shadow of Thy wings *have* I rejoiced, but, "I *will* rejoice." He is rejoicing, and means to go on rejoicing. His joy no man taketh from him. He will rejoice so long as he has a God to rejoice in.

The best of all is, this *is rejoicing assurance.* The text does not say, "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I *trust*," but, "in the shadow of Thy wings *will I rejoice.*" That is going further than silent submission, or humble trust. David is in the dark; but, like the nightingale, he sings in it. When the Lord seems to hide Himself, the soul remembers what the Lord was, and resolves to be glad in Him as He was seen aforetime. David lamented for Absalom, but he rejoiced in God. He rejoiced that the wings of the Lord safely preserved him; and though they cast a shadow over him, he would rejoice in the shadow as the evidence that the wings were really there. O child of God, rejoice in the Lord in the dark. There is no honour to you in rejoicing when everything goes well with you; but your faith wins credit if it leads you to rejoice in God when everything runs counter to your comfort. I may be speaking to some dear brother who, in his business, finds things going very cross, and the current of his affairs sets strongly in the wrong direction. Now is the time to show the difference between the joy of the spiritual life and that which merely comes of the natural life. Rejoice in God, and prove that your joy flows from the upper springs "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

In conclusion, let me remark, it is little wonder that so many do not understand trusting in God, for they have never tried it; and answers to prayer, and fulfilment of divine promises, seem to them as idle tales. If we were to tell them what God has done for us, they would not believe us. There is William Huntington's *Bank of Faith*—well, I would not endorse every word of it; but I see no reason why it should not be accepted as a truthful narrative. When anybody calls it a "*Bank of Nonsense,*" as I have heard them do, I have answered, "It is because you do not know any better. Many other believers could write books equally marvellous." Still, unbelievers will be sure to mock, for it is out of their line altogether. Years ago, a Red Indian went down to Washington, and when he returned to his tribe he began telling them the wonders he had seen among the pale faces. At last he told them that he saw a canoe fastened to a great ball rise up into the sky. One of his brother Indians shot him dead with his rifle, and leaping into the middle of the ring declared that such a liar was not fit to live another minute, and, therefore, he had killed him. The statement was quite true, but as it was outside of Indian knowledge the man was shot. So the experience of a Christian is so far removed from the worldling's line of things, that he ridicules it. It is true for all that. Thousands of us can testify to the truth of the gospel, and we wish, above all things, that you would try it yourself.

When you hear that those who trust in the Lord are delivered, I wonder some of you do not want to know our Saviour. Yesterday a poor person called on a brother minister, and asked for a ticket to go to the gentleman who was curing rheumatism. My friend knew nothing about the gentleman. "Oh," she said, "he is at Croyden, and he has been curing people who have been ill for years." The preacher knew nothing of any tickets, but the person said that her father had failed to see the gentleman, and he would try again. Just so; from every quarter people will come where there is hope of being healed. How strange that men will seek help for their bodies, and not for their souls. There is One who can help in every case of soul-sickness, why not go to Him? We have been healed. Why do you doubt? He will be a faithful helper to all those who put their trust in Him. Why do you not seek Him? We are honest people who bear witness of His helping us: why do you not believe us, so far as to try the Lord Jesus for yourselves? If you will not believe us, believe in God's own Book, and say, "I will look to Jesus for help." Oh, that you would trust the precious Jesus and His precious promises, and His precious blood, by that precious faith whose very trials are more precious than gold! Then shall you find every help you need between this spot and glory's gate. The Lord bring you to Jesus at once for His name's sake! Amen.

GOD IN HEAVEN, AND MEN ON THE SEA

" By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our salvation ; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea."—Psalm lxv. 5.

PLEASE read the sixty-fifth Psalm through. May it do you good, whether as landsmen you read of the Lord's settling the furrows, or as sailors you hear of His stilling the noise of the seas. Notice the first two verses : " Praise waiteth for Thee," " O Thou that hearest prayer." *Holy men of old were accustomed to mix praise and prayer together :* this is a happy mixture. We are not tied to one thing. We spread the sails of prayer, and fly the flag of praise. To praise God without praying to Him would be impossible. To pray to God without praising Him would be ungrateful. Praise takes in a cargo of gold for the King of kings ; and prayer stokes the fires to make the good ship steam towards the royal city. Brothers, keep to this throughout all the watches : *pray and praise,* and when you want a change, *praise and pray.* Keep the boat of the soul going with these two oars, praise and prayer.

Notice, also, in this psalm, that when the saints of the olden time offered prayer and praise, *they addressed themselves at once to God, and not to saints and angels.* David is not satisfied with talking about God, but he talks to Him, as in our text : " Thou wilt answer us, O God of our salvation." There's nothing like straight sailing ; let us go to God direct. We ought not to think of what our fellow-men will say of our praises ; if they are not musical in the ears of men it matters little, so long as they are sweet to the Lord our God. When we engage in public prayer, it is a pity to be thinking about how our words will sound in the opinion of our brethren ; let us only think of the Lord to whom we are speaking. We can't steer two ways at once ; if we make for the mercy-seat we need not consider the pews. Let us fix our eye on the lighthouse at the mouth of the harbour, and leave the church on the hill, and the windmill over yonder, for other people to look at. Brothers, look to your captain, and let your mates think what they like. Let us know our port, and steer for it ; and let the twin-ship of prayer and praise never take any course but that which carries our whole heart straight to heaven.

I. First, then, dear friends, let us consider WHAT THE LORD IS TO US. He is the " God of our salvation."

It is clear from this that *we all need salvation.* If it were not clear in this text, we could not doubt it, for the evidence surrounds us on every side. We have sadly sufficient proof of our lost estate. Human nature is water-logged, and ready to sink, and in God alone is our hope.

The text tells us where salvation is, namely, in God. God is the God of our salvation. You have neither right ideas of yourself, nor right ideas of God, unless you see that by nature you have need of being saved from sin—saved by nothing less than a divine hand. The greatest saint on earth is still a sinner. Let him have safely sailed on the sea of life for sixty years, he will be on the rocks before the morning watch, unless the Lord save him. The most intelligent man, and the man of longest experience, still needs saving. The oldness of a ship does not increase its seaworthiness. Ask at Lloyd's if a ship is any safer because it has been afloat more than sixty years. No man that lives is safe from rocks, and quicksands, and tempests, or even from foundering at sea, unless the Lord God shall be always the God of his salvation. We all have need to ask for salvation from the guilt of sin, the power of sin, and the curse of sin ; and it should be our great joy that the Lord graciously condescends to provide all this for us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

It is this salvation which brings God to us, and us to God. I do not think that very many find out God by what they see in nature. Men see the works of God, but they do not see God in His works. There is such a thing, I suppose, as going " from nature up to nature's God," but it is a hard climb for cripples, like the most of us. To lift your foot even from the top of the highest mountain to the lowest step of the throne of God is a tremendous effort. Human nature does not care for such an upward climb. The ready way to God, by which tens of thousands have come to Him, is by Jesus Christ our Saviour. No man ever does come to God except by Jesus, who is the way of salvation. There may be other channels, but this is the only navigable one. Our boats draw too much water to get to God along the shallow straits of human learning. We shall be wise to keep to the deep waters of redeeming love, for by this channel God came to us. The glorious God came here to earth in the person of His Son, that He might reconcile us to Himself, and so save us. Where there is depth enough for God to come to man, there is a fair sea-way for man to come to God. Remember that the Lord Jesus came for our salvation. " God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world ; but that the world through Him might be saved." Salvation brought God to us, and salvation must bring us to God, or else we shall be castaways. Blessed for ever be our gracious and glorious God ; for in every man that is saved, He is the God of His salvation in Christ Jesus.

The salvation that we get is entirely from God. If you ever hear of salvation that does not come from God, depend upon it, it is not seaworthy, but will turn out to be one of those worm-eaten coffin ships. I would not trust a dog on board of it. If I were to preach a merely human salvation to you, it would not be worth your while to listen to me. " Salvation is of the Lord " is the saying of Jonah, from the depths of the sea. This salvation began in God's everlasting purpose, in His sacred covenant, in His divine choice of His people. It is carried out by the life and death of our Saviour. It is wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, by whom we are quickened, illuminated, converted, and brought to faith in Jesus. Salvation is of the Lord, from stem to stern, from truck to keel. There is not a bit of rope on board, nor even a spar up aloft, which is of man's merit or working. Christ is the A, and He is the Z of the salvation Alphabet. He is not only the helper of our salvation, but the God of it, the Maker of it, the

All-in-all of it. Have any of you a salvation which you have manufactured for yourselves? Then drop it overboard and row away from it as fast as you can, lest it should be a torpedo to work your ruin. The only salvation that can redeem from hell is a salvation which comes from heaven. Eternal salvation must come from an eternal God. Salvation that makes you a new creature must be the work of Him who sits upon the throne and makes all things new.

It is a remarkable thing that *in this salvation there is a strange mixture of the terrible and the gracious.* "By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our salvation." In the death of our Lord Jesus we see the salvation of God; in this the Lord is terrible against sin, but most tender to the sinner. God did not put up the sword of His justice, for He was bound to use it. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" To do right He must punish sin. And, oh, how terrible it is to view our Lord Jesus, the Son of God, bowing His head to death in the sinner's place, and bearing in His own innocent person the wrath of God on account of sin. Our children's hymn puts the truth exactly:—

> "He saw how wicked men had been,
> And knew that God must punish sin;
> So, out of pity, Jesus said
> He'd bear the punishment instead."

In that verse, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings the Lord hath perfected praise. It was indeed a display of terrible things in righteousness when the perfect Son of God was made to sweat great drops of blood, and to be in an agony in Gethsemane. Terrible things in righteousness were manifest when He was scourged, and spit upon, and nailed to a tree and made to die without the comfort of His Father's presence, crying in anguish, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Ah, friends, when the Father's Best-beloved bore those unknown sufferings by which the honour of the divine government was maintained, it was a very terrible day. Not even the pains of the lost are more terrible for a tender and devout mind to think upon, than our Lord's being made a curse for us when He was hanged upon the tree. We seek salvation: the Lord Jehovah answers us, and bids us behold it in the blood of His Only-begotten Son—"By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God."

So, also, when God came to deal with us by His Spirit He mixed the terror with the grace. If you have been praying to God to save you, then, if He has answered you, you have had a vision of terrible things. To see your guilt, your present ruin, and your future doom, is to be made to tremble terribly. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes to our vessel, walking on the sea, He finds us in an awful storm. The sails are gone to ribbons, and every timber groans. We see ourselves wrecked by nature before we see ourselves saved by grace. Conviction of sin does not come to every sinner with the same degree of force; but to some of us when we were under the bondage of the law neither sun nor moon appeared, the sea wrought and was tempestuous, and all hope that we should be saved was taken away from us. We reeled to and fro, and staggered like drunken men, and were at our wits' ends; we did not then know that the God of our salvation has His way in the whirlwind. The Lord comes to us with a drawn sword before He comes with a silver sceptre. He designs to make us give up self-righteousness and self-confidence, and come and lay hold on Christ, to be our all in all. Men won't take to the life-boat of salvation while they think their own craft can be kept afloat; but when their vessel is settling down at the head they are glad to see the life-boat near.

The God of our salvation has revealed Himself to many of us, not as one who winks at sin, but as a consuming fire. In these days a god is preached who is not in the Bible, nor yet in the sea. Our God is not the new god of proud philosophers, but the God of the olden times. We know that the true God is just, as well as gracious, and will by no means allow His laws to be despised. You that go down to the sea in ships, you know that the God of the sea is terrible upon the roaring billows, when the sea runs mountains high. He is tender, and kind, and loving; but, oh, how terrible when He puts on His dark robes of tempest!

He sets the heavens on a blaze, and His terrible voice is heard above the roaring of the sea. The elements are in confusion; deep calleth unto deep, the heavens clasp hands with the ocean; and the largest vessel seems like a cockle-shell, soon to sink and no more to be seen. He is a dreadful God, this God of ours! There is none like Him in power and justice. Well may the seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" This makes us feel that He can smite with iron hand when once He comes forth to deal with sin. Behold the Red Sea! See how the adversaries of Jehovah sink into the bottom as a stone! He is terrible out of His holy places. He is the God of heaven; but a pit is digged for the wicked. The Lord makes His saved ones to know Him as He is, and not as He is made out to be by those who would seem to be wiser than the Scriptures.

I trust that many of you can say of the Lord, "He is the God of my salvation. Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is my hope and my joy." He is glorious in holiness, and terrible in righteousness; and I love Him all the more because He hates iniquity, and will not endure evil.

The difficulty with most men is that they will not have God to be their Saviour; they want to save themselves. Every man thinks he can be his own pilot to the port of glory. But what can we do? What merit? what wisdom? what strength have we? We are proud fools, and deceive ourselves. I have heard a story of a man on board a vessel which was coming home from the other side of the world. He was very conceited, and interfered with everything. Every now and then a captain does get such a man on board. He was always grumbling and making trouble. The ship met with rough weather, and this meddlesome gentleman picked up the notion that things were in a very bad way, and the ship might go down. He was getting into everybody's way, and so the captain, calling him on one side, told him that it was highly important that he should keep very quiet for the next hour or two; especially, that he should hold fast a certain rope to which he pointed him. Nobody could tell what might depend on his holding on to that rope, and saying nothing to anybody. Our noisy friend felt himself to be a person of consequence, put his feet down and set his teeth together, and in a very determined manner stuck to his rope. If anybody

came along, instead of talking, as he was used to do, he held his tongue. Just as you must not speak to the man at the wheel, so he felt that no one was allowed to speak to him. Did not the safety of the ship depend upon his being quiet and holding tightly to that rope? He kept his post with due gravity till the wind dropped, and then he did not say much; for his sense of merit made him modest, of course. He waited patiently for the passengers to present him with a piece of plate for having saved the ship. He felt, at any rate, that deep gratitude was due to him for his wonderful exertions. It was about the most difficult thing he had ever done in his life; for he had held his tongue for hours, and thus made a martyr of himself to save them all. As nobody thanked him, he began to hint at the importance of the service he had rendered. But they did not seem to see it; for, you know, people will not always see a thing that is very plain. At last he stated his case more fully, and became so exacting that the captain had to tell him that he had only given him that bit of rope to hold just to keep him quiet, and that, really, he had not contributed, in the least degree, to the safety of the vessel. That is just what I feel inclined to do with certain vastly important persons who think they can do wonders in the things of God. If you will keep from boasting, and stand out of the Lord's way, that is as much as I hope for from you. And if the Lord leads you to trust yourself in Jesus' hands, then all will be safe enough. With God to save us, what is there for us to do but to trust, and not to be afraid?

II. I have set forth what God is to us. Now, let us see WHAT GOD WILL DO FOR US. Don't doubt it, the Lord has an open ear to hear His people's prayers.

He will answer us. This shows that *we must all pray.* Every believing man in the world must pray; and we shall never get into such a state of grace that we have no need to pray.

But what do we pray for? Well, according to the text, one of the most important things is to *pray against sin.* "Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away." Do we not need to pray daily for cleansing? This must be the prayer of the man who is seeking the Lord for the first time. Does the leak of sin gain upon you? Are the pirates of temptation all around you so that you cannot get away from them? Are you compelled to say, "Iniquities prevail against me"? Cry to the Lord Jesus to come to the rescue. A word from Him will stop the leak, and drive the demons back when they are boarding you. Pray to Him at once.

Do I address a backslider? Did you once own the name of Christ? Have you taken down the old flag? Are you now trading under other colours? Are you sorry it is so? Do iniquities prevail against you? Ah, then, come to the Lord again! Ask Him to come and take possession of you. The pirates are on board now, and you cannot get rid of them; but as for your iniquities, He can "purge them away." He can sweep the deck of them.

If you have been long a Christian, and have not backslidden, you will have, as you grow in grace, more and more a sense of the sin that dwelleth in you. You will be crying out every day, "Lord, keep me; for I shall perish utterly, even now, after all my experience, unless Thou preserve me from my inbred sin, and the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil." Cry to God to-night in that fashion. Ask to be steered clear of all evil, and to be presented faultless. When we are close in shore we need a pilot more than ever. We shall be wrecked in the river's mouth unless the Lord preserve us. Iniquities will prevail unless omnipotent grace prevails. In this direction we shall always need to cry mightily unto the Preserver of men.

We also pray *for nearer fellowship with God.* Just let me read you the next words. "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causeth to approach unto Thee." Lord, help me to approach unto Thee, so as to know Thy love and love Thee in return. Let us go on reading the record: "That he may dwell in Thy courts." Lord, help me to be one of Thy court, and always to live in Thy presence.

"We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple." Do you not long for that satisfaction? Is there not in your hearts, my beloved brethren, a great desire to get nearer to God, and to abide in His house?

Oh, to have a continual enjoyment of the favour of God! May the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost! Blessed be the name of the Lord our God, He will hear and answer that prayer. As He will help you to conquer sin, so will He also help you to grow in grace. There is no reason why we should not be far happier and far holier than we are. If we are straitened at all, we are not straitened in God, but in ourselves. It is not that there is no wind, but we do not spread enough sail. If you do not enter into the deep things of God with understanding, and if you do not enjoy them with delight, you must blame yourselves. You have not, because you ask not, or because you ask amiss. If a man will not take the tide while it flows, it will be his own fault if the ebb bears him away from the harbour. If we pray, God will answer.

But, remember, if we pray to be delivered from sin, and to be brought nearer to the Lord, *He may answer us by terrible things in righteousness.* I would like to whisper these words in the ears of all praying men. Often you know not what you ask; and perhaps if you really knew how God would answer you, you would not pray as you now do. You were praying the other day that God would sanctify you, and now you see more of the workings of evil in your nature than ever before. Crosses and losses have come upon you thick and threefold; temptations and evil thoughts have beset you more fiercely than ever; and you are saying, "Lord, is this the answer to my prayer?" Yes, by terrible things in righteousness He is answering you. The sheep desires to be brought nearer to the shepherd, and the shepherd sends his black dog to fetch it home. Our trials and troubles, afflictions and adversities, are among the best medicines of our Great Physician. A trial has been love's reply to earnest desire. God's wisdom often chooses to give us a head wind to prevent our rushing upon sunken rocks.

Dear friends, *God will answer you surely, though He answer you strangely.* He answers roughly, but rightly. The help of no other can suffice you; but if you cry to God you shall find His strength to be all-sufficient, both for crushing sin and for growth in grace. See what the Lord has been doing for the earth during the last few weeks of Spring! Only a few weeks ago we went out of doors and saw nothing but the earth wrapped in a winding-sheet of snow, or, perhaps, the dull, black ground soaking in rain. Where were the myriads of leaves that now clothe

the trees, and where the kingcups and daisies which bedeck the meadows and make them bright as cloth of gold? Where was all this wealth of flowers? Where all this music of song birds? God came. He breathed in pity on the frozen brooks, and loosed the waters from their icy chains. He unbound the iron bonds of winter. He made the world look up and laugh with flowers. Brethren, He will do the same with us. Though this may be the winter of our soul's grief, and it may be needful that we should endure it for a little while longer, yet He will answer us, and after an interval of terrible storm He will bless us with rest and joy.

III. The third point is this: WHAT THE LORD IS TO "THE ENDS OF THE EARTH." He is "the confidence of the ends of the earth." All men have a confidence, and they are wise who place all their confidence in God.

Who are "the ends of the earth"? They may be those who live in the extremes of climate—the dwellers at the poles and at the equator. These are so tried by cold and by heat, that one would think they would hardly live in such regions if they did not confide in God. Those who live at the ends of the earth *are farthest off.* God is worthy to be the confidence of those who are farthest off from His Church, from His gospel, from hope, from anything that is good, and from God Himself. This sermon may, one of these days, reach somebody who will say to himself, "I think that I am the farthest off from God of anybody that ever lived. I have been guilty of cursing and swearing, and I have committed all manner of vice, and so I have gone as far away from God and the very name of religion as it is possible for a man to go." Friend, our God is worthy to be *your* confidence, even yours. You are premitted to put your trust in Him and find salvation in Him, even in His Son Jesus Christ, who cries "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

The ends of the earth may mean, also, *those that are least known.* Are there not men scattered abroad of whom nobody knows anything? They do not themselves know who their father and mother were, and nobody cares to own them. Nobody calls them brother, or knows where they came from. They wish to be forgotten; they would not like to have their stories told. Their character is such that they can get on better without it than with it. Well, but Jesus Christ is worthy to be the confidence of those who are least known. They are known to Him: He knows their past and their present. Oh, that sinners who are far off in that way, and least known, would come and put their trust in Him!

The ends of the earth are *the parts that are least thought of.* We dart a thought towards France with its Exhibition; we think of Germany and its vast army; we think of the United States and the many there of our kith and kin. These lie within the pale of our thoughts and consideration; but who cares for Dahomey or Nova Zembla? Of the ends of the earth no one thinks. Do I speak to one who has been saying, "No man cares for my soul"? Do they quite pass you by? Are you like a man on a raft, who has seen many a vessel go by, but cannot manage to make any one see him and come to his rescue? Put your trust in the Lord, ye who are derelict, and drifting fast to destruction; for "He is the confidence of all the ends of the earth." Looking to God when you have no one else to look to, you will find in Him a true helper.

The ends of the earth may also mean *the most tried.* Where the cold is most severe, or where the dog-star burns most furiously, there we have the ends of the earth. And you who are most poor or most sick, or who have least of ability and talent, you are those who should make God your confidence, for He delights to be the strength of the weak, the fulness of the empty. God's grace is the hospital for sick souls; come ye and enter it. He lifts the poor from the dunghill to set him among princes. Driven to your wits' end, brought down to life's dregs, take the Lord for your confidence, and it shall be well with you.

"The ends of the earth." Well, they are *the hardest to reach.* We have around us men and women who are as hard to get at as the North Pole. We do not know how to speak to them so that they will understand us, for they are so ignorant. We would, if we could, do them good, but they are so depraved that we are half afraid that they will do *us* harm. It may be, they are so proud and conceited that we can hardly get a good word in edgeways with them. Sailors, you must have met with fellows to whom you give a wide berth. You never felt inclined to take them on board. These ships are too far gone to be towed into harbour; and you clear out, lest when they sink you should be sucked down with them. Yet the Lord is ready to help even these. Those whom no man can pity, and no man can help, God can love and save. A mortal arm is too short to reach these shipwrecked souls. Cast away on an iron-bound coast, there is no hope for them but in the God of salvation; but in Him they may trust; for "He is the confidence of the ends of the earth." Ho, my comrades, when you are at your worst, God is still at His best. When you are all misery, He is all mercy. When you are at "the ends of the earth," you may be at the beginnings of heaven.

IV. I shall not weary you, I trust, for I have come to the last point, which is this; WHAT IS GOD TO SEA-FARING MEN? What should He be to sailors? He is the confidence of all them that are "afar off upon the sea."

In the life of a sea-faring man we have a picture of *the voyage of faith.* Hundreds of years ago, when men went to sea at all, their boats kept always within sight of shore. Your Greek or Roman mariner might be quite master of his galley; but he could not bear to lose sight of a headland which he knew; for he had no compass, and knew little or nothing of astronomical observations. Here and there a light-house might be placed, but it would be regarded as a wonder. But at this day a ship may not sight land for a month, and yet its position on the chart will be as certain as your position in the pew. The vessel will be steered entirely by observations of the heavenly bodies, and by chart and compass; and yet at the end of thirty days it will reach a point which was never within sight, and reach it as accurately as if it had been running on a tram-rail instead of sailing over the pathless ocean. Its way is as certain as if it had traversed a railway from port to port. Such is the life of a Christian—the life of faith. We see not spiritual things, but yet we steer for them with absolute certainty. We ought not to wish to see; for "We walk by faith, not by sight." We take our bearings by the things in the heavens. We are guided by the Word of God, which is our chart, and by the witness of the blessed Spirit within, which is our compass. We see Him who is invisible, and we

seek a heaven full of "things not seen as yet." Glory be to God, we shall reach the harbour as sure as a bullet goes to the mark. We are making direct tracks for the kingdom. We fly to heaven by a bee line, even when we cannot see our way. Don't shift a point, brothers. As the Captain of your salvation has set the helm, so let it remain. Trusting in God, we shall come to our desired haven in due time, and shall not miss our way. We need not fear shipwreck; for He that taught us to sail the spiritual sea will guide us safely till we come to the Glory Land.

Those that are "afar off upon the sea" are *on an unstable element*, but God is their confidence. They are never quiet, the boat is always rocking or rolling from side to side. On the sea they have no continuing city. Is it not so with us? We also dwell upon an unstable element. We talk of the solid earth, but it is only so in contrast with the waves. All things beneath the moon are changing. When I went to my annual resting-place in Mentone, after the earthquake, I felt a delight in realising that everything around me was unsubstantial. I looked at the churches and the houses which had tumbled down, and I said to myself, "Now I feel how unstable the earth is." I went up and down stairs, wondering that the house did not move; regarding it all as likely to give way. Some such impression would be good for us all to carry daily about with us. We live in a world which passeth away. This life is made up of shadows: substance lies elsewhere. The things which are seen are temporal. You have dreamed yourselves into the belief that you live in a solid, substantial world; but it is only a dream, for the world passeth away. The elements which make up our life are no more to be depended upon than the waters of the sea. What is our life, but a vapour? What does it depend upon but air?—the breath of our nostrils. Remember, you may die at any moment. Death may board you before the next watch. Oh, to live like a man at sea! He has loosed his hold from all things and feels himself committed to an unstable element, upon whose calm condition he cannot depend; for at any moment a storm may bear him away. The godly sailors confidence is in God. In God he has a foundation that cannot be moved. God is the mariner's *terra firma*, and He is ours. All else is fickle, but God is immutable.

Next, they that are upon the sea are *liable to great dangers*. They cannot tell at any time that there may not come up from the North a howling blast, or from the South a tremendous cyclone. When above them all is clear blue, save "a cloud the size of a man's hand," they know that within an hour the heavens may gather blackness, and the sea, which now sleeps in calm, may rage in fury. A sailor's life makes him see the dangers which surround him; but you and I know that we also live in a world where tempests of trial may be upon us in a moment. When I go home after a time of spiritual enjoyment, and feel supremely happy, I say to myself, "I may expect trying news. I cannot be long at ease." In fact, one gets in this world to be afraid of too profound a calm, lest at the back of it should lurk a terrible tempest. Our sign is "The Chequers," and close to the white squares lies the black. At sea we may reckon upon all sorts of weathers: we must therefore keep the boat trim, and never neglect to set the helm, and keep the watch wide awake. The sailor must keep his eyes open; for rocks and quicksands lies below, and hurricanes and cyclones lurk above. If he is a Christian man, his confidence is in his God, and his watchfulness is towards the world. O true believer, let your confidence be in God, whether on sea or shore. Say, "O God, my heart is fixed; my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise." What if there should be the devil himself let loose upon us, as upon Job of old? Let us still trust in the Lord. When God gives the devil rope enough he will soon be down upon us; but, brethren, we need not fear him, for Christ is the master of the devil, and he can pull him up short when he comes rushing out to attack us. Let us not be afraid. He that is the confidence of them that are afar off upon the sea shall be our confidence in a world of storms.

But the men on the sea also *are familiar with trouble*. It is not only liability to storm, but the storm does break over them. I speak to many who have weathered no end of tempests. In your voyages across the mighty deep, you have found it no child's play to be tossed up and down like a ball in the hand of the storm. You have even been floating on the angry waves, clinging to a hen-coop, or lashed to the rigging. I do not envy you your trying experience; but, spiritually, we drink from the same cup; for we, too, have had our rough passage, and have been well-nigh cast away.

You do not want to see any more of such nights as you can remember, when sea and sky were blended in dread confusion; neither do I wish to see those months in which to me also the winds were contrary. What a mercy in such seasons to have confidence in God! What is to be done if this fails us? But while God is with us it does not matter whether we live or die. We shall be with the Lord if we die, and if we live the Lord will be with us.

Beloved friends, those that go down to the sea in ships *soon find out their own weakness*. A man looks like a man when he is on shore, or in command of a fine barque sailing along merrily before the wind; but in a great storm what a poor creature a man is. There he goes: yonder wave has swept him from the deck as if he were a spar. You hear one plaintive cry, and it is all over with him. The hungry deep thinks nothing of so small a mouthful. The wind howls still, and the waves dance with a horrid glee. If not thus drowned, the strong man is often rendered useless as to helping others. He cannot stir, for he could not keep his footing. He needs to be lashed to the rigging, or he will be washed away. The bravest, the wisest, the strongest man is just nothing at all in the day of storm. Then the man almost envies the sea-bird that is tossed "up and down, up and down, from the base of the wave to the billow's crown"; because it is always safe, and comes up from the spray as fresh as ever. Dear friends, you and I are often brought into conditions in which we feel that we are not worth half so much as the sea-swallows. We have no strength left at all; we are less than nothing and vanity. Oh, then, let God be our confidence!

I exhort all believers here to have more confidence in God than in all beside. Believe in the Lord a thousand fathoms deep. You will never believe too much nor too well of God. If friends forsake, if all means of comfort fail, let your confidence be so thoroughly in God that such things make no difference to you. It is a grand thing to get off the stocks, and really float on the main sea. It is glorious to have an anchor in the skies, and to hold to that alone, when

everything else is dragging, and the earth itself is dissolved. A sailor is often brought to where, if God does not help him, he will be swallowed up; and you and I are always in the like condition. God is our all and we rest in Him, but apart from Him we are wrecked eternally.

God bless you, my shipmates! We are not yet come to the Pacific Seas; we still are rounding the Cape of Storms, but another name for it is the Cape of Good Hope. With God for our confidence we are not afraid. We shall all meet around the flag-ship of our Great Captain in the Fair Havens above. We are lying in these roads to-night very near each other; but may never cross each other's track again on this life's voyage. Meet me in the Islands of the Blessed in the Land of the Hereafter, where the sun shall go no more down for ever. The Lord Jesus steer you thither. Amen.

THE MINSTRELSY OF HOPE

" God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us."—Psalm lxvii. 6, 7.

"GOD, even our own God." What an exceedingly sweet title! What a loveliness and liveliness of heart must have been in the man who first applied that endearing name to the God of Jacob! Though it be thousands of years ago since the sweet singer of Israel thus spake of the Lord of Hosts, the name has a freshness and even a novelty about it to believing ears, " *God, even our own God.*" I cannot resist touching that string again, the note is so enchanting to my soul! That word " *own*," or " *our own*," seems always to throw an atmosphere of delicious fragrance about anything with which it is connected. If it be our country—

> " Lives there a man with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself hath said,
> ' This is *my own*, my native land ' ? "

Whether it be a land of brown heath and shaggy wood, or a far extended plain, all men love their own fatherland, and in exile they are smitten with home sickness for their own country. It is so with regard to the house in which we were reared. That old roof tree, that ancient homestead—it may have been covered with thatch, and have been one of a group of poor cottages, but still it was our own home, and a thousand kindly thoughts gather around the fireside where we in childhood nestled beneath a parent's wing. " Our own; " why, all our relatives are endeared to us by the fact that they are our own. " Father " is a silver word at all times; but " our father," " our own father," how the name grows richer and turns to a golden word! " Our own child," " our own brother," " our own husband," " our own wife "—the words are most melodious. We even feel the Bible to be all the dearer to us because we can speak of it as " our own old English Bible." As the Jew's book, coming from God in Hebrew; as a book for the Greek, coming in its latter half to the Gentile in the Greek tongue, it was a priceless treasure; but translated into our own familiar Saxon tongue, and on the whole translated so well, our own English Bible is doubly dear to us. The sweetness of the words, " our own " led me to call the hymn-book from which you sing, " Our Own Hymn-book," hoping that perchance the very name might help to weave your affections round about it. But what shall I say of " *our own God* " ? Words fail to express the depths of joy and delight which is contained within these three monosyllables, " Our own God." " Our own " by the eternal covenant in which He gave Himself to us with all His attributes, with all that He is and has, to be our portion for ever and ever. " The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." " Our own God," by our own choice of Him, a choice most free, but guided by His eternal Spirit, so that we who should have chosen our own ruin, were sweetly led to make our election of the Lord, because He had made His election of us. " Our own God," ours to trust, ours to love, ours to fly to in every dark and troublous night, ours to commune with in every bright and balmy day, ours to be our guide in life, our help in death, and our glory in immortality. " Our own God," affording us His wisdom to guide our path, His power to sustain our steps, His love to comfort our lives, His every attribute to enrich with more than royal wealth. The man who can truthfully, out of a pure heart, look up to the throne of the infinite Jehovah, and call Him, " Mine own God," hath said a more eloquent thing than ever flowed from the lips of Demosthenes, or fell from the tongue of Cicero. You are favoured beyond all men, you to whom this is a household word, " our own God."

> " Our God! how pleasant is the sound!
> How charming to repeat!
> Well may those hearts with pleasure bound,
> Who thus their Lord can greet! "

Methinks the Psalmist used this expression in this sublime ode as a kind of argument and assurance of the blessing which he foretold. " God shall bless us " —that is true, it is to be believed—but, " our own God shall bless us," that sentence flashes conviction upon the most timorous; it wears assurance as a frontlet between its eyes; it bears upon its surface its own evidence. If the Lord has been gracious enough to make Himself our own God, He did not do this for nothing, there is a loving intention in it; if in the tenderness of His compassion He has said, " I will be their God, and they shall be My people," it must be with a design to bless us with unspeakable blessings in Christ Jesus. Covertly there is a powerful reason urged in the delightful title, and the more we think upon it the more we shall see it.

This morning I intend simply to keep to the words, " God shall bless us, God shall bless us." They have been sounding in my ears like far-off bells, ringing their way with a march of music into the deeps of my soul. May the same angelic melody charm the ears of all my brethren in Christ Jesus. " God shall bless us; God shall bless us."

Three personified passions I shall introduce into the pulpit this morning, and we shall discourse with them a little, or let them speak with us.

I. The first is FEAR.

Pale-faced fear will be found everywhere, she meddles with every matter, intruding into the bed-chamber of Faith, and disturbing the banquets of Hope. Fear lodges with some as an abiding guest, and is entertained as though she were a dear, familiar friend. What does Fear say to us this morning in reply to our cheering text? Fear enquires "Will God indeed bless us; for of late He Has withheld His hand? There have been many hopeful signs, but they have disappointed us. We have expected the blessing long, we have thought we have seen the signs of it, but it has not come. We have heard of revivals and rumours of revivals; men have risen up who have preached the Word with power, and in some districts, there have been many conversions, but still, to a great extent, we have not received the blessing, God has not visited us as of old. We have seen the early cloud and expected rain, watched the morning dew and hoped for moisture, but all these have vanished, and we are still left without the blessing. A thousand disappointments past lead us to fear that the blessing may not come." Listen, O Fear, and be comforted. What if thou, too hasty and rash, hast misjudged the will of the Lord, is this any reason why He should forget His promise and refuse to hear the voice of prayer? Clouds have passed over the sky every day these many weeks, and we have said full often, "Surely it must rain, and the thirsty fields must be refreshed," but not a drop as yet has fallen; yet rain it must ere long. Even so is it with God's mercy. It may not come to-day, and to-morrow may not see it, but still He is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness. He has His own appointed time, and He will be punctual to it, for, while He never is before it He never is behind it: in due season, in answer to the entreaties of His people, He will give them a shower of liberalities; all manner of gracious blessings shall descend from His right hand; He will rend the heavens, and in majesty come down—for "God shall bless us."

"Yes," says Fear, "but we have seen so many counterfeits of the blessing. We have seen revivals in which intense excitement has seemed for a season to produce great results, but the excitement has subsided, and the results have disappeared. Have we not again and again heard the sound of trumpets, and the loud boastings of men, but vain-glory was the sum of it?" This is most sorrowfully true. There is no doubt that much of revivalism has been a sham; that there has been a wind-bag filling—a bladder-blowing in the Christian Church, which has been terribly mischievous; the very name of "revival," has been made to stink in some places by reason of the mischiefs associated therewith. But this is no reason why there should not yet come a glorious and real revival from the presence of the Lord; and such, my brethren, I earnestly hope for, and vehemently pray for. Remember the revival which passed over New England in the days of Jonathan Edwards. No one could call that spurious; it was as true and real as any work of God on the face of the earth could be. Nor could any one describe the work of Whitfield and of Wesley as a mere spasm or a thing of transient existence; it was God's right hand made bare and put to the work of grace in a marvellous manner; and a work was done which exists in England to this day, and shall remain even to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may expect then, since it has been already given at other times, that God will bless His people with real and substantial advances, and will yet come to the front and make His enemies see that there is an irresistible power in the gospel of Jesus Christ. O Fear, remember, if thou wilt, the delusions of the past to be counselled thereby, but do not recall them as reasons for being dispirited and cast down, for God, even our own God, *shall* bless us.

But Fear replies, "See how much there is in *the present* which is unlike a blessing, and which, instead of prophesying good, portendeth evil! How few there are," saith Fear, "who are proclaiming the gospel boldly and simply, and how many, on the other hand, oppose the gospel with their philosophies or with their superstitions." But listen, O Fear, "God shall bless us," few though we be, for He saveth not by many nor by few. Remember His servant Gideon, and how he went up to the fight against the Midianites, not with the thousands, for they were too many for the Lord of Hosts, but with the few hundred men that lapped, and with these, with no other weapons than their broken pitchers, and uncovered lamps, and sounding trumpets, with these did He put to rout the multitudes of Midian. Say not that Omnipotence can be short of instruments; He could quicken the very dust by the seashore into preachers of the gospel if He pleased, and if He wanted tongues to tell out of His love, He could make each stone a preacher, or each twinkling leaf upon the trees a witness for Jesus. It is not instrumentality that is necessary first and foremost, we need most the power which moves the instrumentality, which makes the weakest strong, and without which even the strongest are but weak. We heard it said, the other day, that the religion of Jesus Christ could not be expected to prosper in some places unless it had a fair start. Did that remark come from an infidel, or from a bishop? If I were asked and knew not, I know what my answer would be. A fair start indeed! Put the religion of Jesus Christ into any arena, and it asks but liberty to use its weapons; and even where that is denied it, it triumphs still. It only wants its own innate strength to be developed, and to be let alone by the kings and princes of this world, and it will work its own way. To be let alone, I said: let them oppose it if they like, yet still our faith will overcome the regal opposition; only let them withdraw their patronage, that deadly thing which paralyses all spiritual life, and the unshackled truth of God will most surely prevail. We do not tremble, then, we must not, because the servants of God may be poor, or may not be gifted, or may be but few. God *shall*, even our own God, shall bless us; and if we be few, as the twelve fishermen, and as unlettered as they, yet as the twelve fishermen made old Rome's empire to shake from end to end, and laid colossal systems of idolatry even with the ground, even so will the Christianity of to-day, if God do but return in power unto her, in the midst of her weakness wax valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens.

But Fear findeth always room for murmuring, and therefore she saith, "*The future*, the black and gloomy future! What have we to expect from this wicked generation, this perverse people, but that we shall be given up once more to be devoured by the jaws of Antichrist, or to be lost in the mists of infidelity?" "Our prospects are indeed appalling," so Fear says, though I confess, not using her telescope, I discern no such signs of the times. Yet Fear saith so, and there may be reason in it; yet whatever that reason may be, it is counterbalanced in our mind by the

belief that God, even our own God, will bless us. Why should He change? He has helped His Church aforetime, why not now? Is she undeserving? She always was so. Does she backslide? She has done so oft-times before, yet has He visited her, and restored her, and why not now? Instead of forebodings, and fears, there seems to me cause for the brightest expectations, if we can only fall back upon the divine promise, and believe that God, even our own God, shall yet, in this very age, bless us as He was wont to do in days of old. Remember the ship tossed with tempest on the Galilean lake. There was, indeed, a dreary out-look for the steersman of the boat. She must, ere long, be driven on the rocky headland, and she and her cargo must sink beneath the wave. Not so, not so, for see ye not walking upon the billows, which congeal to glass beneath His feet, the Man who loves the company within the vessel, and will not see them die? It is Jesus walking on the waves of the sea. He comes into the vessel, and immediately the calm is as profound as if wave had not lifted its head, nor wind had blown. So in the darkest times of the Church's history, Jesus has always in due time appeared walking upon the waves of her troubles, and then her rest has been glorious. Let us not, therefore, be afraid, but casting fear away, let us rejoice with gladdest expectation. What can there be to fear? "God is with us." Is not that the battle-cry before which devils fly, and all the hosts of evil turn their backs? "Immanuel, God with us!" Who dare stand against that? Who will defy the Lion of the tribe of Judah? Ah, bring your might, and come to push of pike, ye mighty ones, but if God be for us, who can be against us, or if against us, who can stand? God is our own God, will He let His own Church be trampled in the mire? Shall the bride of Christ be led into captivity? Shall His beloved, whom He bought with blood, be delivered into the hands of her enemies? God forbid! because He is God, because He is for us, because He is our own God, therefore set we up our banners, and each man among us cheerily sings—

> "For yet I know I shall Him praise,
> Who graciously to me
> The health is of my countenance,
> Yea, mine own God is He."

II. We shall change the strain altogether when we introduce a second character, namely, DESIRE.

Quick of step, bright of eye, warm of heart, Desire saith, "Ah, God shall bless us, but oh that we had the blessing! We hunger and we thirst after it; we are covetous for it as the miser after gold." Therefore, Desire saith, "But what blessing will come, and after what fashion shall our own God bless us?" The reply to Desire is this: when God comes to bless His people He bringeth all grace with Him; for in the treasures of the covenant there are not some things, but all things, not a few supplies for some of the Church's necessities, but a redundant store from which all her needs shall be replenished. When the Lord shall bless His Church, He will give to all her members the grace of revival; they will begin to live after a higher, nobler, happier sort than they have done before. To bestir the church, and make it active, is one of the highest gifts of the Holy Ghost, and this is greatly wanted. I believe it is wanted among us. Some of the most earnest Christians out of heaven are members of this church; but some are a very long way off from that, and need to be brought into a sounder spiritual state. What is true of this one church is true of all the churches of Jesus Christ. They are too much like the virgins who slept because the bridegroom came not—too much apathy, too little love to God, too little consecration to His cause, too little pining and panting after the souls of men. When the Lord shall visit His Church, the first effect will be the quickening of the life of His own beloved: then will the blessing come in the next shape, namely, conversions in her borders, and additions to her membership. I hope that we shall never think that God is blessing us unless we see sinners saved. It is a very solemn delusion when ministers think they are prospering, and yet do not hear of conversions. We, I trust, will be most uneasy if conversions should slacken in number among us. If God return to us, and to all His Churches, the cry will be heard on the right hand and on the left, "What must we do to be saved?" The astonished church will see such a multitude of children born to her, that she will cry in amazement, "Who hath begotten these? Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" When these two blessings come, a quickened church and souls converted, then will be fulfilled the word of the Lord, "The Lord will give strength unto His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace." The Church will be strong. She will have wherewithal to refute her adversaries by pointing to her converts. She will become bold because she sees the result of her work. She will cease to doubt, for faith will be replenished with evidences. Then peace will reign. The young converts shall bring in a flood of new joy; their fresh blood shall make the old blood of the Church to leap in its veins, and old and young rejoicing together, shall rejoice in the abundance of peace. Brethren, I would if I had time this morning, paint you a picture of a church blessed of God; but we must not; you know what it is—many of you have been members of such a church. May the blessing continue, may it be increased, and may all the churches throughout Christendom receive the benediction from the God of Israel, such as shall make them rejoice with joy unspeakable.

But Desire says, "I see what the blessing is, but in what degree will God give it, and in what measure may we expect it?" We say to Desire, "O thou large-hearted one, God will give thee according to the measure of thy confidence in Him." We are all too soon satisfied when the blessing begins to drop from above. We stop, like the king of old, when we have shot but one or two arrows, and deserve to be rebuked in the language of the prophet, "Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times, then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it." We are content with drops when we might have the cup full to the brim; we are childishly satisfied with a mere cruse of water when we might have flagons, firkins, rivers, oceans, if we had but faith enough to receive them. If there should be half-a-dozen persons converted to-day in this house, we should all be jubilant with thanksgiving, but ought we not to be sorry if there are not half-a-dozen hundred? Who are we that, by our narrow expectations, we limit the Holy One of Israel? Can we draw a line around Omnipotence and say, "Hitherto shalt Thou go, but no further"? Were it not wiser to extend our desires, and expand our hopes, since we have to deal with One who knows neither limit nor boundary? Why not look for years of plenty, eclipsing the famous seven of Egypt? Why not expect clusters excelling those of Eshcol?

Why are we so mean, so dwarfed, so straitened in our expectancies? Let us grasp at greater things, for it is reasonable, with the Lord to trust in, to look for greater things. I reckon upon days in which every sermon shall shake the house with its power, in which the hearers shall be converted to God by thousands, as in the day of Pentecost. Was that to be the greatest trophy of God's power, the Pentecost? Is the first sheaf to be greater than the harvest? How can it be? We do believe that if God will again visit His Church, and I trust He is going to do so, we shall see nations born in a day, and the gospel of Jesus, which has painfully limped like a wounded hind, will suddenly take to itself wings as of a mighty angel, and fly throughout the midst of heaven, proclaiming Jesus Christ both Lord and God. Why not? Who can justify the absence of the liveliest hope, since He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we ask or even think?

I hear Desire say, "Yes, I understand what the blessing is, and that it can be had in any measure, but how is it to be obtained, and when will it come?" Follow me in a very brief review of the psalm before us, because that will help us to answer the question, When is it that "God, even our own God, shall bless us?" The psalm begins with "God be merciful unto us"; that is the voice of a penitent people, confessing their past misdeeds. God will bless His Church when she acknowledges her faults and humbles herself; when, with an evangelical repentance, she stands before the mercy-seat, and cries, "God be merciful unto us." We must never expect that the Lord will bless a proud and conceited church, a hard-hearted and indifferent church. When humbled and laid in the dust under a sense of her own shortcomings, then shall God be pleased to look upon her in mercy. I gather from the tenor of the first verse, that God blesses His people when they begin to pray, as well as when they confess their sins. The prayer is urgent, humble, and believing, and therefore it must speed. "God be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us." These agonising desires are a part of the wailing of a church conscious of having somewhat lost the blessing, and ill at ease until it is restored. We are sure to receive the benediction from God when the entire church is instant and constant in intercession. Prayer is the best resort of an earnest people. Are we not witnesses of it? We have had prayer meetings in this house, in which we have all been stirred as the trees of the wood are moved in the wind, and then we have always had the presence of God afterwards in the conversion of souls. Our best praying times have always been followed by joyful harvest homes. The churches everywhere must be prayerful, intensely so, or else they cannot expect that the sound of abundance of rain should be heard throughout their land. Awake to confess sin, O Zion, awake to soul-travail for the souls of men, and then shall God, thy Lord, visit thee from on high. Come, Holy Spirit, and arouse Thy slumbering people; bestir Thy sluggard host, for when Thy power is felt, then hath the bright day of triumph dawned upon us.

As the psalm runs, it speaks not so much of prayer as of praise, "Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase." The Church of God needs to get into a better state with regard to her praising her God. When mercy is received, if we accept it silently, and without gratitude, we cannot expect to have more; but when every drop of favour makes us bless the Lord who gives to such undeserving ones, we shall soon have more, and yet more, and more. The praise ought to be universal. "Let *all* the people praise thee." It ought to be joyful and hearty, each man rejoicing in the exercise, and casting all his strength into it. When shall we all wake up to this, when shall all the Lord's elect magnify His glorious name as they should do? When shall we sing at our work, sing in our households, sing everywhere the praises of God? If prayer and praise be sacredly blended, and the Church become thoroughly anxious for the divine blessing, then God, even our God, will bless us.

If I were asked now to give some indications as to when a blessing may be expected, I should have to run somewhat in the same vein as we did last Thursday evening, but that I cannot avoid. I believe that when a great visitation of mercy is coming upon the Church there are certain signs which are given to the more spiritual, which assure them that it is coming. Elijah could hear "a sound of abundance of rain" before a single drop had fallen, and many a saint of God has had the conviction that a time of refreshing is coming long before it has come. Some souls are especially sensitive to divine workings, just as some men's bodies are peculiarly sensitive to changes of weather before they arrive. As Columbus was sure that he was coming to land, because he saw strange land birds and floating pieces of sea-weed and broken wood, so oftentimes the Christian minister feels sure that he is drawing near to a time of amazing blessing. He can scarce tell another why he feels so sure, and yet the indications to him are all-sufficient. There are doves that come flying into our hands that tell us that the waters of indifference and worldliness are assuaging; they bring us olive branches of hopeful graces flourishing among our people, which let us know that the time to favour Zion is surely coming. Have you never seen the ancient seer arise and take his harp down from the wall, begin to tune it, put every string in order, lay his fingers amongst the unaccustomed strings, and commence to sweep the strings with unusual energy of delight? Have you not enquired of him. "Harper grey, minstrel consecrated to the Lord, wherefore dost thou strike thy harp with song so full of cheer?" He replies, "Because I see afar the silken banners of a triumphant host returning victorious from the fray. It is the Church made more than conqueror through Him who loved her. I hear the moving of the wings of angels; they are rejoicing over penitents, and the Church is glad, for her glory returneth, seeing that her sons are many." Men enlightened with the light of heaven feel the shadow of the coming mercy, and hear the far-off wheels of the chariot of mercy.

These tokens, of course, will only be appreciable by the few, but there are others, tokens which are instructive to the many. It is a very certain sign that the Lord will bless His people, when they feel in themselves an unusual and insatiable craving for the divine visitation, when they feel as if the Church could not go on longer as she now is doing; begin to fret, and pant, and sigh, and hunger and thirst after something better. I would to God that all the members of this church were gloriously dissatisfied without more conversions. And when this dissatisfaction arises in the Christian mind, pretty generally it is a sure indication that God is enlarging the hearts of His people, that they may receive a larger blessing. Then there will come into prepared minds sacred heavings of intense excitement, throes of awful

purpose, mysterious longings to which they were strangers before. These will gravitate into impulses which they will be unable to resist. Men will suddenly find a tongue who had been dumb before; others will become mighty in prayer who never were known as master suppliants up to that moment. There will be tears in eyes long dry aforetime. We shall find professors talking to sinners and winning converts who kept in the rear in days now past, and were never zealous until now. These stirrings of God's hand, these sacred and mysterious motions of His ever-blessed Spirit, are signs that He intends to bless His Church, and that to a large degree. And, brethren, when every man begins to search himself, to see whether there is any obstacle in him to the blessing; when every single member of the church exposes his heart to the search of God, and cries, "Take away from me everything that hinders Thy work, fit me for greater usefulness, put me where Thou wilt win glory by me, for I am consecrated to Thee," then we shall hear the sound as of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, as David of old; then shall we see the flowers spring up, and we shall know that the time of the singing of birds is drawing near, and that spring and summer are close at hand. God send us more and more of these gracious signs! I think I see them even now. Perhaps my wish is father to my thought, but I think I see comfortable signs that God intends to visit His Zion, even now: and if we will but believe it, will but accept it, and work in accordance with such expectation, unitedly praying and praising, and labouring and striving, rest assured this year, eighteen hundred and sixty-eight, will not come to its close without such a display of the divine power as shall make it an *annus mirabilis*, a year of our Lord, a year of grace, a year whose days shall be as the days of heaven upon the earth.

III. Lastly, I introduce to you a far fairer being than either of the other two—the sweet bright-eyed maiden HOPE.

Have you never heard the story of her matchless song? She learned in her youth a song, which she sings evermore to the accompaniment of a well-tuned harp. Here are the words of her enchanting lay: "God will bless us, God will bless us." She has often been heard singing this in the night, and, lo! stars have suddenly shone out of the black sky. "God will bless us." She has been known to sing this in the midst of tempests, and calms have followed the soothing song. Once on a time, certain strong labourers were sent forth by the great King to level a primeval forest, to plough it, to sow it, and to bring to Him the harvest. They were stout-hearted and strong, and willing enough for labour, and well they needed all their strength and more. One stalwart labourer was named Industry—consecrated work was his. His brother Patience, with thews of steel, went with him, and tired not in the longest days, under the heaviest labours. To help them they had Zeal, clothed with ardent and indomitable energy. Side by side, there stood his kinsman Self-denial, and his friend Importunity. These went forth to their labour, and they took with them, to cheer their toils, their well-beloved sister Hope; and well it was they did, for the forest trees were huge, and needed many sturdy blows of the axe ere they would fall prone upon the ground. One by one they yielded, but the labour was immense and incessant. At night when they went to their rest, the day's work always seemed so light, for as they crossed the threshold, Patience wiping the sweat from his brow, would be encouraged, and Self-denial would be strengthened, for they heard a sweet voice within sing, "God will bless us, God even our own God, will bless us." They felled the giant trees to the music of that strain; they cleared the acres one by one; they tore from their sockets the huge roots; they delved the soil; they sowed the corn and waited for the harvest, often much discouraged, but still in silver chains and golden fetters by the sweet sound of the voice which chanted so constantly," "God, even our own God, will bless us." They never could refrain from service, for she never could refrain from song. They were ashamed to be discouraged, they were shocked to be despairing, for still the voice rang clearly out at morn and eventide. "God will bless us, God even our own God, will bless us." You know the parable, you recognise the voice: may you hear it in your souls to-day!

God will bless us! We are few, too few for this great work, but God will bless us, and therefore we are enough. We are feeble, but little taught, with little experience and slender wisdom, but God will bless us, and we shall be wise enough and strong enough. We are undeserving, full of sin, fickle and frail; but God will bless us, and our undeservingness shall be a foil in which to set the precious diamond of His mercy. God *will* bless us—there are glorious promises which guarantee the blessing; they must be kept, for they are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. The nations must bow down before Messias; Ethiopia must stretch out her arms to receive her King. God *will* bless us. He has blessed His people. Let Egypt tell how God overthrew His Israel's enemies. Let Canaan witness how He slew kings, and overthrew mighty kings, and gave their land for a heritage, even a heritage unto His people. God will bless us. He has given us His Son, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? He has given us His Holy Spirit to abide with us for ever; how can He deny us any needful aid or requisite benediction?

Here is a song for each Christian man and woman engaged in holy work! Here is a song for your Sunday-school classes this afternoon, ye diligent teachers of our youth! If ye have seen no good come of your work and ye grow somewhat dispirited, here is a psalm to raise your sinking spirits, "God will bless us." Go on and teach the gospel to the youngsters with redoubled zeal. Here is a sweet note for the minister who has been ploughing a thankless soil, and seen no harvest yet. "God will bless us." Cease not from your energetic labours! Go back to your work, for you have such a blessing yet to come that you may well rejoice even in the prospect of its coming. Let each worker go forth to that form of Christian service which his Master has appointed him, hearing this bird of paradise warbling in his ears, "God will bless us." Like David's minstrelsy before Saul, it charms away despair: like the silver trumpets of the priests, it proclaims a jubilee—Oh that like the rams' horns of Israel, it may level Jericho! Why, if for once this morning I could address with the eloquence of Peter the Hermit, when preaching the crusade, he made his hearers shout aloud, "*Deus vult!*" I too would stir your blood with the war-note of my text. Methinks this "*God will bless us,*" might just as much stir you, and move you, and make you dash along like a mighty host of warriors as did the "God wills it," of the Hermit. God is with us, He will bless us. Why flag ye? why grow weary? why look ye to a human arm for strength? why fear ye your enemies? why seek

ye slothful ease? why get ye to your beds of rest? God will bless us! Up, ye men-at-arms, and snatch the victory! Grasp your sickles, ye husbandmen, and gather in the harvest! Hoist your sails, ye mariners, for the favouring winds are coming! "God *will* bless us." Oh for fire from off the altar to touch our lips! And what can be a better instrument with which to carry the flaming coal, than the golden tongs of the text, "God will bless us?"

One word of warning, and we have done. Suppose the Lord should bless "us" in the plural, and not "you," dear hearer, in the singular! What if there should be showers of mercy, and they should not drop on you? What if He should bestow a token for good upon His people, but you should be left out? It may be so, for it has been so; and if such be the dreary fact it will make you worse instead of better, for none so dry as the fleece which remains unmoistened when the floor is wet: none so lost as those who are lost where others are saved. Tremble lest that should be your case! Yet it need not be so; oh! blessed be God, I hope I can say it shall not be so. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near." He has abundant pardons to bestow, and He will give them freely to all who ask. All He asks of you is that you trust His Son, and this faith His Holy Spirit gives. Do trust Him! Rest upon the merit of His precious blood, and you will not be left out when He dispenses His favours, but you shall sing as cheerfully as all the rest, "God, even our own God, shall bless us. God *shall* bless us."

THE ROYAL PREROGATIVE

"He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of His enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."—Psalm lxviii. 20, 21.

WHATEVER may be said of the Old Testament dispensation, however dimly it may have revealed certain truths, there was one matter about which it was clear as the sun. Under the Old Testament economy the Lord God of Israel is ever most conspicuous. God is in all, and over all; and from the pages of the prophets, as well as from the lips of the temple choirs, we hear loudly sounding forth the note, "The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Hallelujah!" By priest and prophet, saint and seer, the one testimony is borne, "The Lord reigneth." You cannot read the Book of Job without trembling in the majestic presence of the Almighty; nor can you turn to the Psalms without being filled with solemn awe as you see David, and Asaph, and Heman adoring the Lord, who made heaven and earth and the sea. Everywhere, from Abraham to Malachi, man is of small account, and God is all in all. Very little consideration is given to any fancied rights and claims of man, but wonder is expressed that the Creator should be mindful of him. We read no discourse upon the dignity of human nature, or upon the beauty of human character; but God alone is holy, and when He looks from heaven He sees none that doeth good, no, not one. Man is rolled in the dust from which he sprang, and to which he must return; all his pride is cut down, and his comeliness withered, and over all is seen one God, and none beside Him.

It will be a great offence if, coming into the brighter light of the New Testament, we are less vivid in our conceptions of the glory of God. If God should be less clearly seen in the person of our Lord Jesus, than He was under the symbols of the law, it will be the fault of our blinded hearts. It will be ill for us to turn day into night, and like owls to see less because the light is increased. Let it not be so among us, but let it be in our churches as in Israel of old, of which it was said, "in Judah is God known; His name is great in Israel!" "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son," and by Him as the incarnate Word He has revealed Himself with a sevenfold splendour, and therefore it should be our soul's great delight to perceive God in all things, to rejoice in His presence, and to magnify Him in all things as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Psalmist in this particular case ascribes to the Lord universal action and power over us, for He ascribes to Him the mercies of life and the issues of death. He says, "Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits." The Lord heaps up His favours till their number loads the memory, and their value burdens the shoulders of gratitude. He gives us so many mercies that the mind is burdened in endeavouring to calculate their worth: we are overwhelmed with a sense of His goodness, and the consciousness that we cannot return any adequate thanks for such abundance of daily grace. Such is our God in life, and what will He be in death? Shall we be without Him there? No, blessed be His name, "Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." His kingdom includes the land of death-shade, and all the borders thereof. We shall not die without His permit, nor without His presence. Though temporal mercies will find their end when life ends, yet are there eternal mercies which throughout eternal life shall manifest the goodness of the Most High; and meanwhile by rescues, recoveries, and escapes we shall be preserved from prematurely descending to the tomb. If any of you, dear friends, have been brought near to the gates of death, if you have been laid low by wearisome sickness, if your heart has sunk within you in a sort of mental death, you will in coming back to health and strength most heartily bless the Lord who finds for us a way of return from the suburbs of the sepulchre. He is not only the God of life but the God of death; He keeps us in life, and makes life happy; He keeps us from death and from the fierce agencies which wait to drag us to the grave. There are issues out of the dark border-land of sickness, and peril, and despair, and the Lord leads us by His own right hand to cause us to escape. Doth He not say "I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring My people again from the depths of the

sea"? We must, and we will praise Him for this with a new song.

I gather from our text that death is in the hands of God, that escapes from death are manifestations of His divine power, and that He is to be praised for them.

The outline of this morning's discourse, as indicated by the text, is just this: first, *the sovereign prerogative of God*, 'To God the Lord belong the issues from death": secondly, *the character of the Sovereign* with whom this prerogative is lodged, "He that is our God is the God of salvation": and then, thirdly, *the solemn warning which this great Sovereign gives* in reference to the exercise of His prerogative; weighty are the words, may the Holy Spirit cause us to feel their power—"God shall wound the head of His enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

I. First, then, with deep reverence let us speak upon THE SOVEREIGN PREROGATIVE OF GOD—"Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Kings have been accustomed to keep the power of life and death in their own hands. The great King of kings, the sovereign Ruler and absolute Lord of all worlds reserves this to Himself,—that He shall permit men to die, or shall give them an issue from death at His own good will and pleasure. He can alike create and destroy. He sendeth forth His Spirit and they are created, and at His own pleasure He saith, "Return, ye children of men," and lo! they fall before Him like autumn's faded leaves.

The prerogative of life or death belongs to God in a wide range of senses. First of all as to natural life, we are all dependent upon His good pleasure. We shall not die until the time which He appoints; for our death-time, like all our time, is in His hands. Our skirts may brush against the portals of the sepulchre, and yet we shall pass the iron gate unharmed if the Lord be our guard. The wolves of disease will hunt us in vain until God shall permit them to overtake us. The most desperate enemies may waylay us, but no bullet shall find its billet in any heart unless the Lord allows it. Our life does not even depend upon the care of angels, nor can our death be compassed by the malice of devils. We are immortal till our work is done, immortal till the immortal King shall call us home to the land where we shall be immortal in a still higher sense. When we are most sick, and most ready to faint into the grave, we need not despair of recovery, since the issues from death are in Almighty hands. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up." When we have passed beyond the skill of the physician we have not passed beyond the succour of our God, to whom belong the issues from death.

Spiritually, too, this prerogative is with God. We are by nature under the condemnation of the law, on account of our sins, and we are like criminals tried, convicted, sentenced, and left for death. It is for God, as the great Judge, to see the sentence executed, or to issue a free pardon, according as He pleases; and He will have us know that it is upon His supreme pleasure that this matter depends. Over the head of a universe of sinners I hear this sentence thundering, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Shut up for death, as men are by reason of their sins, it rests with God to pardon whom He may reserve; none have any claim to His favour, and it must be exercised upon mere prerogative, because He is the Lord God, merciful and gracious, and delighteth to pass by transgression and sin.

So, too, doth the Lord deliver His own believing people from those "deaths oft" which make up their experience. Though we are in Christ Jesus delivered from death as a penalty, yet we often feel an inward death, caused by the old nature, which exercises a deadening influence within us. We feel the sentence of death in ourselves that we may not trust in ourselves, but in Jesus, in whom our life is hid. It may be that for a season our joys are damped, our spiritual vigour is drained away, and we hardly know whether we have any spiritual life left within us. We become like the trees in winter, whose substance is in them but the sap ceases to flow, and there is neither fruit nor leaf to betray the secret life within. We scarcely feel a spiritual emotion in these sad times, and dare not write ourselves among the living in Zion. At such times God the Lord can give us back the fulness of life, He can restore our soul from the pit of corruption and cause us not only to have life but to have it more abundantly. The issues from death are with the quickening Spirit, and when our soul cleaveth to the dust He can revive us again till we rejoice with joy unspeakable.

As the climax of all, when we shall come actually to die, and these bodies of ours shall descend into the remorseless grave, as probably they will, in the hands of our Redeeming Lord are the issues from death. The archangel is even now waiting for the signal: one blast of his trumpet shall suffice to gather the chosen from all lands, from the east and from the west, from the south and from the north. Then death itself shall die away, and the righteous shall arise

> "From beds of dust and silent clay
> To realms of everlasting day."

"I am the resurrection and the life," saith Christ, and He is both of these to all His people. Is He not life, for He saith, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die"? Is He not resurrection, for He saith, "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"? That bright illustrious day in which the saints shall rise with their Lord will show how unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.

Our translation is a very happy one, because it bears so many renderings, and includes not only escape from death, deliverance from condemnation, revival from spiritual death, and uplifting from deadly mental depression, but recovery from death's direct havoc, by our being raised again from the tomb. In all these respects the Lord Jesus hath the key of death; He openeth and no man shutteth, He shutteth and no man openeth.

Concerning this prerogative we may say, first, that to God belongs *the right to exercise it.* This right springs, first, from His being our Creator. He saith "all souls are Mine." He has an absolute right to do with us as He pleases, seeing He hath made us, and not we ourselves. Men forget what they are, and boast great things; but truly they are but as clay on the potter's wheel, and He can fashion them or can break them as He pleases. They think not so, but He knoweth their thoughts, that they are vain. Oh the dignity of man! What a theme for a sarcastic discourse! As the frog in the fable swelled itself till it burst asunder, so doth man, in his pride and envy

against his Maker, who nevertheless sitteth upon the circle of the heavens and reckoneth men as though they were grasshoppers, and regardeth whole nations of them as the small dust of the balance. The Lord's prerogative of creation is manifestly widened morally by our forfeiture of any consideration which might have arisen out of obedience and rectitude if we had possessed them. Our fault has involved forfeiture of the creature's claims, whatever they may have been. We are all attainted of high treason, and we have each one been guilty of personal rebellion, and therefore we have not the rights of citizens, but lie under sentence of condemnation. What saith the infallible voice of God? "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." We have come under this curse; justice has pronounced us guilty, and by nature we abide under condemnation. If then the Lord shall be pleased to deliver us from death it rests with Him to do so, but we have no right to any such deliverance, nor can we urge any argument which would avail in the courts of justice for reversal of sentence or stay of execution. Before the bar of justice our case must go hard if we set up any plea of right. We shall be driven away with the disdain of the impartial Judge if we urge our suit upon that line. Our wisest course is to appeal to His mercy and to His sovereign grace, for there alone is our hope. Understand me clearly: if the Lord shall suffer us all to perish we shall only receive our deserts, and we have not one of us a shade of claim upon His mercy: we are therefore absolutely in His hands, and to Him belong the issues from death.

The right of God to save is further made manifest by the redemption of His people. It might have been said that God had no right to save if by saving He would abridge His justice; but now that He hath laid help upon One that is mighty, and His only-begotten Son has become a victim in our place, to magnify the law and make it honourable, the Lord God hath an unquestionable right to deliver from death His own redeemed, for whom the Substitute has died. Our God saves His people in consistency with justice: no one can question His doing right even when He justifies the ungodly. His right and power over issues from death are in the case of His own blood-bought ones clear as the sun at noon-day, and who shall dispute with Him?

Our text, however, puts the prerogative upon the one sole ground of lordship, and we prefer to come back to that. "Unto God *the Lord* belong the issues from death." It is a doctrine which is very unpalatable in these days, but one nevertheless which is to be held and taught, that God is an absolute sovereign, and doeth as He wills. The words of Paul may not be suffered to sleep,—"Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, why hast Thou made me thus?" The Lord cannot do amiss, His perfect nature is a law unto itself. In His case *Rex* is *Lex*, the King is the law. He is the source and fountain of all right, truth, rule, and order. Being absolutely perfect within Himself, and comprehending all things, it is not possible for Him to do otherwise than right. He is goodness, truth, and righteousness itself, and therefore the prerogatives of His throne are not bounded, and to the Lord of heaven and earth belong the issues from death.

Enough with regard to that matter of right. I go on to notice that *the Lord has the power of this prerogative*. With Him is the ability to deliver men from natural death. Jehovah Rophi is a physician who is never baffled. Medicines may fail, but not the great Maker of all plants and herbs and useful drugs. Study and experience may be at a nonplus, but He who fashioned the human frame knows its most intricate parts, and can soon correct its disorders. God can restore when a hundred diseases are upon us all at once. Take courage, thou fainting one, and look up. Certainly, as to the soul, there is no case of man so far gone that God cannot find an issue out of its death. He can cast out seven devils, and a legion of diabolical sins. To God the Lord belong the issues from death, however foul the sin, and however forlorn the condition caused by transgression. He who raised Lazarus from the grave after four days can raise the most corrupt from the grave of their iniquities. Oh that awakened sinners would believe this!

I remember reading of an aged minister who had for some years fallen into deep despondency. He gave up his pulpit, and kept himself very much alone, always writing bitter things against himself. At last, when he was on a sick bed, a servant of God was sent to him, who dealt wisely with him. This good man said to the despairing one, "Brother, do you believe that passage, 'He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him'?" "I believe it," said he, "with all my heart, but I am convinced—" Here the other stopped him, "I do not ask what your convincements may be, nor what your feelings may be, but I come to say to you, the man who trusts that promise lives." This plain declaration of the gospel was made by the Divine Comforter the means of supreme consolation to the despairing one; may it be equally useful to all those who hear it. He who can hang his soul's hope upon the infinite ability of Christ to save is a saved man. He that believeth on Him hath everlasting life. What a blessing this is! The devil may tell me that I never can issue out of deserved death, and that I am shut up for ever under the just results of my trespasses; my own conscience knowing my undeservingness may also condemn me a thousand times over; but unto God the Lord belong the issues from death, and He can and will pluck me from between the jaws of death since I believe in Him. He is able to bring up those whom He ordains to save even from the utmost depths of despair. The absolute right of God is supported by almighty power, and thus His prerogative is made a matter of fact.

Nor is this all, *The Lord has actually exercised this prerogative* in abundant cases. As to those issues from death which are seen in restoration from sickness, I need not remind you that these are plentiful enough. At times these have come in a miraculous form, as when Hezekiah had his life lengthened in answer to prayer, and when many others were healed by the Saviour and His apostles. Life has been preserved in a lion's den, and in the belly of a fish, in a fiery furnace, and in the heart of the sea. Death has no arrow in his quiver which can hurt the man whom God ordains to live. Out of imminent peril the Lord still delivers in the ordinary course of providence, and there are persons present this morning who are proofs of His interposing power. He has raised some of us from prostration of body and depression of spirit, He has rescued others from shipwreck and fire in very singular ways, and

here we are, living to praise God, as we do this day.

God has exercised this prerogative spiritually. In what a myriad of cases has He delivered souls from death! Ask yon white-robed hosts in heaven, "Has not God displayed in you His sovereign power to save?" Ask many here below, who have tasted that He is gracious, and they will tell, "He saved me." According to His mercy He has issued a free pardon, signed by His royal hand, saying, "Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom." Why His sovereignty has interposed to rescue us from death we cannot tell. We often ask, "Why was I made to hear His voice? How was it that I was made to live?" But we are silent with grateful wonder, and invent no answer. Divine will, backed by divine power, worked out the sovereign purpose of love, and here we are, saved from so great a death by love invincible.

Yes, indeed, to God the Lord belong the issues from death. Come, then, brethren and sisters, *let Him have all the glory of it.* If you are alive after a long sickness, bless the Lord, who forgiveth all our iniquities, who healeth all our diseases. If you are saved from condemnation this morning, and know it, bless the Lord, who accepts us in the beloved. If you feel at this moment that the death of sin has no dominion over you, for the life of grace reigns within, then bless the Lord who has quickened you into newness of life. Glorify His name this day, who in love to your soul has delivered you from the pit of corruption, and cast all your sins behind His back. Once more, if you have a glorious hope of a blessed resurrection, and feel that you can smile on death because God smiles on you, then bless the Lord who will raise you up at the last day. Your Redeemer liveth, and you shall live because He lives, therefore clap your hands with holy glee. Bless the all-glorious name of Him to whom belong the issues from death.

II. Thus have I set forth the prerogative; and now, secondly, follow me with your thoughts while I show THE CHARACTER OF THE SOVEREIGN in whom that prerogative is vested. We cannot upon this earth exhibit much love to human princes who claim absolute dominion. Imperialism is not to our mind. Among the worst curses that have ever fallen upon mankind have been absolute monarchs: nowadays men shake them off as Paul shook off the viper into the fire. The Lord grant we may see the last of all despotic dynasties, that the nations may be free. We cannot endure a tyrant, and yet if we could have absolutely perfect despots it might be the best possible form of government. Assuredly, the great and Eternal God, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, is absolutely perfect; and we may be well content to leave all prerogatives and vest all powers in His hands. He has never trampled on the rights of the meanest, nor forgotten the weakest. His foot doth not needlessly crush a worm, nor doth He beat down a fly in wantonness. He has never done a wrong, nor wrought an injustice. *We* oppress each other, but the Judge of all oppresses none. The Lord is holy in all His ways, and His mercy endureth for ever; and the amplest prerogatives are safely lodged in such hands.

Our text yet further tells us who it is in whose hands the issues of life and death are left: "He that is our God is the God of salvation." Sinner, your salvation rests with God, but do not therefore be discouraged, for that God with whom the matter rests is the God of salvation, or of "salvations," for so the Hebrew hath it. What mean we by this?

The Scripture signifieth, first, that *salvation is the most glorious of all God's designs.* Since this world was made, the working out of salvation has run through history like a silver thread. The Lord made the world, and lit up moon and stars, and set heaven, earth, and sea in order, with His eye upon salvation in the whole arrangement. He has ruled all things by His supreme government with the same end. The great wheels of His providence have been revolving these six thousand years before the eyes of men; and among them, and at their back, a hand has been ever passing to conduct every movement to the ultimate issue, which is the salvation of the covenanted ones. This is the object which is dearest to Jehovah's heart. He loves best to save. God was pleased with creation, but not as He is with redemption. When He made the heavens and the earth it was every-day work to Him, and He merely spake and said, "It is good"; but when He gave His Son to die to redeem His people, and His elect were being saved, He did not speak with the prosaic brevity of creation, but He sang. Is it not written, "He shall rest in His love, He shall rejoice over thee with singing"? Redemption is a matter which Jehovah sings about. Are you able to imagine what it must be for God to sing? For Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to burst forth into a joyous hymn over the work of salvation! This is because salvation is dearest to God's heart, and in it His whole nature is most intensely engaged. Judgment is His strange work, but He delighteth in mercy. He has put forth many attributes in the accomplishment of other works, but in this He has laid out all His being. He is seen in this as mighty to save. Herein He hath bared His arm. For this He has taken His Son out of His bosom. For this He has caused His Only-begotten to be bruised and put to grief. Salvation is the eternal purpose of the inmost heart of God, and by it His highest glory is revealed. This, then, is the God to whom belong the issues from death: the God whose grandest design is salvation. Sing unto His name and exult that the Lord reigneth, even the Lord who is my strength and my song, who also hath become my salvation.

Ask ye yet again what this meaneth—"He that is our God is the God of salvation," and we remind you that *the most delightful works which the Lord has performed have been works of salvation.* To save our first parents at Eden's gate, and give them a promise of victory over the serpent, was joy to God. To house Noah in the ark was also His pleasure. The drowning of a guilty world was needful, but the saving of Noah was pleasant to the Lord our God. He destroyed the earth with His left hand, but with His right hand He shut in the only righteous ones He found. To save His people is ever His joy: He goes about it eagerly. He rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind when He came to deliver His chosen. What noise He makes about His saving work at the Red Sea! The whole Scripture is full of allusions to the great salvation out of Egyptian bondage, and even in heaven they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. The Old Testament seems to ring with the note, "Sing unto the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." The Lord did greatly rejoice to make a way through the

wilderness, and a path through the deeps for His own people, that He might work salvation for them in the midst of the earth. Afterwards in the Old Testament how well they keep the records of salvations! They tell us of the kings that oppressed the people, but how lovingly they linger over the way in which God redeemed Israel from her adversaries. What a note of joy there is about Goliath slain, and the son of Jesse bearing his gory head, and Israel delivered from Philistia's vaunts! Well did they say, "He that is our God is the God of salvation." He takes delight in deeds of grace: these are His enjoyments. These are His recreations. He comes out in His royal robes and puts on His crown jewels when He rises to save His people, and therefore His servants cry aloud, "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard; which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." This then is the God in whom is vested all sovereignty over the issues from death. He takes pleasure, not in the destruction, but in the salvation of the sons of men. Where could the prerogative be better laid up?

"He that is our God is the God of salvation," also means that at this present time the God who is preached to us is the God of salvation. *We live at this moment under the dispensation of mercy.* The sword is sheathed, the scales of justice are put by. Those scales are not destroyed, and the sword is not broken, nor even blunted, but for a while it slumbereth in its scabbard. To-day over all our heads is held out the silver sceptre of eternal love. The angelic carol, first heard by shepherds at Bethlehem, lingers still in the upper air, if you have ears to hear it,—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The mediatorial reign of Christ is that of multiplied salvations. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" is the saving proclamation of the reigning God. The God of the Christian age is the God of salvation. He is set forth before us as coming to seek and to save the lost. He dwells among us by His abiding Spirit, not as a Judge punishing criminals, but as a Father receiving His wandering children to His bosom, and rejoicing over them as once dead but now alive again. God in Christ Jesus, our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, is He, who quickeneth whom He will, and is ordained to give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given Him. Where else could all power be more safely laid up?

Once more: "He that is our God is the God of salvation" means this, that to His covenanted ones, *to those who can call Him "our God" He is specially and emphatically the God of Salvation.* There is no destruction for those who call Him "our God," for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Jesus came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "This God is our God for ever and ever, He will be"—our destroyer?—no, "He will be our guide even unto death." This God is our sun and shield, and He will give grace and glory. Now, mark well, this fact: we who believingly call the Lord our God this morning will tell you that we are saved entirely through the sovereign grace of God, and not through any natural betterness of our own, nor through anything that we have done to deserve His favour. It was because He looked upon us with pity and kindly regard when we were dead in sin that therefore we live. When we were lying in our blood, and in our filthiness, He passed by in the time of love, and He said to us, "Live." If He had passed by, and left us to die, He would have been infinitely just in so doing, but His heart was otherwise inclined. He looked on us and said "Live," and we lived, and we bless His name that we are living still, and praising His eternal and infinite mercy. He who saith "I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal," is He who has quickened us, though we were dead in trespasses and sins. Surely, He who has exercised His prerogative so kindly towards us may be trusted to exercise it towards all who come to Him according to His gracious invitation. If there be any man who saith, "I rejoice in the election of God, because, although He hath saved me, He hath left others to perish," I desire to have no sympathy with His spirit. My joy is of a far different kind, for I argue that He who saved such an unworthy one as I am will cast out none that come to Him by faith. His election is not narrow, for it comprehends a number that no man can number, yea, all that will believe in Jesus. He waiteth to be gracious, and him that cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out. The wedding feast needs countless guests, and every seat must be filled. We wish that all the human race would come and accept the provisions of infinite love, and we are anxious to go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. We rejoice to know that if any man be shut out from Christ and hope he shuts himself out, though at the same time we feel that if any man be shut in he did not shut himself in, but undeserved grace wrought out his salvation. Justice rules in condemnation, but grace reigns in salvation. In salvation we must ascribe all to grace, absolutely and unreservedly. There must be no stammering over this truth. Some begin to say grace, but they do not out with the word: they stutter it into "free-will." This will never do. This is not according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, nor is it in accordance with fact. If there is any man here who thinks that he has been saved as the result of his own will, apart from the powerful grace of God, let him throw his cap up, and magnify himself for ever. "Glory be to my own good disposition!" But as for me, I will fall at the foot of the throne of God and say, "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ. Hadst Thou, O God, left me to my own free will, I had continued still to despise Thy love, and to reject Thy mercy." Surely, all the people of God agree that this is the fact in their own case, however they may differ theoretically from the general statement.

Yes, the prerogative of life and death is in good hands, it is in the hands of Him who is the God of our salvation, and I beseech every one here present who is not saved to be encouraged to bow before the throne of the great King, and sue for mercy of Him who is so ready to save. Go home and try to merit salvation, and you will waste your efforts. Go about to fit yourself for mercy, and to fashion some good that may attract the regard of God, and you will befool yourself, and insult the majesty of heaven: but come just as you are, all guilty, empty, meritless, and fall before the great King, whom you have so often provoked, and beseech Him of His infinite mercy to blot out your transgressions, to change your natures, and to make you His own, and see if He will cast you away. Is it not written, "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared"? And again, "Him that cometh to

Me I will in no wise cast out." His throne is a throne of grace. Mercy is built up for ever before Him. He is the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. Did ever a penitent sue for pardon at His sovereign feet to be rejected? Never; nor shall such a case happen while the earth remaineth. If you try to purchase His favour you shall be refused; if you claim it as a right you shall be rejected; but if you will come and accept salvation of the divine charity, and receive it through the atonement of Christ Jesus, the Lord will find for you an escape from death. Hear the witness of Jeremiah, and be encouraged to cast yourself before the Lord:—" I called upon Thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not Thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee: Thou saidst, fear not. O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; Thou hast redeemed my life."

III. Our last duty is to hear THE SOLEMN WARNING OF OUR SOVEREIGN LORD. A new god has been lately set up among men, the god of modern Christianity, the god of modern thought, a god made of honey or sugar of lead. He is all leniency, gentleness, mildness, and indifference in the matter of sin. Justice is not in him, and as for the punishment of sin, he knows it not. The Old Testament, as you are, no doubt, made aware by the wise men of this world, takes a very harsh view of God, and therefore modern wisdom sets it on one side. Forsooth, one half the Word of God is out of date, and turned to waste paper. Although our Lord Jesus did not come "to destroy the law or the prophets," but to fulfil them, yet the advanced thinkers of these enlightened times tell us that the idea of God in the Old Testament is a false one. We are to believe in a new god, who does not care whether we do right or wrong, for by his arrangement all will come to the same end in the long run. There may be a little twisting about for awhile for some who are rather incorrigible, but it will all come right at last. Live as you like, go and swear and drink, go and oppress the nations, and make bloody wars, and act as you will; by jingo you will be all right at last. This is roughly the modern creed which poisons all our literature. But let me say, by Jehovah this shall not be as men dream. Jehovah, the Judge of all the earth, must do right. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: the God of the whole earth shall He be called. He hath not changed one whit in the stern integrity of His nature, and He will by no means spare the guilty. Read, then, the last verse of our text, and believe that it is as true to-day as when it was first written, and that if Jesus Himself were here, the meek and lowly One would say it in tones of tearful solemnity, but He would utter it none the less. "God shall wound the head of His enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

It is clear from these words that God is not indifferent to human character. Our God knows His enemies, He does not mistake them for friends, nor treat them as such. He regards iniquity as a trespass, and therefore He has not broken down the bounds of law, nor the hedges of right: there are trespasses still, and God perceives them, and notes them down, and such as go on in their trespasses are trying His long-suffering and provoking His justice. God sleeps not, neither does He wink at human sin, but calls upon all men everywhere to repent.

And it is clear too that God has the power to smite those who rebel against Him. Dream not of natural laws which will screen the wicked—"He shall wound the head of His enemies." They may lift up those heads as high as they please, but they cannot be beyond the reach of His hand. He will not merely bruise their heels, or wound them on the back with blows which may be healed, but at their heads He will aim fatal blows, and lay them in the dust. He can do it, and He will. They may be very strong, and their scalp covered with hair may indicate unabated strength, but they cannot resist omnipotence. There may be no sign as yet of the baldness which comes of weakness, or of the scantiness of hair which is a token of old age, but vain are they who boast their vigour, for in their prime He can cause them to wither as the grass of the field. The proud may vaunt themselves of their beauty: their hairy scalp, like that of Absalom, may be their boast, but as the Lord made the hair of Absalom to be the instrument of his doom, so can He make the glory of man to be his ruin. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. No man is out of the reach of God, and no nation either. The great ones stand on high upon their lofty places, and they talk about the "vulgar crowd," and despise the godly of the land. As for foreign races, how lightly are they esteemed, though one God has made them all. Populations and nations, what are they? Mere food for powder when a proud nation is set upon its own aggrandizement. Overturn their kingdoms, slaughter their patriotic defenders, redden the earth with blood, burn their houses, starve their women and children. Doth God know, and is there judgment in the Most High? We are a great people, and have the men, the ships, and the money. Who shall call us to account? Yet let the still small voice be heard. Thus said the Lord to a great nation of old, "Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know." From such chastisements good Lord deliver us.

When the Lord does put His hand to the work of vengeance His smiting will be terrible, even an utter overthrow, for it will be a smiting upon the head. If He doth not smite His enemies until the hour of death, what a blow will they then receive! They boasted of their self-righteousness, or of their greatness; but, oh, what terror will seize them when at the last moment, while they dream of heaven they are smitten down into the unfathomable deep, where woe shall be the everlasting reward of their daring rebellion against their King! Warriors of old times would when they went to battle often shave off all their hair, except those locks which are on the hinder part of the scalp; yet when they turned to flee it frequently happened they were grasped by their pursuers by their flowing hair. God does not often take the wicked by the forelock, for He has great patience, and bears with them. In special cases, as when young men through dissipated habits hasten on their doom, He takes them in front;

but as a rule He waits in mercy, and yet He suffers them not to go unpunished, for at the last He seizes their hairy scalp. If for fourscore years infinite patience should permit a man to continue in his rebellion, yet if he goeth on in his trespasses, at the very last God shall thrust His hand into his hairy scalp and grasp him to his destruction.

Turn ye, then, ye that know not God, turn ye at His rebuke this morning, for the rebuke is meant in love; and if I have used hard words it is because my heart is honestly anxious that you would repent and escape to Him who hath in His power the issues from death. I am not like yon flatterers who tell you that there is a little hell and a little God, from which you naturally infer that you may live as you like. Both you and they will perish everlastingly if you believe them. There is a dreadful hell, for there is a righteous God. Turn ye to Him, I entreat you, while yet in Christ Jesus He sets mercy before you. He is the God of salvation, and entreats you to come and accept of His great grace in Christ Jesus.

The Lord bless this word according to His own mind, and unto Him be praise for ever and ever. Amen.

THE BELIEVER SINKING IN THE MIRE

"Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink."—Psalm lxix. 14.

MANY rivers, and especially the Nile, have on their banks deep deposits of black mud, and when any person seeks to leap on shore, if he should ignorantly or through misfortune spring upon this soft mud he would, unless speedily pulled out, be sucked under until he was utterly swallowed up and suffocated in the mire. Having no handhold or foothold, the more he laboured to extricate himself from the thick adhesive mud, the deeper he would descend until he would be choked in the filth, unless some one was near to help him out, and save him from destruction. True believers, beloved, are sometimes in deep mire, and in fear of being swallowed up. This was the state and condition of the Psalmist when he wrote this psalm. He felt that he was sinking and could not deliver himself, and therefore he cries unto the Strong for strength in the words of the text "Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink." Mr. Gadsby, in his "Wanderings," narrates an incident, which, with reflections of his own, I shall read to you at the outset. "Being brought to a stand as just mentioned, I hailed the *reis* to heave to, and take me on board. One of the men was, therefore, sent in the small boat, but the river near the western side was so shallow that he could not get the boat within some distance of the bank. He consequently, as is usual in such cases, jumped overboard that he might carry me to the boat on his back. No sooner, however, had he sprung from the boat than I heard him scream. I turned to see what was the matter, when I found him struggling in the mud. He was sinking as though in a quicksand; and the more he struggled the faster and deeper he sank. His fellow-boatmen were not slack: they quickly saw the dilemma he was in, and two of them dashed in and swam to the small boat. I was almost choked with terror, and I breathed, or rather gasped with difficulty. "Can they reach the poor fellow?" I said to myself. "If not, he must inevitably be swallowed up alive!" —Now they reach the boat? Now they near him! And now, praise the Lord, he grasps firmly hold—Oh that death-like grasp!—of the side of the boat! But this was not until he had sunk up to his bosom. Seeing him safe, I breathed more freely; and I feel that now, though only relating the circumstances, the excitement has caused an increased and painful action of the heart. How I thought of poor David! Had he really witnessed a similar scene to this literally, when, speaking of the feelings of his soul spiritually, he said, "I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me?" (Ps. lxix. 2.) Oh what an agonizing state to be in! and yet many of my readers, I have no doubt, who never witnessed such a scene literally, know something about it spiritually, as David did, whether he had seen it with his bodily eyes or not. Well might he, in the struggling of his soul, exclaim, "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink!" Let me grasp firmly hold of the ark, and be pulled safely on board! Well! just at the right time, just before the fellow's arms (shall I say his arms of faith?) were disabled, swallowed up, deliverance came.

The prayer of our text leads us to three reflections: *first, that the true believer may be in the mire, and very near sinking; secondly, that the true believer may be in such a condition that God alone can deliver him*; and thirdly, that in whatever condition the believer may be, *prayer is evermore his safe refuge:* if a man finds that his own strength fails he can look up to Him who is an ever present help in time of trouble and cry unto Him "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink."

I. We commence with the statement, that THE TRUE BELIEVER MAY BE IN THE MIRE.

Let us consider for a moment *what kind of mire the believer may be brought into, and why God suffers him to be brought there, and how he can prove that he is really and truly a believer in the truth, although God suffers him to be brought into the mire.*

The truest believer in the world may be brought into *the deep mire of unbelief.* Some of us who have preached the word for years, and have been the means of working faith in others, and of establishing them in the knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, have nevertheless been the subjects of the most fearful and violent doubts as to the truth of the very gospel we have preached. Times may have occurred to the best of God's servants, when they have even doubted the existence of the God whom they have loved to serve, when even the Deity and reality of the Lord Jesus who has rescued them from sin by His precious blood, has been a matter of grievous and horrible questioning. Little do people know, who are ignorant of the private history of God's believing people, what struggles they have with their own base-

born, wicked unbelief. It is not alone Thomas who has said, "Except I put my finger in the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe," but there have been thousands of eminent saints who have been attacked by unbelief, and have been in doubt as to things which they once received as certain verities, and which still in their heart of hearts they know to be true. They could have died for those truths one day, they could have established them beyond all cavil and question the next, and yet upon the third they are compelled through strong temptation to sit down, and with tears streaming from their eyes, to cry bitterly unto their Strong Helper. "O, God, save me from this accursed unbelief which robs me of every comfort, takes the foundations away, and lays my glory in the dust! What can I do? If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do? Oh settle my soul upon Thy word, and establish me in Thy truth, O Thou God of truth." A man may be a true believer, and yet feel that he is sinking fast into the mire and clay of unbelief as some of us know to our lamentation and dismay.

A believer may be quite settled in his belief of the gospel, and may never doubt the inspiration of Scripture, the atonement of Christ, and all those precious truths which are commonly received among us, and yet, through sin or temptation, or some other cause, *he may not have a full assurance of his own interest* in those glorious and vital truths. A true believer in Christ, in fact, may often suspect himself to be a hypocrite when he is most sincere; to be an apostate when he is most diligently following the Lord; and he may set himself down as the chief of sinners, when the testimony of men and of God is, that "he is a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil." A believer may be in a state of high spiritual health, and yet may think himself to be sick unto death. He may be clothed in fair white linen, and yet reckon himself to be naked, poor, and miserable. He may be rich with all the treasures of his heavenly Father's kingdom, and yet may scarcely know where he can find a ready crust with which to supply his present pressing spiritual wants. There are such things as princes in rags; and there have been such things, and probably are now, as princes of the blood royal—peers of God's own realm—sitting on the dunghill. Many a justified and accepted saint has had to moan out under a deep sense of sin, just as the poor publican did, "God be merciful to me a sinner." I dare say, many of you think that God's ministers never have any question about their interest in Jesus Christ. I wish they never had: brethren, I wish sincerely *I* never had. It is seldom that I do—very seldom: but there are times when I would change my soul's place with the meanest believer out of heaven, when I should be content to sit behind the door of heaven, if only I might be numbered among God's people. True believers sometimes droop into this state: whether they are God's people or not, they cannot tell; whether their sins are forgiven or not is a matter of solemn enquiry with their souls; whether they have ever passed from death unto life or no is the great problem which they sit down and earnestly consider; and whether they be God's people or not, is a question they have great difficulty in answering. This is deep mire, indeed; for it is woe with another woe at its heels to lose the assurance of one's present salvation.

In addition to this, at times, the Lord's chosen are brought into another kind of mire, which will never swallow them up, but which may prove a matter of very severe trial to them while they are in it, I mean *temporal trouble*. When the soul is alarmed about spiritual things, and bodily or pecuniary troubles come also, then the sea is boisterous indeed. It is ill when two seas meet; when Moab and Ammon come against Judah at the same time; when both upper and nether springs appear to be dried up; when God, with both hands, thrusts us into the deep mire. Certain of my brethren are frequently in trouble. Their whole life is a floundering out of one slough of despond into another. You have had many losses in business—nothing but losses perhaps;—you have had many crosses, disappointments, bereavements; nothing prospers with you. Well, brother, there is this consolation, that you are one of a numerous family, for many of God's people pass though just such tribulation. It was said by Matthew Henry, I think, that "Prosperity was the blessing of the old covenant but that adversity is the peculiar blessing of the new." I do not know whether that is true or not, but I do know this, that Christ has said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." It is no sign, beloved, that you are not a child of God, because you feel the rod, but it is rather a token of your being one of the adopted, because you are made to pass under the rod of the covenant, and to utter the prayer of David: "Lord, save me from the deep mire, and let me not sink." You are allowed to plead against the thing you so much fear; you may cry, "Leave me not to become penniless; leave me not to dishonour my character," but remember that none of your trials can prove you to be a lost man. Pray, brother, the prayer of that good man who asked for neither poverty nor riches; ask that you have food convenient for you; pray, "Give me this day my daily bread." "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink."

I have not come to the blackest mire yet. God's own people are at seasons suffered to sink in the mire of *inward corruption*. There are times when believers have such a sight of the little hell within their own hearts that they are ready to despair of the possibility of their being completely sanctified and made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Our God at seasons permits the fountains of the great deep of human depravity to be broken up, and then what floods of sin come pouring forth! We little know what lies secreted in our deceitful hearts,—envyings, blasphemies, murders, lust: there is enough in the heart of any man to make a full-grown devil, if restraining grace did not prevent. To-day you may have had such enjoyments of the Lord's countenance that you have been ready to sing: "Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong; I shall never be moved"; and yet to-morrow you may have such a sight of self that you may exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Remember if you have the nature of God in you, you have also the nature of the old Adam. You are one with Christ, and "as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly"; but you are one with Adam, and "as is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy." You are to be immortal, but you are to be reminded that you are mortal; you are one day to be raised in glory, but you are to remember, as long as you are here, that the time of glory is not come, for you drag about to your shame, your weakness, your dishonour, and your misery a

body of sin and death. The best of God's children know this; and I think the holier they are, the more likely they are to feel the conflict within. It is the fashion in our country for men to wear black coats; I suppose it is because they do not show the dirt so much as the white garment, but if we wore white garments the filth would reveal itself, and we should have to change them very often. So, my brethren, the more a Christian is like his Master, the more clearly he sees his own faults. O, Lord, grant us grace to see much of our sins through the tears of repentance, and to see much of the Saviour through the eye of faith; for if we see little of Him, we shall get into the plight of David when he was in the deep mire, and cried, "Lord, deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink."

Beloved, it is painful to reflect that the best of God's people are suffered to fall into the mire of *Satanic temptations*. There is no knowing what suggestion Satan may thrust into the ear and into the soul of the greatest believer that heaven ever made. God may whisper in your ear one day, and Satan the next, and yet you may be a child of God on both occasions. O, beloved, I dare scarcely say in the midst of this assembly what I know on this point. If I were only to reveal my own struggles and conflicts with Satan, I might stagger some of you; but this I know, that no Christian minister will ever be able to enter into the trials and experiences of God's people, unless he has stood foot to foot with the arch fiend, and wrestled with the prince of hell. Martin Luther was right when he said that temptation and adversity were the two best books in his library. He had never written his commentary upon the Galatians if he had not been one who was frequently tempted and tossed about by Satan. That fiery, vehement nature of his, was like a great coal fire burning up the works of Satan, and all that Satan could do only stirred up the flame and caused it to burn more brightly. Satan will suggest not merely little sins, but the worst and foulest of sins to the best of God's chosen people. He will even venture in his business to urge the man of God to destroy himself when under depression of spirits; and although the saint hates the very thought, yet he may be driven to the verge of it by an influence which he feels that all his puny might is unable to resist. It is a fearful thing to fight with Apollyon. We shall sing of it in heaven as one of the greatest and most marvellous mercies of God, that "He delivered us out of the mouth of our cruel adversary."

2. *Why is it that believers are suffered to fall into it?* The answer is, they sometimes get into it *through their own sin*. It is a chastisement upon them. They were not faithful enough when they walked in the light, and, therefore, they are put into the darkness. If they had minded their steps when they were going down the hill, they would not have been subject to such afflictions in the valley. Rest assured that a great many of our sorrows are the foul weeds which spring up from the seeds of our own sins. If thou hadst been a fruitful tree, the pruning-knife would not have been so often used. The rod is never taken down from the shelf, except when it is absolutely wanted; and we are made to smart so bitterly under it, because we so greatly require it. God does not punish in a penal sense, but He does chastise; and He generally does it by permitting us to be filled with our own ways. We have to drink the powder of the idol calf which we have ourselves set up. We had need to walk with holy jealousy, for we serve a jealous God. Oh for grace to serve Him well.

Our heavenly Father sends these troubles, or permits them to come, *to try our faith*. If our faith be worth anything at all, it will stand the test. Gilt is always afraid of fire, but gold is not: the *paste* gem dreads to be touched by the diamond, but the true diamond fears no test. People who have a kind of confectionery godliness will wish to be preserved from temptations, for they cannot endure them; but the Christian counts it all joy when he falls into divers trials knowing that "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." My dear friends, if your faith is only a sunshiny faith, get rid of it, for you may not have many bright days between this and heaven. If your godliness can only walk with Christ when He wears silver slippers you had better give it up, for Christ very often walks bare-foot. It is a poor faith which can only trust God when friends are true, the body full of health, and the business profitable; but that is true faith which holds by the Lord's faithfulness, when friends are gone, when the body is sick, when our spirits are depressed, when we are driven from the enjoyment of assurances into the desert land, and cannot see the light of our Father's countenance. A faith that can say in the midst of the direst trouble, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," this is heaven-born faith indeed. I believe in my Lord, because He is a God that cannot lie, faithful and true to His every word, and, therefore, let the whole creation go to rack and ruin, my faith shall not waver or give up its confidence.

The Lord may also let His servants slip into the deep mire *to glorify Himself*, for He is never, perhaps, more glorified than in the faith of His own people. When an architect has erected a bridge of whose enormous strength he is well satisfied, he has no objection that it shall be put to any test. "No," says he, "let the heaviest train pass over it which has ever been dragged by a locomotive; let the most terrible tempest come that has ever blown from the four winds, I have built my structure in a manner so substantial that, the more it is tried and proved, the more you will admire its firmness and completeness. So our gracious God, beloved, glorifies Himself by permitting His people to be subjected to trials and by enabling them to endure the strain. We should never know the music of the harp if the strings were left untouched; we should never enjoy the juice of the grape if it were never trodden in the wine-press; we should never discover the sweet perfume of cinnamon if it were not pressed and beaten; and we should never know the warmth of fire if the coals were not utterly consumed. The excellence of the Christian is brought out by the fire of trouble. The wisdom of the Great Workman and the glory of His skill and power are discovered by the trials through which His vessels of mercy are permitted to pass.

Again, beloved, trials are doubtless permitted *to shew the natural weakness of the creature*, that no flesh may glory in the presence of God. Men of iron nerve are raised up to face all opposition and confront the powers of darkness; their testimony never falters, their course is true and bright as the sun in the heavens, and men rejoice in their light. With faith undaunted they beard the infernal lion in his den, and in the day of battle seek the thickest of the fight.

All the devils in hell cannot affright them, and all the foes upon earth cannot stir them from their divine purpose. They win souls as many as the sands of the sea, and their spiritual children are for number, like the gravel thereof. They revive the flame which lingers in the embers of the church, they set the world on a blaze with heavenly fire, they comfort many and set free thousands of prisoners, and yet, on a sudden, and it may be in the last hour, their joy departs, their assurance flees and their confidence departs. May not this be needful that men may not trace the champion's noble bearing to the strength of his natural constitution, but discern that the Eternal God was the support of his faith. We might have dreamed that the successful warrior was something different from other men, but when he is brought low, we discern clearly, that it was distinguishing grace rather than a distinguished man which is to be seen and wondered at. The man was but an earthen vessel in which God had put His precious treasure, and He makes the earthiness of the vessel manifest, that all men may see that the excellency of the power is not of us, but of God.

There is, perhaps, another reason why God permits His people to sink for a time into deep depression, viz., *to make heaven sweeter when they enter its pearly gates.* There must be some shades in the picture to bring out the beauty of the lights. Could we be so supremely blessed in heaven, if we had not known the curse of sin and the sorrow of earth. Rest, rest, rest; in whose ear does that sound most sweetly? Not in the ears of the loiterers who scorn all knowledge of the word "toil," but in the ears of those who are exhausted and fatigued by the labours of the day. Peace! Is there a man in England who knows the blessedness of that word peace? Yes, there are some. The soldier knows it. He has heard the whizz of the bullet, he has seen the smoke of the battle and the garment stained with blood, and his heart has been stirred by the din; and the shrieks and the death of the field of fight; to him peace is a peerless boon. Who will know the peace of heaven but those who have experienced the warfare of earth, and have endured conflicts with sin and the prince of the power of the air? Beloved, there must be the foil of sorrow to bring out the bright sparkling of the diamond of glory. The happiest moments of mere physical pleasure I can remember, have been just after a long illness, or some acute pain. When pain is lulled to sleep, how happy one is! I saw a brother the other day affected by the most painful of all bodily complaints. He was telling me of the sufferings he had endured, and he said, "I am so happy now it is all over." And I suppose, my beloved, that heaven will derive some of its excess of delight, its overflowing joy, from the contrast with the pain and misery, and conflict, and suffering, which we have had to pass through here below. There will be something better to talk about than troubles in heaven; but the recollection of them may afford a flavour to our happiness, which it would have lacked without it. We shall, I doubt not, "with transporting joys, recount the labours of our feet."

3. These are some of the reasons why God permits His people to sink for a while in the deep mire, where there is no standing. But the question is raised, "*Are these men who are thus tossed about by doubts and vexed with the great depravity of their hearts, truly at that time God's people?*" Certainly they are; for *if they were not God's people the pain of the temptation* which they endure *could not have reached them.* This spot is the spot of God's children, and none others are marked with it. The man who lives in sin as his element, never feels the weight of it. A fish may be deep in the sea, with thousands of tons of water rolling over his head, but it does not feel the load; but, if a man has only a bucketful of water to carry upon his head, he feels the weight of it, and rejoices to lose his burden. The sinner whose element is sin, laughs at the weight by which a believer is borne down. Conflicts and pains, such as I have been speaking of, are not possible to those destitute of spiritual life. Spiritual life is the first requisite for spiritual grief and spiritual contrition. Depend upon it, beloved, that those who suffer as I have described, are the children of God, for *they shew it.* They shew it by the way in which they bear their trials; for, in their worst times there is always a clear distinction, which marks them as separate from other men. If they cannot shout "victory," they bear patiently. If they cannot sing unto God with their mouth, yet their hearts bless Him. There is a degree of light even in their worst darkness; it never becomes Egyptian darkness; some one star at least gilds the gloom. There is still a candle somewhere or other for the Lord's chosen, in the blackest night. If they get into the mire, they do not perish there; they cry for help when their woes surround them, and in the very nick of time when everything appears to be lost, their heavenly Father hastens to their aid.

It is well known to the students of Christian biography, *that the most eminent of God's saints have had to pass through trials similar to those which we have been describing.* Luther was a man of the strongest faith, and yet at times of the faintest hope. He was, and he was not, a firm believer. His faith never wavered as to the truth of the cause which he advocated; but his faith as to his own interest in Christ, seldom, if ever, amounted to full assurance. The force of his faith spent itself in carrying on with fearful vigour the war against Antichrist and error of all shapes. He believed the truth, and held right manfully justification by faith; but he was at times very doubtful as to whether he himself was justified in Christ Jesus. He believed in salvation by the precious blood of Christ; but, especially at the last, it became a very serious matter with him as to whether he had ever been washed in that precious blood. Roman Catholic biographers,—who, of course, if they can, will slander him,—say, that he had doubts as to everything which he preached, and that at the last, he found his faith was not in accordance with truth. Not so; no man stuck to his testimony with more tenacity than the great reformer; but yet I marvel not that they should say so. He never doubted the truth of the things which he preached; but he did doubt his own interest in them frequently; and when he came to die, his testimony, though amply sufficient, was nothing like so brilliant as that of many a poor old woman who has died in a humble cottage, resting upon Jesus. The poor peasant who knew no more than her Bible true, was utterly unknown to the Vatican, and Fame's trumpet will never resound her name, but yet she entered into eternal peace with far louder shoutings of joy than Martin Luther, who shook the world with his thundering valour.

"Here lies he that never feared the face of man," is a most proper epitaph for John Knox; and yet at the last for some hours he passed through fearful temptation. And what do you suppose it was? The temptation of self-righteousness. The devil

could not charge him with sin; for Knox's life had been so straightforward and honest, that no man could impugn his motives or deny his Christianity; and, therefore, the devil came to him in another and more crafty way. He whispered, "John Knox, thou hast deserved well of thy Master; thou wilt get to heaven well enough through thine own merits." It was as hard a struggle as the lion-hearted soldier of the cross could well have to hold to his simple faith in Jesus Christ in his hour of peril. Now, no Christian man denies that Luther and Knox were men of faith; and yet they were men who had to pray, "Deliver me out of the mire." I know as I look around on this congregation, that some of you can heartily sympathize in the truth before us; but if there be no other here who can, *I* can most thoroughly, "I know whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day;" but I know also that the Christian life is one of stern conflict and battle; and though we do rejoice in the Lord always, yet there are times when it is as hard work as we can possibly do, nay, harder work than we can accomplish without the help of the Eternal Spirit, to keep our faith alive at all, for our souls are brought almost to death's door. I wished to enlarge on this matter for the comfort of those who are tossed to and fro by doubts and fears. I have been attempting to describe the case of those who, for the greater part of their lives have lived in the shade, and seen but little of the light of God's countenance. Oh may the sun shine on them yet with cheering rays.

II. I turn very briefly to the second point,—WHEN BELIEVERS ARE IN SUCH A STATE, THEY KNOW EXPERIMENTALLY THAT NO ONE CAN DELIVER THEM BUT THEIR GOD.

The Word of God itself, if not laid home by the divine Spirit, cannot help them. You may possibly be in such a condition that every promise scowls at you as though it were transformed into a threatening. When you turn over the pages of the book once so full of comfort to you, it seems withered into a howling wilderness. Even those promises which you have been wont to offer to others in their time of need, appear to shut their doors against you. "No admittance here," says one promise. Unbelief puts its burning finger right across another. Past sin accuses you and cries, "You cannot claim this word, for your transgression has forfeited it." So you may look through the whole book and find nothing upon which your souls may fasten. You have noticed strong posts by the sides of rivers to which ships may be safely moored. To get the rope fairly round one of the promises of God will yield good enough moorings for a Christian; but there are times when we have great difficulty in getting the rope round so as to hold fast; the fault is not in the promise but in us. At such seasons, the *preaching of the gospel is* apparently without power. You say to yourselves, "I do not know how it is, but I do not profit by the ministry as I once did. It used to make me leap for joy when I heard of the precious things of God, but I come away uncomforted from that table which once furnished me a feast of consolation." It is not the fault of the minister, he still as a good steward brings forth things new and old; it is not the fault of the Word, it is still milk for babes, and strong meat for full-grown men, but you painfully feel that you are changed, for you lament in words like these, "I go where others go, and find no comfort there." This is a case in which the Holy Spirit must Himself exercise His comforting office, it is only by the effectual application of the Word to your heart by the Holy Spirit that you can be brought out of this deep mire.

At such times, *other believers cannot aid you.* Those about you can prove to you how foolish it is to be in such a state, and you can even see your folly for yourself, yet you lie there helpless to lift hand or foot. They tell you of the faithfulness of God; they remind you of the glorious future, and point to the land beyond the skies; but you only sigh, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove that I might fly away and be at rest, for there is no rest for me beneath the sky." Human sympathy is at a *non plus*, and all we can do is to weep with you, for we cannot stay our tears. Why does our gracious God permit this? Perhaps it is because you have been living without Him and now He is going to take away every thing upon which you have been in the habit of depending; and the second cause may be, that He wishes to drive you to Himself. Oh, it is a blessed thing to live at the fountain head. While our skin-bottles are full, we are content like Hagar and Ishmael to go into the wilderness; but when those are dry, nothing will serve us but "Thou God seest me." We must then come to the well. We are like the prodigal, we love the swine-troughs and forget our father's house. Remember, we can make swine-troughs and husks even out of the forms of religion. Do not misunderstand me. They are blessed things, but we may put them in God's place and then they are of no value. Anything becomes an idol when it keeps us away from God; even the brazen serpent is to be despised as Nehustan, a mere piece of brass if I worship it instead of God. The prodigal was never safer than when he was driven to his father's bosom, because he could find sustenance nowhere else. And, brethren, I think our Lord favours us with a famine in the land that it may make us seek after the Saviour more. The best position for a Christian is living wholly and directly on God's grace. The best position is still to be where he was at first, "Having nothing and yet possessing all things." Not building up a wooden house on the rock, piling it higher and higher with our own faggots, and then getting up at the top and saying, "How high I am!" but having no wood and no faggots at all, but just keeping down on the bare, solid rock; this is wisdom. When the wind comes and the storm blows, we shall see that the ricketty structures which we build will give way and fall to our own damage; but if we stand on the Rock which never shakes, we cannot suffer loss. I pray God that you and I may never get beyond the fountain filled with blood. Stand there brother and be happy. Sinners blood-washed, sinners pleading, sinners accepted, we would always feel ourselves to be. Never get for a moment to think that our standing is in our sanctification, our mortification, our graces, or our feelings, but know that because Christ on Calvary offered a full, free, efficacious atonement for every one that believeth on Him, therefore, we are saved; for we are complete in Him, having nothing of our own to trust to, but resting upon the merits of Him whose passion and whose life furnish for us the only sure ground of confidence. Beloved, when we are brought to this, then it is that God comes to help us. We are sure in our poverty to turn to Him afresh with new earnestness. Infants when they are among strangers, are pleased with little toys and amusements, but when they become hungry, nothing will do for them

but their mother's breast; so it is with a child of God, he may for a time be satisfied and find pleasure in the things of this world, but he only finds lasting and sure happiness in being embraced in his Father's arms. When the boys walk out with us in fair weather, they will run in front of us ever so far, but as soon as they see any danger in the way they quickly return to father's side; so when everything goes well with us we frequently run a long way from God, but as soon as we are overtaken by trouble, or see a lion in the way, we fly to our heavenly Father. I bless God for the mire, and for my sinking in it, when it makes me cry out, "Deliver me, O my God, out of the deep mire, and let me not sink."

III. In the last place, our text shows us that PRAYER IS THE NEVER FAILING RESORT OF THE CHRISTIAN in any case, in every plight.

When you cannot use your sword you may take to the weapon of all-prayer. Your powder may be damp, your bowstring may be relaxed, your sword may be rusty, your spear may be bent, but the weapon of all-prayer is never out of order. Men have to sharpen the sword and the spear, but prayer never rusts. There is this blessed thing about prayer, it is a door which none can shut. Devils may surround you on all sides, but there is always one way open, and as long as that road is unobstructed, you will not fall into the enemy's hand. We can never be taken by blockade, escalade, mine, or storm, so long as heavenly succours can come down to us by Jacob's ladder to relieve us in the times of our necessities. Prayer is never forbidden. Remember, Christian, never is it wrong for you to pray, for the gates of heaven are open night and day. Your prayer is heard in heaven in the dead of the night, in the midst of your business, in the heat of noon-day, or in the shades of evening. You cannot be in any condition of poverty, or sickness, or obscurity, or slander, or doubt, or even sin, but still it is true that your God will welcome your prayer at any time and in every place.

Again, prayer is never *futile*. True prayer is evermore true power. You may not always get what you ask for, but you shall always have your real wants supplied. When God does not answer His children according to the letter, He does so according to the spirit. If thou askest for silver wilt thou be angered because He gives thee gold? If thou seekest bodily health, shouldst thou complain if instead thereof He makes thy sickness turn to the healing of spiritual maladies? Is it not better to have the cross sanctified than to have the cross removed? Was not the apostle more enriched when God suffered him still to endure the thorn in the flesh, and yet said to him, "My strength is sufficient for thee?" Better to have all sufficient grace than to have the thorn taken away. What is your condition my brother, my sister? Let me entreat you not to cease from prayer. There may be spiritual life in you, and yet the devil may tempt you to say, "I cannot pray." But you *can* pray; you *do* pray; you *must* pray. If you have spiritual life, although you can scarcely bend your knee, and are almost afraid to utter words once dear to you, yet your soul desires, pants, hungers, thirsts, and that is the essential of prayer, that is the very marrow and essence of prayer. Sobs and looks are prayers; and though you say you cannot pray, you must pray, you cannot help praying if you are a Christian. "I cannot breathe," that might be true in a certain sense; I cannot, perhaps, breathe under an asthmatic affection without great difficulty and much pain, but I *must* really breathe if I live; and so with you. You must breathe if you live; and you do pray, must pray, if you are truly a child of God. At any rate I pray thee by the power of God the Holy Spirit to break through those evils, those nets of the devil which hold you in bondage, and begin with your whole soul to pray. Never mind what form your prayer takes, but do pray. My dear brother, everything depends now upon thy prayer. If Satan can stop thy prayer, he has stripped thee of thy last resort, thy last hope. He will take thee by storm if thou shalt leave off praying. Pray, if it costs thee thy life, *pray*. Go not to thine ease, and take not thy rest until thou hast prayed. Give no sleep to thine eyes till thou hast prayed. Slumber not until thou hast had dealings with God in prayer. Not pray! are you willing to be damned? Not pray! are you willing to make your bed in hell? Not pray! shall devils be your companions? Shall heaven's gate be shut against you? Not pray! why, my brother you *must* pray *now*. Oh, send up the prayer from the very bottom of your heart: "O God, deliver me out of the deep mire, and let me not sink. Save me O, my God. God be merciful to me a sinner." May God the Holy Spirit sweetly compel you to pray! May He incline, guide, direct, and instruct you how to pray, that this very night you may offer up a prayer which God in His great goodness will hear and answer! Pray: "Lord, my soul is besieged. I am shut up by my sins. Oh, God, raise the siege, and deliver me from the enemy. Lord, help me with Thine Almighty arm. Make my extremity Thy opportunity. I am a foul beggar sitting on a dunghill; Lord, come and lift me up, and put me among the princes, and I will praise Thy name for ever and ever." May the blessed virgin's song be yours. "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek; He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away"; and may you find in the goodness, and mercy, and loving-kindness of God, a speedy deliverance out of the deep mire, that you may not sink! May God give a blessing to these words, to your comfort! I know some of you will say, "I am not in such a state." Thank God that you are not. Be grateful for thy mercies, lest thou lose them. Be thankful for thy full assurance and thy comfortable hope, lest those favours should become dim, like dying tapers and waning moons. Rejoice now, O Christian, as the young man does in his youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in thy youthful joy; but, remember, if thou art not careful how thou walkest in these flowery paths, if thou become too confident in thine own strength or goodness, God will bring thee down, and make thee cry out as sharply and as sorrowfully as David:—"Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink."

PLEADING

"But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: Thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying."—Psalm lxx. 5.

YOUNG painters were anxious, in the olden times, to study under the great masters. They concluded that they should more easily attain to excellence if they entered the schools of eminent men. At this present time, men will pay large premiums that their sons may be apprenticed or articled to those who best understand their trades or professions; now, if any of us would learn the sacred art and mystery of prayer, it is well for us to study the productions of the greatest masters of that science. I am unable to point out one who understood it better than did the psalmist David. So well did he know how to praise, that his psalms have become the language of good men in all ages; and so well did he understand how to pray, that if we catch his spirit, and follow his mode of prayer, we shall have learned to plead with God after the most prevalent sort. Place before you, first of all, David's Son and David's Lord, that most mighty of all intercessors, and, next to Him, you shall find David to be one of the most admirable models for your imitation.

We shall consider our text, then, as one of the productions of a great master in spiritual matters, and we will study it, praying all the while that God will help us to pray after the like fashion.

In our text we have the soul of a successful pleader under four aspects: we view, first, *the soul confessing:* "I am poor and needy." You have, next, *the soul pleading,* for he makes a plea out of his poor condition, and adds, "Make haste unto me, O God!" You see, thirdly, *a soul in its urgency,* for he cries, "Make haste," and he varies the expression but keeps the same idea: "Make no tarrying." And you have, in the fourth and last view, *a soul grasping God,* for the Psalmist puts it thus: "Thou art my help and my deliverer"; thus with both hands he lays hold upon his God, so as not to let Him go till a blessing is obtained.

I. To begin, then, we see in this model of supplication, A SOUL CONFESSING. The wrestler strips before he enters upon the contest, and confession does the like for the man who is about to plead with God. A racer on the plains of prayer cannot hope to win, unless, by confession, repentance, and faith, he lays aside every weight of sin.

Now, let it be ever remembered that confession is absolutely needful to the sinner when he first seeks a Saviour. It is not possible for thee, O seeker, to obtain peace for thy troubled heart, till thou shalt have acknowledged thy transgression and thine iniquity before the Lord. Thou mayest do what thou wilt, aye, even attempt to believe in Jesus, but thou shalt find that the faith of God's elect is not in thee, unless thou art willing to make a full confession of thy transgression, and lay bare thy heart before God. We do not usually think of giving charity to those who do not acknowledge that they need it: the physician does not send his medicine to those who are not sick. There is too much to be done in the world of necessary work for us to undertake works of supererogation; and, surely, to clothe those who are not naked, and to feed those that are not hungry, is to attempt superfluous work, which will bring us no credit. God will not do this: you must be empty before you can be filled by Him, and you must confess your emptiness, too, or else assuredly He will not come to fill the full, nor to lift up those who are already high enough in their own esteem. The blind man in the gospels had to feel his blindness, and to sit by the wayside begging; if he had entertained a doubt as to whether he were blind or not, the Lord would have passed him by. He opens the eyes of those who confess their blindness, but of others, He says, "Because ye say we see, therefore, your sin remaineth." He asks of those who are brought to Him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" in order that their need may be publicly avowed. It must be so with all of us: we must offer the confession, or we cannot gain the benediction.

Let me speak especially to you who desire to find peace with God, and salvation through the precious blood: you will do well to make your confession before God very frank, very sincere, very explicit. Surely you have nothing to hide, for there is nothing that you can hide. He knows your guilt already, but He would have *you* know it, and therefore He bids you confess it. Go into the details of your sin in your secret acknowledgments before God; strip yourself of all excuses, make no apologies; say "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." Acknowledge the evil of sin, ask God to make you feel it; do not treat it as a trifle, for it is none. To redeem the sinner from the effect of sin Christ Himself must needs die, and unless you be delivered from it you must die eternally. Therefore, play not with sin; do not confess it as though it were some venial fault, which would not have been noticed unless God had been too severe; but labour to see sin as God sees it, as an offence against all that is good, a rebellion against all that is kind; see it to be treason, to be ingratitude, to be a mean and base thing. Do not think that you can improve your condition before God by painting your case in brighter colours than it should be. Blacken it: if it were possible blacken it, but it is not possible. When you feel your sin most you have not half felt it; when you confess it most fully you do not know a tithe of it; but oh, to the utmost of your ability make a clean breast of it, and say, "I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee." Acknowledge the sins of your youth and your manhood, the sins of your body and of your soul, the sins of omission and of commission, sins against the law and offences against the gospel; acknowledge all, neither for a moment seek to deny one portion of the evil with which God's law, your own conscience, and His Holy Spirit justly charge you.

And O, soul, if thou wouldst get peace and approval with God in prayer, confess the ill desert of they sin. Submit thyself to whatever divine

justice may sentence thee to endure: confess that the deepest hell is thy desert, and confess this not with thy lips only, but with thy soul. Let this be the doleful ditty of thine inmost heart—

> "Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
> I must pronounce Thee just in death;
> And, if my soul were sent to hell,
> Thy righteous law approves it well."

If thou wilt condem thyself, God will acquit thee; if thou wilt put the rope about thy neck, and sentence thyself, then He who otherwise would have sentenced thee will say, "I forgive thee, through the merit of My Son." But never expect that the King of heaven will pardon a traitor, if he will not confess and forsake his treason. Even the tenderest father expects that the child should humble himself when he has offended, and he will not withdraw his frown from him till with tears he has said, "Father, I have sinned." Darest thou expect God to humble Himself to thee, and would it not be so if He did not constrain thee to humble thyself to Him? Wouldst thou have him connive at thy faults and wink at thy transgressions? He will have mercy, but He must be holy. He is ready to forgive, but not to tolerate sin; and, therefore, He cannot let thee be forgiven if thou huggest thy sins, or if thou presumest to say, "I have not sinned." Hasten, then, O seeker, hasten, I pray thee, to the mercy seat with this upon thy lips: "I am poor and needy, I am sinful, I am lost; have pity on me." With such an acknowledgment thou beginnest thy prayer well, and through Jesus thou shalt prosper in it.

Beloved hearers, the same principle applies to the Church of God. We are praying for a display of the Holy Spirit's power in this church, and, in order to successful pleading in this matter, it is necessary that we should unanimously make the confession of our text, "I am poor and needy." We must own that we are powerless in this business. Salvation is of the Lord and we cannot save a single soul. The Spirit of God is treasured up in Christ, and we must seek Him of the great Head of the church. We cannot command the Spirit, and yet we can do nothing without Him. He bloweth where He listeth. We must deeply feel and honestly acknowledge this. Will you not heartily assent to it my brethren and sisters at this hour. May I not ask you unanimously to renew the confession this morning? We must also acknowledge that we are not worthy that the Holy Spirit should condescend to work with us and by us. There is no fitness in us for His purposes, except He shall give us that fitness. Our sins might well provoke Him to leave us: He has striven with us, He has been tender towards us, but He might well go away and say, "I will no more shine upon that church, and no more bless that ministry." Let us feel our unworthiness, it will be a good preparation for earnest prayer; for, mark you, brethren, God will have His church, before He blesses it, know that the blessing is altogether from Himself. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." The career of Gideon was a very remarkable one, and it commenced with two most instructive signs. I think our heavenly Father would have all of us learn the very same lesson which He taught to Gideon, and when we have mastered that lesson, He will use us for His own purposes. You remember Gideon laid a fleece upon the barn floor, and in the morning all round was dry and the fleece alone was wet. God alone had saturated the fleece so that he could wring it out, and its moisture was not due to its being placed in a favourable situation, for all around was dry. He would have us learn that, if the dew of His grace fills any one of us with its heavenly moisture, it is not because we lie upon the barn-floor of a ministry which God usually blesses, or because we are in a church which the Lord graciously visits; but we must be made to see that the visitations of His Spirit are fruits of the Lord's sovereign grace, and gifts of His infinite love, and not of the will of man, neither by man. But then the miracle was reversed, for, as old Thomas Fuller says, "God's miracles will bear to be turned inside out and look as glorious one way as another." The next night the fleece was dry and all around was wet. For sceptics might have said, "Yes, but a fleece would naturally attract moisture, and if there were any in the air, it would be likely to be absorbed by the wool." But, lo, on this occasion, the dew is not where it might be expected to be, even though it lies thickly all around. Damp is the stone and dry is the fleece. So God will have us know that He does not give us His grace because of any natural adaptation in us to receive it, and even where He has given a preparedness of heart to receive, He will have us understand that His grace and His Spirit are most free in action, and sovereign in operation: and that He is not bound to work after any rule of our making. If the fleece be wet He bedews it, and that not because it is a fleece, but because He chooses to do so. He will have all the glory of all His grace from first to last. Come, then, my brethren, and become disciples to this truth. Consider that from the great Father of lights every good and perfect gift must come. We are His workmanship, He must work all our works in us. Grace is not to be commanded by our position or condition: the wind bloweth where it listeth, the Lord works and no man can hinder; but if He works not, the mightiest and the most zealous labour but in vain.

It is very significant that before Christ fed the thousands, He made the disciples sum up all their provisions. It was well to let them see how low the commissariat had become, for then when the crowds were fed they could not say the basket fed them, nor that the lad had done it. God will make us feel how little are our barley loaves, and how small our fishes, and compel us to enquire, "What are they among so many?" When the Saviour bade His disciples cast the net on the right side of the ship, and they dragged such a mighty shoal to land, He did not work the miracle till they had confessed that they had toiled all the night and had taken nothing. They were thus taught that the success of their fishery was dependent upon the Lord, and that it was not their net, nor their way of dragging it, nor their skill and art in handling their vessels, but that altogether and entirely their success came from their Lord. We must get down to this, and the sooner we come to it the better.

Before the ancient Jews kept the passover, observe what they did. The unleavened bread is to be brought in, and the paschal lamb to be eaten; but there shall be no unleavened bread, and no paschal lamb, till they have purged out the old leaven. If you have any old strength and self-confidence; if you have anything that is your own, and is, therefore, leavened, it must be swept right out; there must be a bare cupboard before there can come in

the heavenly provision, upon which the spiritual passover can be kept. I thank God when He cleans us out; I bless His name when He brings us to feel our soul-poverty as a church, for then the blessing will be sure to come.

One other illustration will show this, perhaps, more distinctly still. Behold Elijah with the priests of Baal at Carmel. The test appointed to decide Israel's choice was this—the God that answereth by fire let him be God. Baal's priests invoked the heavenly flame in vain. Elijah is confident that it will come upon his sacrifice, but he is also sternly resolved that the false priests and the fickle people shall not imagine that he himself had produced the fire. He determines to make it clear that there is no human contrivance, trickery, or manœuvre about the matter. The flame should be seen to be of the Lord, and of the Lord alone. Remember the stern prophet's command, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it a second time; and they did it a second time. And he said, Do it a third time; and they did it a third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." There could be no latent fires there. If there had been any combustibles or chemicals calculated to produce fire after the manner of the cheats of the time, they would all have been damped and spoiled. When no one could imagine that man could burn the sacrifice, then the prophet lifted up his eyes to heaven, and began to plead, and down came the fire of the Lord, which consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood, and the altar stones and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. Then when all the people saw it they fell on their faces, and they said, "Jehovah is the God; Jehovah is the God." The Lord in this church, if He means greatly to bless us, may send us the trials of pouring on the water once, and twice, and thrice; He may discourage us, grieve us, and try us, and bring us low, till all shall see that it is not of the preacher, it is not of the organization, it is not of man, but altogether of God, the Alpha and the Omega, who worketh all things according to the council of His will.

Thus I have shown you that for a successful season of prayer the best beginning is confession that we are poor and needy.

II. Secondly, after the soul has unburdened itself of all weights of merit and self-sufficiency, it proceeds to prayer, and we have before us A SOUL PLEADING. "I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God. Thou art my help and my deliverer: O Lord, make no tarrying." The careful reader will perceive four pleas in this single verse.

Upon this topic I would remark that it is the habit of faith, when she is praying, to use pleas. Mere prayer sayers, who do not pray at all, forget to argue with God; but those who would prevail bring forth their reasons and their strong arguments, and they debate the question with the Lord. They who play at wrestling catch here and there at random, but those who are really wrestling have a certain way of grasping the opponent—a certain mode of throwing, and the like; they work according to order and rule. Faith's art of wrestling is to plead with God, and say with holy boldness, "Let it be thus and thus, for these reasons." Hosea tells us of Jacob at Jabbok, "that there he spake with us;" from which I understand that Jacob instructed us by his example. Now, the two pleas which Jacob used were God's precept and God's promise. First, he said, "Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred:" as much as if he put it thus:—"Lord, I am in difficulty, but I have come here through obedience to Thee. Thou didst tell me to do this; now, since Thou commandest me to come hither, into the very teeth of my brother Esau, who comes to meet me like a lion, Lord, Thou canst not be so unfaithful as to bring me into danger and then leave me in it." This was sound reasoning, and it prevailed with God. Then Jacob also urged a promise: "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." Among men, it is a masterly way of reasoning when you can challenge your opponent with his own words; you may quote other authorities, and he may say, "I deny their force;" but, when you quote a man against himself, you foil him completely. When you bring a man's promise to his mind, he must either confess himself to be unfaithful and changeable, or, if he holds to being the same, and being true to his word, you have him, and you have won your will of him. O, brethren, let us learn thus to plead the precepts, the promises, and whatever else may serve our turn; but let us always have something to plead. Do not reckon you have prayed unless you have pleaded, for pleading is the very marrow of prayer. He who pleads well knows the secret of prevailing with God, especially if he pleads the blood of Jesus, for that unlocks the treasury of heaven. Many keys fit many locks, but the master-key is the blood and the name of Him that died but rose again, and ever lives in heaven to save unto the uttermost.

Faith's pleas are plentiful, and this is well, for faith is placed in divers positions, and needs them all. She hath many needs, and having a keen eye she perceives that there are pleas to be urged in every case. I will not, therefore, tell you all faith's pleas, but I will just mention some of them, enough to let you see how abundant they are. Faith will plead all the attributes of God. "Thou art just, therefore spare Thou the soul for whom the Saviour died. Thou art merciful, blot out my transgressions. Thou art good, reveal Thy bounty to Thy servant. Thou art immutable—Thou hast done thus and thus to others of Thy servants, do thus unto me. Thou art faithful, canst Thou break Thy promise, canst Thou turn away from Thy covenant?" Rightly viewed, all the perfections of Deity become pleas for faith.

Faith will boldly plead all God's gracious relationships. She will say to Him, "Art Thou not the Creator? Wilt Thou forsake the work of Thine own hands? Art Thou not the Redeemer, Thou hast redeemed Thy servant, wilt Thou cast me away?" Faith usually delights to lay hold upon the fatherhood of God. This is generally one of her master points: when she brings this into the field she wins the day. "Thou art a Father, and wouldst Thou chasten us as though Thou wouldst kill? A Father, and wilt Thou not provide? A Father, and hast Thou no sympathy and no bowels of compassion? A Father, and canst Thou deny what Thine own child asks of Thee?" Whenever I am impressed with the divine majesty, and so, perhaps, a little dispirited in prayer, I find the short and sweet remedy is to remember that, although He is a great King, and infinitely glorious, I am His child, and no matter who the father is, the child may always be bold

with his father. Yes, faith can plead any and all of the relationships in which God stands to His chosen.

Faith, too, can ply heaven with the divine promises. I need not enlarge here, for this I trust you all do so continually. When you can as it were bring home the Lord's word to Himself, it is well. That is the conquering argument, "Do as Thou hast said." "Thou hast spoken it, and Thou hast made Thy promise to be yea and amen in Christ Jesus to Thine own glory by us, wilt Thou not fulfil it? Wilt thou run back from Thine own word? Wilt Thou fail to carry out Thine own declaration? That be far from Thee, Lord!" Brethren, we want to be more business like and common-sense with God in pleading promises. If you were to go to one of the banks in Lombard Street, and see a man go in and out and lay a piece of paper on the table, and take it up again and nothing more; if he did that several time a day, I think there would soon be orders issued to the porter to keep the man out, because he was merely wasting the clerk's time, and doing nothing to purpose. Those city men who come to the bank in earnest present their cheques, they wait till they receive their gold and then they go, but not without having transacted real business. They do not put the paper down, speak about the excellent signature and discuss the correctness of the document, but they want their money for it, and they are not content without it. These are the people who are always welcome at the bank and not the triflers. Alas, a great many people play at praying, it is nothing better. I say they play at praying, they do not expect God to give them an answer, and thus they are mere triflers, who mock the Lord. He who prays in a business-like way, meaning what he says, honours the Lord. The Lord does not play at promising, Jesus did not sport at confirming the Word by His blood, and we must not make a jest of prayer by going about it in a listless unexpecting spirit.

The Holy Spirit is in earnest, and we must be in earnest also. We must go for a blessing, and not be satisfied till we have it; like the hunter, who is not satisfied because he has run so many miles, but is never content till he takes his prey.

Faith, moreover, pleads the performances of God, she looks back on the past and says, "Lord, Thou didst deliver me on such and such an occasion; wilt Thou fail me now." She, moreover, takes her life as a whole, and pleads thus:—

> "After so much mercy past,
> Wilt Thou let me sink at last?"

"Hast Thou brought me so far that I may be put to shame at the end?" She knows how to bring the ancient mercies of God, and make them arguments for present favours. But your time would all be gone if I tried to exhibit, even a thousandth part of faith's pleas.

Sometimes, however, faith's pleas are very singular. As in this text, it is by no means according to the proud rule of human nature to plead—"I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God." It is like another prayer of David: "Have mercy upon mine iniquity, for it is great." It is not the manner of men to plead so, they say, "Lord, have mercy on me, for I am not so bad a sinner as some." But faith reads things in a truer light, and bases her pleas on truth. "Lord, because my sin is great, and Thou art a great God, let Thy great mercy be magnified in me." You know the story of the Syrophenician woman; that is a grand instance of the ingenuity of faith's reasoning. She came to Christ about her daughter, and He answered her not a word. What do you think her heart said? Why, she said in herself, "It is well, for He has not denied me: since He has not spoken at all, He has not refused me." With this for an encouragement, she began to plead again. Presently Christ spoke to her sharply, and then her brave heart said, "I have gained words from Him at last, I shall have deeds from Him by-and-by." That also cheered her; and then, when He called her a dog. "Ah," she reasoned, "but a dog is a part of the family, it has some connection with the master of the house. Though it does not eat meat from the table, it gets the crumbs under it, and so I have Thee now, great Master, dog as I am; the great mercy that I ask of Thee, great as it is to me, is only a crumb to Thee; grant it then I beseech Thee." Could she fail to have her request? Impossible! When faith hath a will, she always finds a way, and she will win the day when all things forebode defeat.

Faith's pleas are singular, but, let me add, faith's pleas are always sound; for after all, it is a very telling plea to urge that we are poor and needy. Is not that the main argument with mercy? Necessity is the very best plea with benevolence, either human or divine. Is not our need the best reason we can urge? If we would have a physician come quickly to a sick man, "Sir," we say, "it is no common case, he is on the point of death, come to him, come quickly!" If we wanted our city firemen to rush to a fire, we should not say to them, "Make haste, for it is only a small fire"; but, on the contrary, we urge that it is an old house, full of combustible materials, and there are rumours of petroleum and gunpowder on the premises; besides, it is near a timber yard, hosts of wooden cottages are close by, and before long we shall have half the city in a blaze." We put the case as badly as we can. Oh for wisdom to be equally wise in pleading with God, to find arguments everywhere, but especially to find them in our necessities.

They said two centuries ago that the trade of beggary was the easiest one to carry on, but it paid the worst. I am not sure about the last at this time, but certainly the trade of begging with God is a hard one, and undoubtedly it pays the best of anything in the world. It is very noteworthy that beggars with men have usually plenty of pleas on hand. When a man is hardly driven and starving, he can usually find a reason why he should ask aid of every likely person. Suppose it is a person to whom he is already under many obligations, then the poor creature argues, "I may safely ask of him again, for he knows me, and has been always very kind." If he never asked of the person before, then he says, "I have never worried him before; he cannot say he has already done all he can for me; I will make bold to begin with him." If it is one of his own kin, then he will say, "Surely you will help me in my distress, for you are a relation"; and if it be a stranger, he says, "I have often found strangers kinder than my own blood, help me, I entreat you." If he asks of the rich, he pleads that they will never miss what they give; and if he begs of the poor, he urges that they know what want means, and he is sure they will sympathize with him in his great

distress. Oh that we were half as much on the alert to fill our mouths with arguments when we are before the Lord. How is it that we are not half awake, and do not seem to have our spiritual senses aroused. May God grant that we may learn the art of pleading with the eternal God, for in that shall rest our prevalence with Him, through the merit of Jesus Christ.

III. I must be brief on the next point. It is A SOUL URGENT: "Make haste unto me, O God. O Lord, make no tarrying." We may well be urgent with God, if as yet we are not saved, for our need is urgent; we are in constant peril, and the peril is of the most tremendous kind. O sinner, within an hour, within a minute, thou mayest be where hope can never visit thee: therefore, cry, "Make haste, O God, to deliver me: make haste to help me, O Lord!" Yours is not a case that can bear lingering: you have not time to procrastinate; therefore, be urgent, for your need is so. And, remember, if you really are under a sense of need, and the Spirit of God is at work with you, you will and must be urgent. An ordinary sinner may be content to wait, but a quickened sinner wants mercy now. A dead sinner will lie quiet, but a living sinner cannot rest till pardon is sealed home to his soul. If you are urgent this morning, I am glad of it, because your urgency, I trust, arises from the possession of spiritual life. When you cannot live longer without a Saviour, the Saviour will come to you, and you shall rejoice in Him.

Brethren, members of this church, as I have said on another point, the same truth holds good with you. God will come to bless you, and come speedily, when your sense of need becomes deep and urgent. Oh, how great is this church's need! We shall grow cold, unholy, and worldly; there will be no conversions, there will be no additions to our numbers; there will be diminutions, there will be divisions, there will be mischief of all kinds; Satan will rejoice, and Christ will be dishonoured, unless we obtain a larger measure of the Holy Spirit. Our need is urgent, and when we feel that need thoroughly, then we shall get the blessing which we want. Does any melancholy spirit say, "We are in so bad a state that we cannot expect a large blessing?" I reply, perhaps if we were worse, we should obtain it all the sooner. I do not mean if we were really so, but if we felt we were worse, we should be nearer the blessing. When we mourn that we are in an ill state, then we cry the more vehemently to God, and the blessing comes. God never refused to go with Gideon because he had not enough valiant men with him; but He paused because the people were too many. He brought them down from thousands to hundreds, and He diminished the hundreds before He gave them victory. When you feel that you must have God's presence, but that you do not deserve it, and when your consciousness of this lays you in the dust, then shall the blessing be vouchsafed.

For my part, brethren and sisters, I desire to feel a spirit of urgency within my soul as I plead with God for the dew of His grace to descend upon this church. I am not bashful in this matter, for I have a license to pray. Mendicancy is forbidden in the streets, but, before the Lord I am a licensed beggar. Jesus has said, "men ought always to pray and not to faint." You land on the shores of a foreign country with the greatest confidence when you carry a passport with you, and God has issued passports to His children, by which they come boldly to His mercy seat; He has invited you, He has encouraged you, He has bidden you come to Him, and He has promised that whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Come, then, come urgently, come importunately, come with this plea, "I am poor and needy; make no tarrying, O my God," and a blessing shall surely come; it will not tarry. God grant we may see it, and give Him the glory of it.

IV. I am sorry to have been so brief where I had need to have enlarged, but I must close with the fourth point. Here is another part of the art and mystery of prayer—THE SOUL GRASPING GOD. She has pleaded, and she has been urgent, but now she comes to close quarters; she grasps the covenant angel with one hand, "Thou art my help," and with the other, "Thou art my deliverer." Oh, those blessed "my's," those potent "my's." The sweetness of the Bible lies in the possessive pronouns, and he who is taught to use them as the Psalmist did, shall come off a conqueror with the eternal God. Now sinner, I pray God thou mayest be helped to say this morning to the blessed Christ of God, "Thou art my help and my deliverer." Perhaps you mourn that you cannot get that length, but, poor soul, hast thou any other help? If thou hast, then thou canst not hold two helpers with the same hand. "Oh, no," say you, "I have no help anywhere. I have no hope except in Christ." Well, then, poor soul, since thy hand is empty, that empty hand was made on purpose to grasp thy Lord with: lay hold on Him! Say to Him, this day, "Lord, I will hang on Thee as poor lame Jacob did; now I cannot help myself, I will cleave to Thee; I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." "Ah, it would be too bold," says one. But the Lord loves holy boldness in poor sinners; He would have you be bolder than you think of being. It is an unhallowed bashfulness that dares not trust a crucified Saviour. He died on purpose to save such as thou art; let Him have His way with thee, and do thou trust Him. "Oh," saith one, "but I am so unworthy." He came to seek and save the unworthy. He is not the Saviour of the self-righteous: He is the sinners' Saviour—"friend of sinners" is His name. Unworthy one, lay hold on Him! "Oh," saith one, "but I have no right." Well, but that is the very reason you should grasp Him, for right is for the court of justice, not for the hall of mercy. I would advise thee not to try thy rights, for thou hast no right but to be condemned; but thou needest no rights when dealing with Jesus. Nothing makes a charitable person refuse his alms like a beggar's saying, "I have a right." "Nay," says the giver, "If you have rights, go and get them; I will give you nothing." Since you have no right, your need shall be your claim; it is all the claim you want. Methinks I hear one say, "It is too late for me to plead for grace." It cannot be; it is impossible. While you live and desire mercy, it is not too late to seek it. Notice the parable of the man who wanted three loaves. I will tell you what crossed my mind when I read it: the man went to his friend at midnight; it was late, was it not? Why, his friend might have said, and, indeed, did in effect say to him, that it was too late, but yet the pleader gained the bread after all. In the parable the time was late, it could not have been later; for if it had been a little later than midnight, it would have been early in the next morning, and so not late at all. It was midnight, and it could not

be later; and so, if it is downright midnight with your soul, yet, be of good cheer, Jesus is an out of season Saviour; many of His servants are "born out of due time." Any season is the right season to call upon the name of Jesus; therefore, only do not let the devil tempt thee with the thought that it can be too late. Go to Jesus now, go at once, and lay hold on the horns of the altar by a venturesome faith, and say, "Sacrifice for sinners, Thou art a sacrifice for me. Intercessor for the graceless, Thou art an intercessor for me. Thou who distributest gifts to the rebellious, distribute gifts to me, for a rebel I have been. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Such am I, good Master; let the power of Thy death be seen in me to save my soul."

O, you that are saved and, therefore, love Christ, I want you, dear brethren, as the saints of God, to practice this last part of my subject; and be sure to lay hold upon God in prayer. "Thou art my help and my deliverer." As a church we throw ourselves upon the strength of God, and we can do nothing without Him; but we do not mean to be without Him, we will hold Him fast. "Thou art my help and my deliverer." There was a boy at Athens, according to the old story, who used to boast that he ruled all Athens, and when they asked him how, he said, "Why, I rule my mother, my mother rules my father, and my father rules the city." He who knows how to be master of prayer will rule the heart of Christ, and Christ can and will do all things for His people, for the Father hath committed all things into His hands. You can be omnipotent if you know how to pray, omnipotent in all things which glorify God. What doth the Word itself say? "Let him lay hold on My strength." Prayer moves the arm that moves the world. Oh for grace to grasp Almighty love in this fashion. We want more hold-fast prayer; more tugging, and gripping, and wrestling prayer, that saith, "I will not let Thee go." That picture of Jacob at Jabbok shall suffice for us to close with. The covenant angel is there, and Jacob wants a blessing from him: he seems to put him off, but no put-offs will do for Jacob. Then the angel endeavours to escape from him, and tugs and strives; so he may, but no efforts shall make Jacob relax his grasp. At last the angel falls from ordinary wrestling to wounding him in the very seat of his strength; and Jacob will let his thigh go, and all his limbs go, but he will not let the angel go. The poor man's strength shrivels under the withering touch, but in his weakness he is still strong: he throws his arms about the mysterious man, and holds him as in a death-grip. Then the other says, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." Mark, he did not shake him off, he only said, "Let me go," the angel will do nothing to force him to relax his hold, he leaves that to his voluntary will. The valiant Jacob cries, "No, I am set on it, I am resolved to win an answer to my prayer. I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Now, when the church begins to pray, it may be at first, the Lord will make as though He would have gone further, and we may fear that no answer will be given. Hold on, dear brethren. Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, notwithstanding all. By-and-by, it may be, there will come discouragements where we looked for a flowing success; we shall find brethren hindering, some will be slumbering, and others sinning; backsliders and impenitent souls will abound; but let us not be turned aside. Let us be all the more eager. And if it should so happen that we ourselves become distressed and dispirited, and feel we never were so weak as we are now; never mind, brethren, still hold on, for when the sinew is shrunk the victory is near. Grasp with a tighter clutch than ever. Be this our resolution, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." Remember the longer the blessing is coming the richer it will be when it arrives. That which is gained speedily by a single prayer is sometimes only a second rate blessing; but that which is gained after many a desperate tug, and many an awful struggle, is a full weighted and precious blessing. The children of importunity are always fair to look upon. The blessing which costs us the most prayer will be worth the most. Only let us be persevering in supplication, and we shall gain a broad far-reaching benediction for ourselves, the churches, and the world. I wish it were in my power to stir you all to fervent prayer; but I must leave it with the great Author of all true supplication, namely, the Holy Spirit. May He work in us mightily, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

GOD, THE CHILDREN'S TEACHER

"O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth."—Psalm lxxi. 17.

DAVID was a very great man, and at the time he used these words he ruled a kingdom, and wore a crown; but he needed to be taught, and he tells us that he had been to school, and that the wisdom he had was given to him by the great Teacher who taught in that school. You who are at school now must take care that you use well the privilege you have. You will not be wise without learning. Learning does not grow up in our heart, like weeds do in the fields; but it must be sown in us, as good wheat and barley must be cast into the ground if there is ever to be a harvest.

David did well in life because he had been well taught in his youth. He was one of those in whom God fulfilled that text, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." You know, when boys go to school, their teacher feels very anxious that they should turn out well, and be a credit to him. The teacher is very sorry when, after all his trouble, the boy becomes a dunce; and he is very happy when he sees some lad prosper in life, because he says, "I trained that boy." The success of the scholar brings honour and credit to the teacher. So David speaks of God having taught him, in order that he may give honour and glory to God. David feels that he owes so much to his God that he cannot help saying what he does. "Lord," he seems to say, "if I have learnt anything, if I have

learnt how to fight giant Goliath, if I have learnt how to bear my troubles, if I have learnt how to pray, if I have learnt how to preach and how to be a king, I had it all from Thee. I was the scholar, Thou wast the Teacher; and unto Thy name be all the praise." Now, I shall not keep on any longer with the preface to my sermon; it is a cold, damp night, and people do not like to be kept outside the doors at such a time; we will just put our finger on the latch, and get to the inside of our sermon at once.

I. As soon as we come into it, the first thing we see is THE GREAT TEACHER. Who is the Teacher? David says, "*Thou* hast taught me from my youth." Who taught David?

The CHILDREN: "God."

Mr. SPURGEON: Yes, that is right, God was David's Teacher; he says in the text, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." I have no doubt that David had other teachers; but all the teachers he had would not have been of any practical use to him if he had not also been taught by God.

Now, if God be the Teacher, we shall notice, first, that *God is an effectual Teacher.* David had been taught by his good mother. I know he had a godly mother, for he says, "Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid." He calls his mother God's handmaid, which shows that she was one of God's servants. I have no doubt that she took David on her knee, and taught him God's Word while he was but a child, for he had such a love for it afterwards that he must have had a love for it while he was yet little. After his mother, I have no doubt his father taught him. What was the name of David's father?

The CHILDREN: "Jesse."

Mr. SPURGEON: Quite right; and we believe that Jesse was also one of God's people, and that he would have been sure to teach his son wisely, and train him up in the way he should go. I think there was another person who taught David, namely, the prophet Samuel. You recollect that Samuel anointed David while he was yet a youth; he poured oil on his head, and told him that he would one day be a king over God's people. I feel sure that Samuel told him what God's will was, and tried to train him so that he might, when he became a king, do God's good pleasure rightly. But all these teachers—his mother, his father, and the prophet, could not have taught David if God had not taught him too. You see, dear children, your teachers, though they are very good and kind, can only get at your ear; but God gets at the heart, and that is where we most need to be taught. Suppose my watch should get out of order so that it would not go, and I could not get it open, all I could do in polishing up the gold outside, or cleaning the glass, would not make it go. I must take it to some watchmaker who could get at the inside, and who could touch the mainspring, or clean out the wheels. Now, your teachers cannot get at that which is inside of you as they could wish unless God helps them; but God can get at the heart, which is like the mainspring of the watch. He can get at our thoughts and feelings, which are like the wheels. I trust that you, my dear children, may be taught of God from your youth, because God is an effectual Teacher.

The next point is that *God is a condescending Teacher.* Have you ever thought of this? The great God made yon blue sky, the sun and the moon, and all those bright stars that we see at night, and piled up the big mountains, and poured out the great seas and oceans from the hollow of His hand, and He is so great that all things in this world are just like nothing when compared to Him; and yet He stoops to teach children. He stooped to teach David. David says, "Thou hast taught me from my youth." Would not some of you girls like to go to school if the Queen were to take a class? I am sure that nearly all the young ladies and all the little girls in London would be tearing away to the place if the Queen would but teach a class; you would think it such a great honour to be taught by Her Majesty. Oh, but when God teaches, what a wonderful stoop of condescending love that is! He who made the world, and bears all things up by His everlasting might, condescends to be a Teacher of little children: "Thou hast taught me from my youth." Perhaps you have heard of that holy man, Mr. John Eliot. He went away from all his home comforts, out among the Red Indians and spent his life in preaching to them; and when he was sick, and near to death, he was lying in a hut upon a hard couch, and what, think you, was the last thing he did? He had a New Testament, and he was teaching a little Red Indian boy his A B C, and making him spell out some simple text from God's holy Word. "Oh, but!" one said; "does this great missionary teach that little red-faced copper-coloured boy?" "Yes," replied Eliot; "I prayed to God that I might never live to be useless; so, now I cannot preach, I am trying to teach Jesus Christ to this one little boy." That was very kind of him; but think of the kindness of the great God, who wheels the stars along, and calls them all by their names, that He should condescend to teach us. Dear children, do not refuse to be taught by God; but, on the contrary, let this be your resolve, "My Father, Thou shalt be the Guide of my youth." Ask the Lord to teach you; for, as surely as He taught David, He is willing to teach you to-night.

My next remark is that *God is a loving Teacher.* I know you boys and girls in the Sunday-school classes like to have a smiling-faced teacher. You do not care to have one who is very cross and short-tempered with you, and inclined to give you a box on the ears; you like somebody who is very kind. I cannot tell you how kind God is to us; how patient, how pitiful, how tender. A good mother was telling her little girl a lesson over ever so many times,—I think it was nineteen or twenty times,—and someone said, "How can you have the patience to tell the child the same thing twenty times?" "Why!" she replied; "I tell her twenty times because nineteen are not sufficient." Now, our God not only tells us twenty times, but twenty thousand times if necessary; "for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." From our very earliest childhood, right on, God keeps teaching us with great patience; and yet some of us are so wicked or so thoughtless that we forget what He teaches us almost as soon as we hear it; and we go on to do the wrong thing which He tells us not to do, and we forget to do the right thing which He bids us do. Yet He does not strike us dead. He still continues preaching to us, teaching us on the Sabbath, and on the week-days, by His Book, and by His Spirit, and by His ministers, and by our teachers and in a thousand ways. Oh, what a kind and patient Teacher the Lord our God is! But I must not keep you long on any one point.

The next truth is that *God is a wise Teacher.*

Have you ever thought what a wise Teacher God is? I will prove to you that He is very wise; for, do you know, He teaches not only men, but He can teach beasts? Did you ever see a beaver? Perhaps you did at the Zoological Gardens. Well, those beavers have flat tails, and they know how to use them just like bricklayers use their trowels; and they will go and nibble away at trees, and get bits of wood, and go down to a river, and build a house Nobody could build such a house, so fit for beavers, as they build; they daub it, and plaster it; you would think that they had been apprenticed to a plasterer, they do the work so well. Who taught the beavers to build a house? Why, God! And how wise He must be to teach even the animals He has created? How wise he must be to teach the beaver to build a house! But God not only teaches beasts, He also teaches fish; and I never heard of any man who could teach a fish as God does. The fishes of the sea know exactly the day of the month when they ought to begin to go round the English coast; and the herrings and the mackerel come exactly to the time, though nobody rings the bell to say to them, "It is such a day of the week, and such a month of the year; and you ought to swim away." When the time comes for them to go back again, away they go, and they seem to understand everything that they should do. If God can teach even the fish of the sea, what a wise Teacher He must be!

It is said that, many years ago, there was a very wise man who lived at Cambridge, and he taught scholars Latin and Greek, and many things that seemed very queer to the people who lived then; and the news flew abroad that there was a wonderful man there who knew everything, a little about the stars, and a great deal about all sorts of things. The young men all over Europe began to flock to him, and that is how there came to be a University at Cambridge, for the fame of the man's learning drew those who wanted to be taught to come and be pupils to him. Now, when God can teach even the beasts and the fishes, you boys and girls and grown-up people ought to say, "Lord, let us be scholars in Thy school!" Why, my dear friend over here, Mr. Johnson, is such a good teacher that the boys come and fill the school-house! If he were a bad teacher, he would not have half the number of boys that he has. A good teacher is sure to draw pupils, and God is the best and wisest Teacher. Oh, may His grace draw you to His school, that you may be able to say with David, "Thou hast taught me from my youth!"

I have only one more point to speak upon under this head, so do not grow weary. *God is a needful Teacher.* It is really necessary that every one of us should be taught of God; for, if we are not, somebody else will teach us, and that somebody else will so teach us that we shall lose our souls for ever. There was a sad sight seen some years ago, I daresay the like of it has been seen far too often. A minister called at a house, and he saw a woman crying, oh, so bitterly, and she refused to be comforted! The minister said, "My good woman, what is the matter?' She answered, "Oh, my boy, my boy, my boy!" "What, is he ill?" "Oh, no, sir; worse than that!" "Is he dead?" "Worse than that." "What is the matter?" "Oh, my boy, my boy!" "Where is he?" "O sir, he is in prison,—in prison for stealing and it is all my fault!" "How is that?" said he. "Why, I took him to the theatre; and if there is any place where children can learn to do wrong, it is there!" And so she began to cry again. "I took him there, and that was the first step in his ruin; and now my boy is lost." Ah, if you do not go to God to teach you, the devil will teach you! Do you know, the devil has plenty of teachers? I see them on Sunday; I mean bad boys and bad girls, who teach other boys and girls to do wrong. The devil can make a Sunday-school teacher out of a very small boy. "Come," he says, "I'll teach you"; and he teaches that boy to say bad words, and to do wrong things; and then away the boy goes, and teaches others. A bad boy is like a sheep that comes into the flock with a disease in it, and the disease goes from one sheep to another.

"One sickly sheep, infects the flock,
And poisons all the rest."

But if we have God for our Teacher, we shall not be taught to sin; but we shall be taught everything that is good.

II. But now we are going on to the second head, and that is, THE LESSONS WHICH THIS GREAT TEACHER TAUGHT DAVID.

One of the lessons which God taught David was, to *value his soul.* We all want to be taught that lesson. We generally value our bodies, and take care of them, and up to a certain point that is right. Some of us like to look into the glass, for we think we are rather pretty; but there is danger in that glass as well as in others. I like to see the boys well-washed and clean, and I am pleased when they keep themselves tidy; and though I do not like to see girls dressed very finely, yet it is very nice to see them neat and trim. But, after all, you know, the body is only like the shell of the nut; the inside is the nut itself. It is the soul that is the thing we ought to care about. Some time ago, there was a great fire. What a noise there was in the street! Here come the engines! People are gathering together all round the house, and there is a woman shouting and crying, "Oh!" she says, "come and help me! Do come and help me! I want to save some of my things. She gets a bed downstairs, she brings out a box, she has secured some little trinkets and jewellery, and she gets everything that she can out of the fire, and she says to herself, "Dear me, am I not fortunate in having saved so much?" The fire is burning, the house is crackling, everything is being consumed, and all of a sudden the woman starts up, and says, "Oh, dear! where's my child?" The neighbours cry, "What, did you not think of your child first?" "Oh!" she replies, "what a foolish woman I've been! I have saved these paltry things, and forgotten my child, my precious child!" That is like a person who cares only for his body, what he shall eat, and what he shall drink, and what he shall put on, and then at last when he comes to die, he says, "Oh, dear! I have forgotten my soul, and now my soul must be cast away for ever into the everlasting burning that never shall be quenched." Dear children I hope God will teach every one of you in the Sunday-school to look after the welfare of your soul, and to recollect that, if you were to gain the whole world, and lose your own soul, all the gain would be an eternal loss.

The next lesson that God taught David was, *to value the world aright.* David, I am sure, valued the world aright because he says, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us!" And he

says again, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Young people generally think of this world. I will tell you a story, and ask you a question. There was a little boy carrying a basket of peaches, and he had to cross a railway. Just as he crossed it, the train came up, and went right over him, and crushed him to atoms. A little girl heard that story, and I do not think you could guess what question she asked, because it was such a silly question that you never would guess it, I think. Her mother said the dear little boy was all crushed to pieces by the train going over him; but the little girl was silly enough to say, "Mother, what became of the peaches?" Was not that a foolish question to ask; Now, when I hear of people dying, and I often do hear of persons who have been living without God, and without Christ, and they have been said to be "worth" perhaps £20,000, or £50,000, what silly question do you think I hear people ask? They say, "How much money did he leave?" as if that was of any consequence at all compared with the other question, "What has become of his soul? Where is his immortal spirit?" The little basket of peaches that the child carried was nothing compared with the boy himself; and all that you can ever gain in this world is nothing compared with your own self, your own real self, your soul. So I hope you will be taught by God's grace to put the world in its right place, and look at it as being nothing compared with the saving of your soul.

Another thing that David was taught of God was, *to see his sin.* I know that, in your classes, you have read the fifty-first psalm. How much David talks about his sin in that Psalm! He says, "My sin is ever before me." This is one of the lessons that every boy and girl here must learn, if they would enter heaven. You must learn that you are a sinner, and learn it so that it makes you mourn and cry out before God. I saw, last week, in the West-end of London, two soldiers, with bayonets fixed, one walking on one side of a soldier, and the other on the other side of him, and the man who was walking in the middle had a coat over his hands. I knew what that meant; he had handcuffs on his wrists. He had been deserting; and he had his hands chained together; but he did not like the people to know it, and therefore he had asked his comrades to be kind enough just to throw a cloak over his hands, so that he might not look as though he was chained. I do not blame him for that. But, you know, the devil—though men are all chained by nature, and are all of them slaves,—puts something over them so that they cannot see their chains, and they walk on believing that they are free, whereas they are in the worst possible bondage. One of the best lessons you can learn is to find out that you are a slave, and that you need someone to set you free; to find out that your soul is sick, and needs to be healed. Oh, may God's Spirit teach you that, and teach it to you in your youth!

But, better still, the next lesson that God taught David was, *where the remedy was for all his sins.* If you read the fifty-first Psalm, you can hear him say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." David knew that the blood of Jesus Christ could take away his sin. I have heard, but I do not know whether it is true, that a little creature, called the ichneumon, which lives in Egypt, lives by killing and eating snakes. It is a very useful little creature, for it destroys many things that would be deadly to men. But sometimes these snakes bite the ichneumon, and he would die, but the story goes that there is a kind of grass growing near the river which heals snake-bites, and as soon as ever the ichneumon gets bitten, and feels the poison, he runs away to this little herb, and nibbles at it, and gets healed directly. Whether it is true or not, you and I have been bitten by the old serpent Satan, and there is "the Plant of Renown," the Lord Jesus Christ; and if we go and feed upon Him, all the wounds that sin can make will soon be healed.

Well, these were very good lessons to be learned by David. Let me remind you what they were. God taught him to value his soul, to value the world aright, to see his sin, and to see the remedy for it. Another thing David learned was, *to live as in God's sight.* How wonderfully David talks, in various parts of the Psalms, about God seeing him! When I was a boy, about the size of many of these boys that I see before me here, my father made me learn that long Psalm, the one hundred and thirty-ninth, in which Dr. Watts puts thus the great truth that God is everywhere and can see everyone:—

"If mounted on a morning ray
I fly beyond the Western sea,
Thy swifter hand would first arrive,
And there arrest Thy fugitive.

"Or should I try to shun Thy sight
Beneath the spreading veil of night,
One glance of Thine, one piercing ray,
Would kindle darkness into day.

"The veil of night is no disguise,
No screen from Thy all-searching eyes;
Thy hand can seize Thy foes as soon
Through midnight shades as blazing noon.

"Oh may these thoughts possess my breast,
Where'er I rove, where'er I rest!
Nor let my weaker passions dare
Consent to sin, for God is there."

One other lesson David learnt was this, *he learnt to prepare to die.* This is one of the grandest lessons that any man can ever learn; for, you know, we must all die. There was a great king, who was a great warrior as well as a king. His name was Saladin; and when he was very ill in his tent, he said to his generals who gathered round him, "Go and fetch the crescent-banner around which my warriors have always rallied in the day of battle." So they brought it in, on a long lance, and they unfurled the colours right before him, and the dying man said, "Take off the colours; and see, there is the shroud that I have had prepared to wrap me in when I am dead. Now, put the shroud on the lance instead of the colours"; and they did so. These were the last words he uttered, "Go and take that shroud on the lance, and go through every street of the city, and cry aloud, 'This is all that remains of the mighty Saladin! This is all that remains of the mighty Saladin!'" And this is what will be said of all of us, 'This is all that remains of the fair girl with the beautiful hair"; "This is all that remains of that dear boy who was once so full of mirth and laughter"; "This is all that remains of that grey-headed man, so wise and learned"; "This is all that remains of the merchant with all his wealth"; or "This is all that remains of the preacher with all his speech." Oh, to be ready, thoroughly ready, whenever the summons shall come for us to leave this world behind us, and go to the better land!

III. Now the third head is about WHEN THE SCHOLAR WENT TO SCHOOL.

I hope none of these boys who go to school ever go too late. "Dilly, dilly dollar," don't they say? "ten o'clock scholar." He is always a bad scholar who comes in late. Those who go to God's school are never very good scholars if they go too late. When did David go to God's school, according to the text?

THE CHILDREN: "In his youth."

MR. SPURGEON: That is right; in his youth. He says, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." He went to school in his early days, and that is one of the reasons he turned out so good a scholar, because he went to school betimes. Why should we go to God's school early? I think we ought to do so, first, *because it is such a happy school.* Schools used to be very miserable places; but, nowadays, I really wish I could go to school again. I went into the Borough Road School the other day, into the repository, where they sell slates, and pencils, and books, and all such things. The person who was there said to me, "Do you want to buy any of these things?" I said, "What are they?" He opened a box, and I said, "Why, they are toys, are they not?" He answered, "No, they are not; they are used for the lessons that are taught in the kinder-garten school." I said, "Why if I were to take them home, my boys would have a game with them, for they are only toys!" "Just so," he said, "but they are what are used in the kinder-garten school to make learning the same as playing, so that little children should play while they are learning." Why, I thought, if that were so, I should like to go at once! Now, those who go to God's school are made much more happy than any toys can make children. He gives them real pleasure. There is a verse, I don't know how many of you know it; I will say the first line, you say the second, if you can.

MR. SPURGEON: "'Tis religion that can give"

THE CHILDREN: "Sweetest pleasures while we live";

MR. SPURGEON: "'Tis religion must supply"

THE CHILDREN: "Solid comfort when we die."

Another reason why boys and girls should try to get to God's school very early is *because they will not have so much to be sorry for afterwards.* Two or three times during the last fortnight, I have heard good men pray in the Tabernacle, and each one has said something like this, "O God save my dear children! Grant that they may never go into sin as I did, that they may never have so much to repent of and to weep over as I had!" That was the father of some boy here, I expect; and oh, I know, if he were here to-night, he would say, "Dear boy, dear girl, do not go into sins which will afterwards cause you to weep." This story will show you what I mean. A boy's father once said to him, "Now, John, I will tell you what I am going to do to make you look at yourself a little. Every time you do wrong, I am going to drive a nail into that post; and every time you do right, and are a good boy, I shall draw one out." "Well," John thought, "I will not have any nails in that post if I can help it." But they did get in somehow; boys will be boys, and girls will be girls; and there was a lot of nails in the post, and the boy felt very sorry as he saw them, for they seemed to speak to him, and to say "You disobeyed your father that day; you disobeyed your mother another day," and he thought he *would* be a good boy. So he tried with all his might, and got half the nails out; and after a while, he got every nail out of the post. And what do you think he said then? His father said to him, "You have got all the nails out, John," "Yes, father," he said, "but there are the holes still there. There are the holes still there." Now when God's grace comes to a man who has led a wicked life from his boyhood, it pardons him, and takes the nails out. "Ah!" says he, "but there are the holes still there. I recollect the sins I did, and they have done me serious hurt, though God has forgiven me." One good man said, "I never shall forgive myself, to think that I lived so long without serving God." Get then, dear children, to God's school early, that you may not have the holes in the post, nor have so much to be sorry for in your after life.

Another reason why I would have boys and girls go to God's school early is *because it will make them most useful.* A man cannot be very greatly useful who has only the fag end of his life to use for God. The tree that has been transplanted very lately cannot be expected to bear much fruit; but a tree that was put into the soil when but a scion, and that has continued to grow there year after year, is more likely to become a good fruit-bearing tree.

One other reason why I would have you go to God's school soon is that *you will die soon.* Even if you live long, life will be very short. Oh, that God's mercy would take you into God's school now, even to-night, that you may be able to say with David, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth." Let this be your cry,—

"Soon as my youthful lips can speak
Their feeble prayer to Thee,
O let my heart Thy favour seek;
Good Lord, remember me!"

IV. Now the last thing, and that is the most important of all to-night, and it will not take many minutes to tell you about it, the last thing is this. David said, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." But David is dead now. I wonder whether there are some here to-night who can say the same as he did; I hope there are many. So the last head is, THE SCHOLAR—WHERE IS HE? THE SCHOLAR—WHERE IS SHE?

Pass those questions all round the building, and I hope there are many who will be able to say, "O God, Thou hast taught *me*," —Mary, Jane, Thomas, William,—"Thou hast taught *me* from my youth." I do not suppose you could make much of a speech to-night if you were on this platform; but, do you know, if I could have my choice between being able to speak as well as Mr. Gladstone, who spoke so grandly last night, or only be able to say, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth,"—if I could only have one of the two, I should certainly choose the latter? There is more music in that sentence than in all the eloquence of the greatest orator.

I shall now ask a question or two, and then I shall have done. All the children here believe that, when we have gone from this life, we shall go into another world; and you are all hoping, I am sure, that, when you die, you will go to that happy land of which we sometimes sing,—

"There is a happy land,
Far, far away,
Where saints in glory stand,
Bright, bright as day;
Oh, how they sweetly sing,
Worthy is our Saviour King,
Loud let His praises ring,
Praise, praise for ay.

" Come to this happy land,
Come, come away :
Why will you doubting stand ?
Why still delay ?
Oh, we shall happy be,
When from sin and sorrow free ;
Lord, we shall live with Thee,
Blest, blest for ay !

" Bright in that happy land
Beams every eye ;
Kept by a Father's hand,
Love cannot die.
On then to glory run,
Be a crown, and kingdom won ;
And bright above the sun,
Reign, reign for ay."

May we have that crown and kingdom ! That is what we are looking for. A little girl came home one Sunday, and asked her mother a question. Little boys and girls will sometimes ask questions which cannot be very easily answered. She said, " Mother, do you believe what teacher told me to-day ? " " What's that, dear ? " " Why, she says that we are only going to stop in this world for a little while, and that we are going to another world ; do you believe it, mother ? " " Oh, yes, my dear, of course I do ; the Bible says so ! " Then, mother, you know aunt Eliza is going to Australia." " Yes, what about that ? " " She is getting ready, is she not ? " " Yes ; she is packing up her trunks, and getting ready." " Then, mother, if you are going into another world, why don't you get ready, too ? " A very proper question for a child to put, and a very proper question for me to put to you here. If you are going to another world, dear children, may God's Holy Spirit help you to get ready to go !

Dear children, I hope you will be scholars who will learn that *the next world is the one for us to look for.*

This world is but a very poor thing at the best. A great man, a very rich man, and a mighty emperor, invited a friend of his youth to come and stay with him ; and this friend, when he entered into the palace, was quite dazzled by the marble, and ivory, and gold, and silver, and gems on every side, and he said to the great man, " How happy you must be with all this wealth ! I never saw such a palace, nor such servants in livery, nor such gardens ! " " Ah ! " said the other, "I will one of these evenings tell you what I think of all I have." So, one evening, a servant brought to this gentleman, on a golden dish, an apple so lovely that it seemed as if such an apple never grew ; it was, as we sometimes say, like wax, perfect. He took it off the golden dish, but put it back again, and the servant took a knife, and cut it down the middle, and inside it was full of black dust, and a great worm dropped out of it. The emperor said nothing, but looked at his friend, and his friend knew that he meant, " That is like my life ; all outside looks very beautiful, but inside there is a worm." Now, in all the joy that this world ever gives to us there is a worm. The only apples that have no worms grow only in Paradise ; and there, dear children, if God shall teach us, we shall sit and pluck new fruit from the celestial tree. Let us go there, and leave this poor world behind, seeking a better rest, where fruits immortal grow.

Mr. Spurgeon then went over the heads of the sermon with the children. The latter, having omitted one point in their replies, Mr. Spurgeon added :—

That is just like most people ; they forgot *the time*, that is, now, *now*, NOW ; and I must just say this one sentence or so. The way to go to God's school is this,—Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, died on the cross to open the door into that great school ; and if any of you, my dear young friends, will trust in Jesus Christ to save you, because he died for sinners, you are then inside His school, and you shall be taught and trained, and as I told you about the little ichneumon that ate the grass, and healed all its wounds, so shall you have all your sins forgiven, and your soul-wounds healed, and you shall go on your way rejoicing.

THE OLD MAN'S SERMON

" O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth : and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not ; until I have shewed Thy strength unto this generation, and Thy power to every one that is to come."—Psalm lxxi. 17, 18.

I EXPECT during the present week to have the pleasure of preaching at Kettering, to celebrate the centenary of the ministry in that place of Mr. Toller and his father. My esteemed friend Mr. Toller has for about fifty-five years proclaimed the gospel of the grace of God to the same people, and with the forty-five years of his father's previous pastorate the century is completed. Having this very pleasant task before me, I have been led to consider the subject of old age, and especially the old age of believers, and have concluded that " *the reminiscences of an old man* " would furnish us a suitable topic for this morning's discourse. I was the more led to choose the subject because on Sabbath week the children and young people will have a claim upon the preacher, since that day has been selected by the Sunday School Union for special prayer. To balance accounts, let us give this morning's service to our grave and reverend seniors.

David has here spoken as an aged man, and what he has said has been echoed by thousands of venerable believers. His experience of the past, his prayer for the present, and his aspiration for the future, have all occurred to others who are his equals in years, and those of us who are in middle life will ere long be glad to say " Amen " thereto. " O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth : and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." David in this passage may be regarded as the model of an aged believer converted in early life, and we feel quite safe in taking all his expressions and putting them into the mouths of veteran soldiers of the cross.

I. The first thing we shall dwell upon this morning will be HIS SCHOLARSHIP, *or a good beginning.* "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." *The Psalmist was an instructed believer.* He had not merely been saved, but taught: conversion had led to instruction. I call the attention of all young Christians to this. How desirable it is not merely that you should be forgiven your sins, and justified by faith in Christ Jesus, and that your hearts should be renewed by the operations of the Holy Ghost, but that you should go to school to Jesus, and take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him. Do you not know that this is the good part which Mary chose, and which the Lord declared should not be taken away from her? She chose to sit at His feet to learn of Him. Do not suppose that to be saved from hell is everything, you need also to be instructed in righteousness. If you seek to know the Lord more and more, it will save you from a thousand snares, cause you to grow in grace, and enable you to be useful. That will be a fruitful old age which was preceded by an instructed youth. We ought to know the truth and understand it, for if we do not we shall always be weak in the faith. That David was exceedingly well instructed is clear from his Psalms, which contain a mine of doctrine and a wealth of experience never surpassed even by other inspired writings. If one had no other book than the Psalms to study, he might, by the blessing of God's Spirit, become one of the wisest of men. Aim, then, my brethren to be disciples now, that in your old age you may look back with joy on the days spent in heavenly learning.

All his instruction the Psalmist traced to his God. "O God, *Thou* hast taught me." He had entered Christ's college as a scholar. Most wisely had he chosen to learn of Him who has infinite wisdom to impart, and divine skill in communicating it. The Lord not only endeavours to teach, but He does do so; He knows how to make His children learn, for He speaks to the heart, and teaches us to profit. "O God, Thou hast taught me." What a blessed thing it is when we are fully convinced by the Holy Spirit that to learn anything aright we must be taught of God. Too many appear to fancy that everything they need to know they can discover for themselves, they can work it out by their own thoughts, or at any rate the profound learning of their favourite authors will carry them through. My brother, thou who hast grown grey in thy Master's service, I am sure thou hast learned to mistrust thine own understanding, and art glad to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child. You know by experience that all you have ever learned apart from God has been a lesson of sorrow or of folly: you have obtained no true light except from the great Father of lights. No heavenly truths are learned aright till by the Holy Ghost they are burnt into the soul. Blessed are those who have gone to school to such a Master, they shall be among the wise who shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.

The Lord had taught David in part by His Word, for we find David delighting in the Scriptures and meditating in them both day and night. He taught Him also by His ministers. He gathered no little instruction from Samuel, and he learned some pointed lessons from Nathan; while Gad, the king's seer, no doubt, also ministered to his building up. God's children are willing to be taught by God's servants. He had also been instructed by the Holy Spirit: many a precious truth had been communicated to him in the quiet of the sheep walks, or in the solitary caverns of the hills, and even when he had become a king he was awakened in the night watches that he might hear the voice of the Lord his God. Moreover, the Lord taught him by providence. He learned much from his shepherd's crook, much from his sling and stone, much from the hatred of Saul, much from the love of Jonathan. He must have learned much afterwards of his own heart from his own trials, follies, and sins, and he must have seen much of man's worthlessness from the ingratitude of Absalom, the treachery of Ahithophel, the brutality of Joab, and the blasphemy of Shimei. His whole life was a course of education. Whether he stood on the hill Mizar or traversed the valley of Baca, whether he exulted in green pastures or sunk in the deeps where all God's waves and billows went over him, whether he sang a hallelujah or chanted a *misêrêré*, everything was training him for a yet nobler existence. Hence he could say to the Most High, "Thou hast taught me." O beloved Christian friends, in looking back can you not see how everything has been instructive to you when you have been willing to learn? What a school have some of us passed through, a school of trial and a school of love. We have sat on the hard form of discipline we have felt the rod of correction, and on the other hand our eyes have sparkled with delight as we have studied the illuminated book of fellowship, and peered into the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him. In us has been fulfilled that ancient covenant promise, "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord."

David also had the privilege of beginning early. "O God, Thou hast taught me *from my youth.*" I was a scholar in Thy infant class; I was put to Thee to learn my letters, and when I learned to spell out Thy name as my Saviour and Father, it was Thy grace which taught it me. All true learning begins at Christ's feet, and it is well to be there in our boyhood. If you would be a good scholar you must be a young scholar. David felt that he needed to be instructed of God from his youth, for in one of his psalms he says, "Remember not the sins of my youth, and my former transgressions." So that even pious David had sins of his youth to mourn over, and therefore needed as well as others to learn the way of holiness when young. The dire necessity which the foolishness of nature has laid upon us from our earliest days is met by early grace. My aged brethren, I would urge you at this moment to bless the Lord for the grace which in early days saved many of you from falling into grievous sin.

The sin which the Psalmist mourned over he was enabled by divine teaching to master. He says himself, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word," and so David had done, and hence his early life was marked by great purity and simplicity of character, because he had so well been taught of God. Specially had he been taught to *trust* his God, for in the fifth verse of this psalm he says, "Thou art my hope, O Lord God, Thou art my trust from my youth"; and being so taught he had practically proved his faith, for while he was yet in his youth he smote the uncircumcised Philistine, and in the name of God delivered Israel. Blessed is that young man who practically shows by daring deeds that he is a disciple of Jesus. Blessed is that old man who in

looking back confesses that he needed teaching from his youth up, but also rejoices that he received instruction from the Lord, and was led into the way of righteousness.

Further, notice David tells us *he kept to his studies*. He says, "O God, Thou hast taught me *from* my youth," which implies that God had continued to teach him: and so indeed he had. The learner had not sought another school, nor had the Master turned off His pupil. Some make slight progress because they seem to begin well but afterwards turn aside to folly. They profess to be taught of God at one time, but they grow weary of the plain gospel of Jesus, and resort to heresy-mongers and inventors of strange doctrines. Good is it for the heart to be established in the truth, and to yield itself to no teacher but the Lord. Venerable brother, I hope you can say, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth. I have not bowed my soul to every wind of doctrine, and made myself as the bulrush, which yields to every passing breath of air; but I have been steadfast, unmovable, holding fast the word of truth."

It is equally clear that *he was still learning*. The oldest saint still goes to school to the Lord Jesus. Oh, how little we know when we know most. The wisest saints are those who most readily confess their folly. The man who knows everything is the man who knows nothing. The man who cannot learn any more is the man who has never learned anything aright. To know Christ and the power of His resurrection creates an insatiable thirst after a still closer acquaintance with Him. Our eager desire is yet more fully "to know Him."

I half wish that I could leave the pulpit and that some venerable brother could come forward and tell you how God began with him, and repeat the first lessons that he learned. I should like to hear him tell how God has had patience with him, and has taught him still; how sometimes he has had to smart under the rod ere he could be made to learn at all, and yet the Lord has been gentle with him. I should like "such an one as Paul the aged" to tell you how by everything that has happened, bad and good, bright and dark, his education has been carried on; and I should like him to tell you how glad he is to continue to be a learner, though now so far advanced in life. The best instructed of our elder brethren are those who most earnestly cry, "What I know not teach Thou me"; and "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." Though my venerable friend has earned unto himself a good degree, he still keeps to his old book, and his old Master. Though now able to teach others also, he is none the less a disciple, sitting at the feet of Jesus; yea, he is all the more teachable because of what he already knows.

Thus, brethren, we have seen that the model of aged believers is an instructed saint, who owes all he knows to divine teaching, who began to learn early, and has persevered in his sacred studies even to this day.

> "'Twas Thine, O Lord, to train and try
> My spirit from my youth;
> And to this hour I glorify
> The wonders of Thy truth."

II. Secondly, we now pass on to consider HIS OCCUPATION. His scholarship was a good beginning, his occupation was *a good continuance*,—"Hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works." This was David's chief employment. It is true he had other work to do, for he was at first a shepherd, he then became a royal harper, afterwards grew into a warrior, and at last climbed to a throne; still his life's main bent and object was to magnify the Lord, by declaring His wondrous works. You and I, brethren, have each one his calling, and if it be a lawful calling let us abide in it, and let us not dream that it would honour God for us to leave our daily occupations upon pretence of serving Him in a more spiritual way by living upon other people. Still our earthly vocation is but the shell of our heavenly calling, which is the kernel of our life's pursuit. Our temporal business must be subservient to our spiritual business, and we must declare the glory of God in some way or other. David magnified the Lord by his psalms. How sweetly has he therein declared God's ways of mercy and of faithfulness! He glorified God by his life, especially by those heroic deeds which made all Israel know the mighty works which God could do by a feeble but trustful man. He no doubt often declared the wondrous works of God in private converse with believers and unbelievers, by narrating his personal experience of the Lord's mercies. You and I, if we have been to God's school, must follow the same occupation. Some of us can preach; let us be diligent in it. Others of you teach in the school; I beseech you put your whole hearts into that blessed work. All of you can by written letters or private conversation, and especially by consistent lives, declare the wondrous works of God, and make men know the glories of the God of grace; let us be eager in this sacred work. Men do not care to know their God, but we must not allow them to be ignorant. Tell them of that love of His against which they daily offend, and of His readiness to forgive their provocations. Publish and proclaim salvation by grace. It is sweet in old age to remember that you did this.

Notice here, dear friends, that *David had chosen a divine subject*. "Hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works." *God's* works he had declared, not man's. He had not talked of what man could do or had done. Note verse sixteen—"I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only." Neither the virtues of saints, nor the prerogatives of priests, nor the infallibility of pontiffs, nor anything of the sort, had degraded the Psalmist's lips, but those lips had reserved themselves for the glory of God alone. "My tongue also shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long."

We ought to speak of what God has done in creation, providence, and grace, and especially should we point out the marvellous nature of those works, for there is a wonder about them all. Truly, brethren, here is a great subject for us,—the wonders of electing love, the wonders of redeeming grace, the wonders of the Holy Spirit's converting power, the wonders of sanctification, the wonders of sin conquered and of grace implanted: such wonders never cease. Wonders of grace to God belong, and it should be your business and mine, in the spirit of holy reverence, to tell out to others what God has done, that we may set them wondering and adoring too. David had a blessed subject, a subject of which the main point was the blending of righteousness with salvation. Did you notice the fifteenth verse, "My mouth shall show forth Thy righteousness and

Thy salvation all the day"? That is the great Christian doctrine—*medulla theologiæ*, the very pith and marrow of theology—the atonement in which grace and justice unite in the sacrifice of Jesus. O beloved, I could wish to have no other subject to speak upon, and to have my tongue touched with a live coal from off the altar to preach of substitution only. I desire to speak of it first and foremost and beyond all else; I would show forth daily how God is just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus; how He smites for sin, and yet smites not the sinner; how He is severe, relaxing none of the penalty, and yet laying none of the penalty upon the guilty, because The Guiltless One has borne it all. Make it, dear friends, the occupation of your lives to instruct men in this saving truth; teach them this if nothing else. If there are some doctrines you cannot understand, yet get a grip of this. If some are too high for you, yet let this be your daily theme—Christ crucified, at whose cross righteousness and peace have kissed each other. This was David's occupation. My aged brethren in Christ, this has been your occupation also, and you do not regret it, you only wish you had been more diligent in it.

Now notice that while David's subject was divine, it had also been *uniform*. He says, "*Hitherto* have I declared Thy wondrous works." It is a sad thing when a good man turns aside to error, even if it be but for a little season. Some ministers have preached motley; I should think they themselves do not know what they have taught, for they have gone from one line of thought to another, and contradicted themselves over and over again. Beware of being men given to change, ready to catch every new disease. I confess I feel an admiration for a man who can say, "What I taught in my youth I teach in my old age. That which was my hope and confidence when first the Spirit of God opened my mouth, that and no other is my hope and confidence still." As men grow in years they ought to think more deeply, to understand more clearly, and to speak with greater confidence, and it is their wisdom to correct many errors of detail which occurred through the immaturity of their early days; but still it is a great thing to hold fundamental truth from the very first. There are not two Christs nor two gospels; if there be another gospel, it is not another, but there be some that trouble us. O, my brother, if the Lord has taught you from your youth, abide in that which you have learned, hold to it now that your hair is grey. Let us see that "the Old Guard dies but never surrenders." Even we, who are younger than you are, have resolved to abide in the grand old truth; our flag was nailed to the mast long ago; surely the veterans will say the same. All my salvation and all my desire are centred in the covenant of grace and the gospel of redemption by the blood of Jesus, and as for novelties of doctrine, I have one answer for them all.

> "Should all the forms which men devise
> Assault my faith with treacherous art,
> I'd call them vanity and lies,
> And bind the gospel to my heart."

That is a good word of permanence—*hitherto*; "hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works." Hitherto also have our aged fathers come, holding still the things most surely believed among us.

But, dear friends, notice that *the style which David used was very commendable.* "Hitherto have I *declared*," says he. Now by declaration I understand something positive, plain, and personal. David's teaching about his God had not been with an "if," and a "but," and a "may be," but it had been "Thus and thus, saith the Lord"; he had declared the truth openly; his teaching had not been misty and foggy, so that his people could make what they liked out of it according to their tastes; neither had it been mystical, metaphysical, transcendental, and philosophic, but he had declared it, cleared it, explained it, and brought it into prominent notice, so that he who ran might read it. He had also declared it as known to himself, and certified by His own experience. It is a blessed thing to give a personal tinge to our testimony by saying, "Thus and thus have I experienced, and so has the Lord dealt with me." Herein will lie much of the interest of our testimony. Dear brother, you who have attained to a ripe old age, I trust you are able in looking back to say, "Yes, I have spoken honestly for God from my inmost heart, and therefore I have spoken with decision, proving by my personal experience the truth of the divine promises." God has always been true to me, and though some may think me an egotist I can bear the censure, for I am unable to restrain myself from uttering my grateful acknowledgments. Surely if I did not speak the stones would cry out; I must proclaim the faithfulness of the living God.

David's style had in it very much of holy awe and loving devotion, for he says, "Thy *wondrous* works," which shows that he himself had wondered while he spoke. I like to hear a good man talk of God's love, feeling it to be too deep for him; speaking of it with tears, as though it overcame him; telling his tale as though it were more marvellous to him than he could make it appear to his hearers. David had done his work in the spirit of adoring wonder and grateful love; for, my brethren, he had ever before him this one object, to make God great in men's thoughts. May I ask you who are getting on in years, are you making this your one occupation? and, if you happen to be teachers or preachers, do you teach the salvation of God with the sole aim of glorifying God? Oh, it must come to this, for all divine service which is not rendered with this motive is unacceptable and idle work. If we could preach with the tongues of men and of angels so as to surpass Apollos, if our object were to shine in the eyes of men, our preaching would be as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. If there be any mixture in the motive, dead flies are in the ointment of the apothecary, and it giveth forth an ill savour; but if this be our one sole desire, to glorify God by making men see what a great and blessed God He is, our labour will be as the incense upon the golden altar. Upon such service we shall be able to look back in our old age with thankfulness. How is it with you, my brother, my sister, in reviewing the past? And how are matters with you who are in the prime of your strength,—are you about your Father's business, and living for God in all that you do? Oh, then, happy shall you be when grey hairs shall adorn your heads with a crown of glory, for the silver light shall not rest on your heads only, but shall cast its sheen of gladness upon your hearts also, as you remember that hitherto you have declared His wondrous works.

III. Thus I pass on to the third thing in the text, namely, HIS PRAYER, which was *a good omen*,—"*Now*

also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." What a plaintive prayer it is. It shows you, brethren, that David was not ashamed of *his former reliance.*

He felt that he should not have come so far if God had not led him. He saw his absolute dependence upon God in the past, the necessity which had always existed for his entire reliance on the divine omnipotence. I hope that from our youth we have known the necessity of dependence upon God, but I am certain that dependence is a growing feeling. Growing Christians think themselves nothing; full-grown Christians think themselves less than nothing. Good men are like ships, the fuller they are the lower they sink in the stream. The more grace a man has the more he complains of his want of grace. Grace is not a kind of food which creates a sense of fulness, but as I have heard of some meats that you can eat them till you are hungry, so it is with grace, the more you receive the more you long for. David knew the secret springs from which all his blessings had flowed, and he pleads with the Lord never to stop the divine fountain of all-sufficiency, or he must faint and die.

This proves, dear friends, that David did not imagine that past grace could suffice for the present. Past experience is like the old manna, it breeds worms and stinks if it be relied upon. The moment a man begins to pride himself on the grace he used to have six years ago you may depend upon it he has very little now. We want new grace every day. The presence of God with me yesterday will not suffice for the present moment; I must have grace now. David acknowledged his *present dependence*, and it was wise to do so. Men always stumble when they try to walk with their eyes turned behind them. It is very remarkable that all the falls, as far as I remember, recorded in Scripture, are those of old men. This should be a great warning to us who think we are getting wise and experienced. Lot and Judah and Eli, and Solomon, and Asa were all advanced in years when they were found faulty before the Lord. Cool passions are no guarantees against fiery sins, unless grace has cooled them rather than decay of nature. There was great need for David to say, "O God, forsake me not," and his own case proved it. I have heard say by those who drive much, that horses oftener fall at the bottom of the hill than anywhere else. Where the driver thinks he need not hold them up any longer, down they go; and thus many men have borne temptation bravely for years, and just when the trial was over, and we reckoned that they were safe, they turned aside to crooked ways and grieved the Lord. You are greatly surprised, you would have believed it of anybody sooner than of them, but so it is. Take this, then, as a caution, lest we spoil a lifelong reputation by one wretched act of sin. My very heart cries, "O God, forsake me not."

> "With years oppressed, with sorrows worn,
> Dejected, harassed, sick, forlorn,
> To Thee, O God, I pray;
> To Thee my withered hands arise,
> To Thee I lift these failing eyes;
> Oh, cast me not away!"

The Psalmist saw that many enemies were watching him, and therefore he pleaded, "Forsake me not." He had many temptations to grow weary in his Master's service, and he prayed, "Forsake me not." He felt also the natural decay of his physical force, and he cried, "My strength faileth," and therefore he pleaded, "Forsake me not."

The Psalmist by this prayer confessed *his undeservingness.* He felt that for his sins God might well leave him. Hence that prayer in the fifty-first Psalm, "Cast me not away from Thy presence; take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." But he humbly resolved not to be deserted, he could not bear it, he held his God with eagerness, and cried in agony, "O God, forsake me not." His heart was desperately set upon holding to his one hope and consolation, and so he pleaded as one who pleads for life itself.

You now have the prayer before you; what think ye, brethren, will the Lord answer it? You who are feeling your strength fail through old age have been praying, "O God, forsake me not"; what think you, will the Lord answer your prayer? Aye, that He will! It is not possible for Him to do otherwise. Do you think it is like our Lord to leave a man because he is growing old? Would any of us do it? Son, would you cast off your father because he totters about the house? Brother, would you leave your elder brother because he is now aged and infirm? Do we any of us, as long as we have human hearts in our bosom, pitilessly desert the aged? Oh no, and God is far better than we are, and He will not despise His worn-out servants. The feeble moanings of the most afflicted and infirm are heard by Him, not with weariness, but with pity. Do you think the Lord will turn off His old servants? Would you do so? Among men it is common enough to leave poor old people to shift for themselves. The soldier who has spent the prime of his life in his country's service has been left to beg by the roadside, or to die of want. Even the saviours of a nation have been suffered in their old age to pine in penury. How often have kings and princes cast off their most faithful servants, and left them naked to their enemies! When time has wrinkled the handsome face, and bowed the erect figure, the old man has no longer found a place in the throng of courtiers. But the Lord dealeth not so. The King of kings casts not off His veteran soldiers, nor His old courtiers, but He indulges them with peculiar favours. We have a proverb that old wine and old friends are best, and truly we need not look far to see that the oldest saints are frequently the best esteemed by the Lord. He did not forsake Abraham when he was well stricken in years, nor Isaac when he was blind, nor Jacob when he worshipped upon the top of his staff.

Who among us would turn off an old servant? Some skinflints who have no sense of shame might do so, but they are a disgrace to their kind. I know my Lord and Master will never act as they do, for He is love, and His mercy endureth for ever. If He has blessed us in youth and middle life He will not change His ways, and desert us in our declining days. No, blessed be His name, at eventide it will be light, and He will show Himself more tender than ever to us; for He has said, "Even to old age I am He, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

No, my brethren, Jesus will not forget His old Barzillais; nor, though, like Peter, others should gird us and take us whither we would not, He will not turn away His face from us, but will love us to the end.

Why, brethren, if the Lord had meant to have

cast us off would He not have done so long ago? If He wanted occasion for discharging us from His service has He not had plenty? My Lord has had reason enough to send me packing hundreds of times if He had willed to do so. He has not waited all these years to pick a quarrel with you at the last, I am sure, for He might have justly removed you from His household years ago. If He had meant to destroy you, would He have shown you such things as He has done? If He meant to leave you, would He not have left you in your troubles twenty years ago? He has spent so much patience and pains, and trouble over you that He surely means to go through with it. Why should He not? Has He begun to build and is He not able to finish? Trembling friend, remember that your vessel has been steered across the ocean of life for seventy years, and surely you can trust the Lord to pilot you for the few years which remain? Did you say that you are nearly eighty, and do you still doubt your God? How long do you expect to live? Another ten years? Cannot you trust Him for that? Why, you will not be here so long as that, in all probability, and since the Lord has been good to you so long, do you doubt now? Oh, do not so. It is almost Saturday night, the week's work is nearly done, and you will soon enjoy the everlasting Sabbath; can you not rely upon your God till the day break and the shadows flee away. "Ah," say you, "you are only a young man, it is very well for you to talk." I know it; I know it; and yet I believe that when I grow old I shall be able to talk as I do now, and even more confidently, for I trust I shall then be able to say, "He who taught me from my youth and kept me to this day, will not now let me go." O, my brother, though you cried in prayer, "O God, forsake me not," do not sink so low as to imagine that He can forsake you, for that were to mistrust His royal word, wherein He said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

IV. Our last point is this, here is HIS WISH, or *a good ending.* "Forsake me not *till I have showed Thy strength unto this generation and Thy power to every one that is to come.*" He had spent a lifetime in declaring God's gospel, but he wanted to do it once more. Aged saints are loth to cease from active service. Many of them are like old John Newton, who, when he was too feeble to walk up the pulpit stairs of St. Mary Woolnoth parish church, was carried up to his place and preached on still. His friends said, "Really, Mr. Newton, you are so feeble, you ought to give over," and he said, "What? Shall the old African blasphemer ever leave off preaching the grace of his Master as long as there is breath in his body? No, never." It is harder work to leave off than to go on, for the love of Christ constrains us still, and burns with young flame in an aged heart. So here the good man pines to show forth once more God's strength. I think I hear somebody say to the aged man, "You are very unfit to show forth God's strength, for by reason of years your strength is failing." But such a speech would be foolish, for the very man to show forth the Lord's strength is the man who has none of his own. It is no small thing to be in a condition to need great help, and so to be fitted to receive it, and qualified to illustrate what great things divine power can accomplish. My aged friend, your weakness will serve as a foil to set forth the brightness of divine strength. The "old man eloquent," feels that if he could bear one more testimony everybody would know it was not the strength of his natural spirit or his fine juvenile constitution which upheld him. If he spoke up for his Maker all men would say, "That feeble old man who testified so bravely for his Lord is himself the best of all testimonies to the power of divine grace, for we see how it strengthens him."

Moreover, he thought that if he witnessed for his Lord the young people would note the strength of divine grace which could last out so many years; they would see that many waters could not quench love, neither could the floods drown it; they would see the strength of God's pardoning mercy in blotting out his sins so long, and the power of God's faithfulness in remaining true to His servant, even to the end. Because of all this he eagerly desired to bear one more testimony.

And, do you notice the congregation he wished to address. He would testify to the generation that was growing up around him. He wished to make known God's power to his immediate neighbours, and to their children, so that the light might be handed on to other generations. This should be on the mind of all who are going off the stage of action: they should think of those who are to come after them, and pray for them, and help them. The aged man's thoughts should be fixed upon the spiritual legacies which he will leave; and as good old Jacob gathered up his feet in the bed, and then divided his blessing among his sons, so should the venerable believer distribute benedictions. Your work is almost done, it only remains to leave behind you a monument by which you may be remembered; marble and brass will perish, but truth will remain: set up a memorial of faithful testimony. Not much longer will you mingle with the sons of men; your seat will be empty here, and the place which knows you to-day will know you no more; hand on, then, the blessed treasure of the gospel. You die, but the cause of God must not. Speak now, so that when you are gone it may be said of you, "He being dead yet speaketh." Call your children and your grandchildren together and tell them what a good God you have served; or, if you have no such dear ones, speak to your neighbours and your friends, or write it down that other eyes may read it when yours are glazed in death. Reach out your hand to the ages yet to come, and present them with the pearl of great price. Pray God to enable you to set your mark upon the coming generation, and then set about winning youth to Jesus by a cheerful, bold, unhesitating witness to His love and power. Willing to go we all ought to be, but we ought scarcely to desire departure till we have seen the interests of the cause of God secured for coming time. If there is one more soul to be saved, one more heart to be comforted, one more jewel to be gathered for the Redeemer's crown, you will say, dear friend, I am sure "Let me wait till my full day's work is done."

> "Happy if with my latest breath
> I may but lisp Thy name.
> Preach Thee to all, and say in death,
> 'Behold, behold the Lamb!'"

With the last practical thought I send away my venerable brethren and sisters, asking them to take care that their eventide shall be made to glow with the special light of usefulness by their abundant

witness-bearing. I would urge the Lord's veterans to yet more valorous deeds. If, like David, you have slain the lion and the bear and the Philistine when you were young, up, man, and do another deed of daring, for the Lord liveth still, and His people have need of you. Though your joints are rather rusty, and your limbs can hardly bear you to the battle-field, yet limp to the conflict, for the lame take the prey. He who helped you when you were but a youth and ruddy, will help you now though you are old and infirm, and who knoweth what you may do yet! One of the finest paintings I ever saw to move one's soul was the picture of old Dandolo, the Doge of Venice, leading the way in an attack at sea upon the enemies of the Republic. He was far past the usual age of man, and blind, and yet, when the efforts of others failed to save his country, he became the leader, and was the first to board the ships of the enemy. The young men felt that they could not hold back when they saw the heroic conduct of the blind, greybearded man. His brave example seemed to say, "Soldiers of Venice, will you ever turn your backs?" and the response was worthy of the challenge. O, my honoured brethren, reverend for your years, show us your metal. Let the young ones see how victories are won. Quit yourselves like men, and let us see how he who is washed in the blood of Jesus would not hesitate to shed his own blood in the Redeemer's cause. Your zeal will stimulate us, your courage nerve us, and we, too, will be valiant for the Lord God of Israel. So may God's Spirit work in you and in us. Amen.

THE POOR MAN'S FRIEND

"For He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper."—Psalm lxxii. 12.

THIS is a royal psalm. In it you see predictions of Christ, not upon the cross, but upon the throne. In reference to His manhood as well as to His godhead, He is exalted and extolled and very high. He is the King—the King's Son, truly with absolute sway, stretching His sceptre from sea to sea, and "from the river even unto the ends of the earth." It is remarkable that in this psalm which so fully celebrates the extent of His realm and the sovereignty of His government, there is so much attention drawn to the minuteness of His care for the lowly, His personal sympathy with the poor, and the large benefits they are to enjoy from His kingdom. Where Christ is highest and we are lowest, and the two meet, there is "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." I might almost raise the question whether this psalm is more a tribute of homage to the Messiah, or a treasury of comfort for His poor subjects. We will compound the controversy by saying that as Christ here is highly exalted, so His poor needy ones are highly blessed, and while it is a blessing to them that He is exalted, it is an exaltation to Him that they are blessed.

Turning to our text without further preface, we shall note in it *the special objects of great grace.* "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper"; then, *the special blessings which are allotted to them.* Here it is said that He shall deliver them, but all through the psalms there are scattered promises full of instruction and consolation all meant for them. And, lastly, *the special season which God has appointed for the dispensing of these favours.* "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth." That shall be God's time. When it is our time to cry, it shall be God's time to deliver.

I. First, then, notice THE SPECIAL OBJECTS OF GREAT GRACE. There is a three-fold description—they are needy, they are poor, they have no helper.

They are *needy.* In this they are like all the sons of men. We begin life in a needy state. We are full of needs in our infancy, and cannot help ourselves. We continue throughout life in a needy state. The very breath in our nostrils has to be the gift of God's goodness. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. And, as we grow old our needs become even more apparent. The staff on which we lean reveals to us our needs, and our infirmities all tell us what needy creatures we are. We need temporal things and we need spiritual things. Our body needs, our soul needs, our spirit needs. We need to be kept from evil; we need to be led into the paths of righteousness; we need on the outset that grace should be implanted; when implanted, we need that it be nurtured; when nurtured, we need that it be perfected and made to bring forth fruit. We are never a moment without need. We wake up, and our first glance might reveal our needs to us, and when we fall asleep it is upon a poor man's pillow, for we need that God should preserve us through the night. We have needs when we are on our knees, else where would be the energy of our prayers? We have needs when we try to sing, else how should our uncircumcised lips praise Him aright? We have needs when we are relieving the needs of others, lest we become proud of our almsgiving. We have need in preaching, need in hearing; we have need in working, need in suffering, need in resting. What is our life but one long need? All men are full of needs. But God's peculiar people *feel* this need—they not only confess it is so, but they know it experimentally. They are full of needs. Once they thought that they were rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing, but now, through the enlightenment of God's Spirit, they feel themselves to be naked, and poor, and miserable. Their needs were great before, but they appear now to be incalculable, more in number than the hairs of their heads. They have need of a covering for the sin of the past; they have need of help against the temptation of the present; they have need of perseverance as to the entire future. If there are any people under heaven who could claim the title of "needy," above all others, it is not the pauper in the workhouse, nor the mendicant who asks alms in the streets, but it is the child of God, for he feels himself to be so dependent that the more he gets from his great Benefactor the more he requires, and the more he must have to satisfy the enlarged desires of a heart that begins to know the will of God concerning us. Our needs are great and constant.

The second description given is that he is *poor*—

"the poor also." A man might be needy, and be able to supply his own needs. As fast as his needs arose, he might have sufficient wealth to be able to procure what he wanted. I speak merely of His temporal wants. But, with regard to us in spiritual things, we are not only needy, but we are poor to utter destitution—there is nothing within our reach that we can help ourselves with. We have need of water for our thirst, but nature's buckets are empty, and her cisterns are broken. We have need of bread, but nature's granary is bare. Like the prodigal son in a far off country, there is a famine, a mighty famine, in that land, and we are in want. We have need of clothing; we have found that we are naked, and we are ashamed, but our fig leaves will not serve us, and we are too poor to buy a garment for ourselves. We are so poor that when a want comes it only shows us how empty the treasury is; and every want while it draws upon us meets with no fitting response; there is nothing, nothing, nothing, in human nature at its very best, that can keep pace with its own needs. Speak of self-reliance!—'tis well enough in matters of the world, but self-reliance is absolutely madness in the things of God. We have heard of self-made men, but if any man would enter heaven, he must be a God-made man from first to last, for all that can come out of human nature will still be defiled. The stream shall never mount higher than the fountain-head, and the fountain-head of human nature is pollution, total depravity. It cannot rise higher than that, let it do its best. We are very needy, and very poor. If there be any poor in all the world, who have tasted the bitter ingredients of this cup of sorrow, it is God's people. We are very needy and very poor, though we did not always think so. When the discovery was first made to us, we felt the smart as those do "who have seen better days." Once we fancied ourselves able to do our work and sure to get our wages; we did hope to merit a reward for our good conduct; and we thought it was only for us to add a little piety to our decent morals in order to be well pleasing to God and our own conscience. Ah, sirs! when we woke from these foolish dreams, and faced our own abject poverty, how ashamed we were; how we shunned the light; how we sat alone and avoided company; how fear preyed on our heart; with what anguish we chattered to ourselves, saying, "What shall I do? What shall I do?" Poor indeed we are and we know it.

Moreover, it is said they have *no helper*. Now, until God enlightens us, we seem to have a great many helpers. We fancy—perhaps we once fancied—that a priest could save us. If we have a grain of grace we have given up that idea. Perhaps we imagined that our parents would help us, that our godly ancestry might stand us in some stead:—but we have long ago been brought to the conviction that we must each stand personally before God, for only personal religion is of any value. At one time we placed some dependence upon the ministry we attended, and hoped that in some favored hour that ministry might be of use to us; but, if God has awakened us, we look higher than pulpits and preachers now. Our eyes are up towards the hills whence cometh our help, and as to all earthly things, we see no help in them. "Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." "He shall be like the heath in the desert—he shall not see when good cometh." The Lord grant us all to be reduced to this—that we have no helper, because when we have no helper here, He will become our helper and our salvation. Put the three words together and you have a very correct description of the awakened people of God—needy, poor, and having no helper.

We have felt this, beloved, very keenly some of us just before we looked to Christ. Oh! we can remember now when we wanted to have our sins forgiven us, we would have given all we had if we could but have found mercy;—we were full of needs. We turned all our good works over, but they had all become mouldy and worm-eaten, and they stank in our nostrils. We tried our prayers. We used to fancy if we began to pray earnestly it would all be well with us, but alas! alas! we found our prayers to be poor comforts—broken reeds. We looked all around us, and we could get no consolation. Even Scripture did not seem to cheer us; the very promises seemed to shut their doors against us. We had no helper. Oh, do you remember then when you cried to God in your trouble, and He delivered you? I know you verified the truth of the promise in our text, "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth."

Since that time, we have been equally needy; we have been making fresh proof of our indigence; and getting into straits from which we could by no means extricate ourselves. Indeed, when a Christian is richest in grace he is poorest in himself. The way to grow rich in grace is to feel your poverty. Whenever you think you have stored up a little strength, a little comfort, a little provision against a rainy day, you are pretty sure to have the trouble you bargained for, and to miss the resources you counted on. Estimate your true wealth before God by your entire dependence on Him. The more you have, the less you have, and the less you have, the more you have. When you have nothing at all in yourself, then Christ is all in all to you. The perpetual condition of every child of God in himself is that of a needy and a poor and a helpless one—on the high mountains with his Lord, rejoicing in His love, yet is he even there in himself less than nothing and vanity—still poor and needy.

There have been times when we felt this very powerfully, perhaps, very painfully. Has Satan ever beset you, my brethren, with his fierce temptations? No doubt many of you have had to feel the ferocity of his attacks. Perhaps, blasphemous thoughts have been injected into your mind—dark forebodings, such as these, "God has forsaken me." Perhaps, he has said, "He has sinned himself out of the covenant—he is a castaway," and your poor little faith has tried to hold on to Christ, but it seemed as if she must be driven from her hold. While others found it as you thought easy to get to heaven, you realised the truth of the text—"The righteous scarcely are saved." You have had to fight for every inch of ground, and it seemed to you often as though you had not a spark of grace in you, not a ray of hope, and not so much as a single grain of the grace of God within your heart. Ah! and at such times you have been poor and needy, and you have had no helper. And, perhaps at such seasons, too, temporal trouble may have come in. Whoever may go through the world without trouble, God's people never do.

> "The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown."

"In the world ye shall have tribulation" is as

sure a promise as that other, "In Me ye shall have peace." The trials of God's servants are sometimes extremely severe. Not a few are literally as well as spiritually poor. Hunger, privation, and embarrassment haunt their steps. And when you once come to be poor, how often does it happen that you have no helper. In the summer of prosperity your friends and acquaintances are numerous as the leaves of the forest, but in the winter of your losses and distresses, your friends are few indeed; your neighbours stand aloof, your old mates desert you, for like the wind your trials have borne them all away as sere leaves, and you cannot find them.

But, do not think that the Lord has cast you off, because He is thus chastening you with the rod of men; take it as an exercise of your faith, and go to Him and plead this promise, "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper."

Thus I have set before you the character of God's especial objects of sovereign grace; they are poor and needy spiritually. Do you ask why is it that God selects these? Our first answer is, He giveth no account of His matters; He doeth as He will. He is a sovereign; who shall say unto Him, "What doest Thou?" And, in order that He may make that sovereignty clear to the sons of men, He is pleased to select those whom naturally we might expect Him to pass by. Did not Jesus lift His eyes to heaven full of gratitude and say, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are chosen, but God hath chosen the poor of this world, He hath chosen the things that are despised, (and as the Apostle puts it) "Things that are not hath God chosen to bring to nought the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." When the chariot of the Eternal comes from above, he bids it roll far downward from the skies; He passes by the towers of haughty kings; He leaves the palaces of princes and the halls of senates, and down to the hovels of cottagers the chariot of His grace descends, for there He sees with joy and delight the objects of His everlasting love. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion, is the word of divine sovereignty, and God makes it true by taking the poor and the needy, and them that have no helper.

Still, if we may enquire into the reason, we see in the poor, and the needy, and the helpless, a reason for God's grace. They are the persons who are most willing to accept it, for they are the persons who most require it. Your generosity will not stand to be dictated to, but, at the same time, you usually prefer to give to those who want most. Wise mercy seeks out chief misery, and God therefore delights to give His blessings to those who need them most, not to those who fancy they deserve them—*they* shall have none of them, but those who need them, they shall have all of them.

When a soul is made to feel its own poverty, it does not set itself up in rivalry with Christ; it does not pretend to be able to help itself; it has no disputing about the terms of the gospel. A sinner, when he is thoroughly famished, has such an appetite that he eats such things as God's mercy sets before him, and he raises no question. A proud Pharisee will say, "I will not submit to this, to be saved by faith alone—I will not have it. To accept mercy as the absolute gift of heaven, irrespective of my character, I cannot endure it." The high soul of a Pharisee, I say, kicks at it. But when God has brought a man low, till like the publican he cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he is glad to be saved in God's way, and no matter however humbling the plan of grace, nor how the sinner is debased and Christ exalted, the poor sinner loves to have it so. It is a way suitable to his own wants, a way which he accepts for the very reason that God has adapted it to his position. Hence, if there be reasons they lie here, not in man's merit but on the Lord's mercy. The fact that bare misery, when touched and guided by the Spirit of God, makes the soul to open its mouth like the hard chapped soil to drink in the rain, as soon as the rain descends from above, is an argument why grace so commonly flows in this course.

In choosing to bless the poor and needy by His grace, the Lord finds for Himself warm friends, those who will give Him much praise, contend earnestly for His reign and for His sovereignty, and endure much obloquy for very love to His dear name. Why if the Lord were to save the Pharisees, they would hardly say, "Thank you," they are so good themselves. They reckon themselves to be so excellent, that if they had salvation they would take it as a matter of course, and, like the lepers, they would never return to thank Him that healed them. But when the Lord saves a great sinner, a man that feels there is nothing good in him; oh, how that man talks of it and tells it to others. He cannot take any praise to himself, he knows that he has nothing to do with it, that it is all of the grace of God. And, oh, see that man how he will stand up for the doctrines of grace! He is as the valiant men in Solomon's song, "each man with a sword on his thigh because of fear in the night"; for the doctrines of grace are not to him matters of opinion, but matters of experience. They are dear to him as his own life. "What," says he, "is not God the giver of salvation? Is not salvation all of God, from first to last? I know it is," saith he. "Don't tell me. Whatever your arguments, however smooth may be the form and fashion of your theology, it does not tally with what I have tasted and handled and felt; for unless it is grace from first to last, I am a lost man; and, if I be indeed a child of God, then can I contend for the doctrines of grace, and will do till I die." I know I felt myself last Sunday night, after I had talked to you about the difficulties of salvation, that if ever I got to heaven, I would praise and bless God with all my soul. I felt like that good old woman who said, that if the Lord ever saved her He should never hear the last of it, for she would tell it every where, and publish it abroad throughout all eternity, that the Lord had done it, that He was a good and gracious God to have mercy on such a soul as she was. Now, since one object of God in bestowing His mercy is to glorify Himself, He does wisely in bestowing His mercy upon the poor and the needy, and such as have no helper. The Lord give to you, my dear hearer, to be brought down to this to-night. I know many of you have been brought there and are there now. Let my text encourage and cheer you. Dear objects of Almighty love, He finds you on the dunghill, but He lifts you from it. He finds you in the dust, but is not this the song of Hannah and the song of Mary too—"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and He hath exalted them of low degree: He hath

filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away ? " It is God's way of dealing with the poor and lost ; rejoice at it, it is full of encouragement to you. But I say to any of you that have never been humbled, good people, who have always been good people you that have always kept the law from your youth up, and gone to church regularly, or to chapel regularly, very good people—The Lord have mercy upon you, and let you see that your goodness is filthiness, that your righteousness is unrighteousness, and that the best that is in you is bad, and that the bad that is in you that you have never seen as yet will be your ruin, your eternal destruction, unless God set it before your eyes, and bring you down to loathe yourself, and feel yourself to be abominable in His sight, and abominable also in your own sight, when His law comes with power home to your souls. Thus I have spoken upon the special objects of divine grace.

II. Now, a few words upon THE SPECIAL BLESSING WHICH THE GREAT KING HAS STORED UP FOR THESE PEOPLE. Kindly look at the second verse. " He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment " ; so that one of the special blessings for God's poor is that they shall be judged with judgment. Alas ! they are often judged with harshness ; or they are judged in ignorance ; or they are judged by malice—not judged by righteousness, nor by judgment. When their enemies see them, they say, " These are a broken-spirited people ; they are moping and melancholy, wretched and sad." Thus hard things are spoken against them, and unkind stories are told of them. Sometimes they say they are out of their minds, and then they will insinuate that they are only hypocrites and pretenders. Slander is very busy with the children of God. God had a Son that had no fault ; but He never had a Son that was not found fault with. Aye, God Himself was slandered in paradise by Satan ; let us not expect, therefore, to escape from the venomous tongue.

One blessing, however, that will always come to God's needy ones is this—Christ will right them, He will judge them with judgment. Are you harshly spoken of at home ? Don't be angry, don't provoke in return, don't answer railing with railing. " He shall judge His poor with righteousness." Leave it to Him. Wait, wait, till the judgment sits, for who are these that they should judge you ? Their opinion, though it is bitter as gall to your spirit, does not really affect your character or your destiny. If you are right before the Lord, through faith in Christ, they cannot make you wrong by anything they say. God judges and God knows. " He searcheth the heart and tries the reins." You remember how David, among his brethren, was much despised. He had not the appearance and the carriage that his elder brethren had, and even Samuel the Lord's prophet, thought the others to be better than David, and said of them, " Surely the Lord hath chosen these." David was therefore despised of his brethren, but what mattered it ? The Lord looked not as man looks, for man looked upon the outward appearance, but God looketh at the heart. Bide your time you that are one of a family and alone. Or, if for Christ's sake you have been despised, have courage to-night and let not your spirit be bowed down. " Rejoice ye in this day and leap for joy, for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you." The King will speedily come, and when He cometh then will this word be verified. " He shall judge His people with righteousness and His poor with judgment." There is one mercy for you—to have your wrongs righted and your character cleared.

God's poor and needy ones, you will perceive, if you turn a little further down, shall be saved from oppression. Fourth verse : " He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." The Lord's people are like sheep among wolves, the wolves treat them injuriously. Christ Himself was oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. His people may expect to be oppressed too ; but they have this for their comfort, that Christ will surely deliver them, and He will break their oppressors in pieces. Are you to-night oppressed by Satan ? Have you things laid to your charge by Him that you know not of, and doth conscience oppress you with the remembrance of sins which have been forgiven ? Have you ever believed concerning them in the atonement of Christ ? Well, bow your head meekly, and go to the mercy-seat once again, pleading the precious blood, and He shall break in pieces the oppressor. There is no answer for Satan like the blood ! and there is no answer for conscience but the blood. Plead it before God, plead it in your own soul, and you shall find that the great and glorious King in Zion shall, in your hearts, break in pieces the oppressor. There is another special mercy, then—help against the oppressor.

The third blessing is that of our text : " He shall deliver the needy." Deliver them ! You are brought into great troubles ; you shall be delivered out of them. You are just now the subject of many fears : you shall be delivered from your fears. It seems as though the enemy would soon exult over you, and put his foot upon your neck, and make an end of you ; you shall be delivered. You are like a bird taken in the fowler's net, and he is ready to wring your neck and take the breath out of you ; but you shall be delivered out of the hand of the fowler, and brought safely through the perils that threaten you. Oh, that we all had faith ! Oh, that we all could exercise faith when in deep waters. It is a fine thing to talk about faith on land, but we want faith to swim with when we are thrown into the flood. May you, to-night, get such a grip of this precious word that you may take it before the Lord and say, " I am poor and needy, and have no helper. O God, deliver my soul now."

But, we have not exhausted the string of blessings. A little further down in the psalm, at the thirteenth verse, you will notice it is said of the King ; " He shall spare the poor and needy." If He lays heavily upon them apparently, yet will He by-and-by stay His hand ; if He bids one of His rough winds blow, He will save the other. As He is said to temper the wind to the shorn lamb, so will he certainly temper it to His people ; they shall be afflicted, but it shall be in measure ; He shall spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him : the rod shall make them smart, but shall not make them bleed ; they shall be made to suffer, but they shall not be called to die. Perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; there shall always be a gracious limit put to the blows that come from Jehovah's hand for His own people. Oh, what a mercy, to be amongst His poor ones, and to feel that He will spare us ; He spared not His own Son, but He will spare us, the poor and needy ; He smote Him with the blows of avenging justice, but concerning us it is written,

"The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but the covenant of My love shall not depart. As I have sworn that the waters shall no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." He will spare His people; He will bring them safely through, and, meanwhile, He will not let the waters be deep enough to overwhelm them.

There is one other blessing which sums up all the rest; you find it in the fourteenth verse: "He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence." Redemption belongs to the Lord's poor people. He bought with a price His poor ones, and as the ransom has all been paid, they belong to Christ, and none shall take them out of His hand. He that redeemed them by price will redeem them by power. He will, if it be needful, divide the Red Sea again to redeem His people; and, if by no usual means His servants can be preserved, He will bring unusual means into the field. There are no miracles now, we say, but if they are ever wanted for the safety of God's people, there shall be miracles as timely and as plentiful as of yore. "Heaven and earth may pass away, but His word shall never pass away." He would sooner shake the heavens themselves than suffer one of His children to famish, or utterly to perish, rest assured of that. Oh, what glorious comfort there is in all this! We shall be spared, we shall be redeemed, we shall be delivered, we shall be saved, we shall be revenged and cleared before the judgment-bar of God; and, all because the great King has made the poor and needy the special objects of His love. Oh! my soul revels in this. I cannot speak out the thoughts I feel, much less the joy that arises out of them; but what a mercy it really is, that the great King, the King who rules from the river to the ends of the earth, is the poor man's friend. I am very poor and needy and helpless to-night, but the king has made me His favourite, counts me one of His courtiers: it is the same with you, dear brother, if you are poor and needy. He rules, and He rules on the throne for us. He is great and hath dominion, but He uses all His greatness and His dominion for us. As Joseph in Egypt was invested with power for the good of his brethren, or at least such sovereignty as he held of Pharaoh he laid out for the welfare of his father's house, so Jesus has all power and authority in heaven and earth; all might, majesty, and dominion for the good of His people. He has the King's signet ring upon His finger, but He uses it for His own beloved ones that He may enrich, and honour, and cheer, and perfect them. His glory is concerned in every one of us. If one of the least of His people should perish, His crown would suffer damage. He is the Shepherd and Surety of the flock, and at His hand will the Father require all those who are committed to Him. He cannot, therefore, let us perish, for then He would not be able to say at the last, "Of all that Thou hast given Me I have lost none." He must and will preserve us. We are wrapped up in His honour. His power, I say, His crown, His glory, His very name, as the Christ of God anointed to save sinners, all are wrapped up and intertwisted in the salvation of every poor and needy soul that is brought to rest in Him.

III. And, now, our closing word is, THE SPECIAL SEASON WHEN ALL THIS SHALL BE TRUE. He shall deliver the needy *when he crieth.*

Ah! while I have been preaching there may have been some poor child of God here who has said, "I am poor and needy, and I am in great distress, but I have not been delivered." And there may be some sinner here who has said, "God has taught me my poverty and need, and I know I have no helper, but I cannot find I have been delivered." Perhaps, dear friends, you have been praying for months, praying very bitterly too, after a sort, and you have been desirous that you might find mercy. God's time, when will it come? Well, it will come when you cry. That is something more, I take it, than a mere ordinary prayer. A child asks you for something, and you may perhaps deny it; but you know there is a difference between asking for a thing and crying for a thing. Oh, when you get so that you must have it, and your heart breaks for it, when your needs are so extreme that you cannot stand up under them—well, now, it comes to this, that you must have Christ or perish. "Give me Christ or else I die," when it seems as if you could not put your prayer into words any more, that you could only fall at the foot of the cross, and say, "O God, I cannot pray, but my very soul groans after Thee, to have mercy upon me," then is the time, then is the time, but not till then, when God will deliver you. The Lord loves to hear the prayers of His people, and He sometimes keeps them waiting at the posts of His door, that they may pray more. It is always a blessing for us to pray as well as to get the answer to prayer. Prayer is in itself a blessing. When the Lord hears us knock faintly at the door, He does not open; we may knock and knock again—He likes us to knock; it does us good to knock. But when it comes to this, that it is all knocking with us, and our very soul and body seem to knock, and our heart and flesh cry after God, the living God: when we shall thus come to appear before God, and open our mouth and pant vehemently for the mercy He has promised, then it will come. When thou canst not take a denial, thou shalt not have a denial. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. There is none so violent as the man who is in desperate need. There is a person who has been without bread many hours, and he asks you for charity in the street. You would pass him by, but he is famished, and he says, "Oh give me bread! I die." He compels you to it. And such is the prayer that prevails with God. When the soul cannot wait, dare not wait, fears lest it should shut its eyes and open them in hell. Oh! God will not keep such a soul long waiting. I am always glad when I hear of convinced souls saying, "I went up into my chamber with the resolution that I would never come down again till I had found the Saviour." I always delight to hear of men and women who say, "I went upon my knees and cried to Him, saying, I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." He will bless thee. If thou wilt let Him go, He will go, but if thou wilt not let Him go, thou shalt have thy request of Him. "But who am I," saith one, "that I should plead thus? I have no right to hold Him thus." 'Tis true, but when a man is hungry, when a man is dying, He does not think of rights. He holds you right or wrong. His need is His right. Poor soul, go and plead your need before God. Plead your sin, tell Him you are wretched and undone without His sovereign grace. Use the strange argument which David used, the strangest in all the world, "For Thy name's sake, O Lord! pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." Plead the very greatness of your sin as a reason for mercy; the damnable character of

your sin; the certainty that you will soon be cast into hell, the fact that He might justly drive you from His presence for ever; plead all that before Him; and say, "Lord, if ever the heights and depths of Thy grace might be seen in saving an undeserving soul, I am just that one. If Thy mercy wants to honour itself by saving the most undeserving, ill deserving, hell deserving sinner that ever lived, Lord, I am the man. If Thou wantest a platform on which to erect a monument of infinite grace, that men shall stand and wonder, and angels shall gaze on it with astonishment, Lord, here am I. If Thou wantest emptiness, here is one who is all emptiness. If Thou as the good physician wantest a bad case, a glaring case, a desperate case, to operate on, Thou wilt never have a worse case than mine. O God, turn aside and have pity upon me, and show Thy mighty power." This is the way to plead. Not your merits—they will never get a hearing, but your misery, your sin, your guiltiness before God—these are the arguments. And then if faith can come in and plead the blood, and say, "Didst Thou not send Thy Son to save sinners?" has He not said He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance? Is it not written that the Son of man is come to seek and to save not the good, but that which was lost? Oh! if you can plead the blood in that fashion, you will not fail. His name is the Saviour—He came to save His people from their sins. He died for the ungodly, He justifieth the ungodly—the unrighteous He makes righteous through His own merits. If you can plead this, oh, then, you shall not long wait, for though God does not deliver till we cry, yet He does deliver *when* we cry. "He will deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." Oh, what a mercy it is when the tide is ebbed right out, and there is nothing left. It will turn now, it will turn now. The streams of grace will turn now. When you are empty, when you are overwhelmed, when you are like a dish wiped out, and there is not anything good left in you—now will God come to you. The darkest part of the night is that which precedes the dawn of the day. When God has killed you, He will make you live. When He has wounded you through and through, He will come to your healing.

"'Tis perfect poverty alone,
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own,
We get no *full* discharge.

"But let our doubts be what they may,
However great or small;
As soon as we have nought to pay,
Our God forgives us all."

May it be so now, for His name's sake. Amen.

LET US PRAY

"But it is good for me to draw near to God."—Psalm lxxiii. 28.

THERE are many ways by which the true believer draws near to God. The gates of the king's palace are many; and through the love of Jesus, and the rich grace of His Spirit, it is our delight to enter and approach our heavenly Father. First and foremost among these is communion, that sweet converse which man holds with God; that state of nearness to God, in which our mutual secrets are revealed—*our* hearts being open unto Him, *His* heart being manifested to us. Here it is we see the invisible, and hear the unutterable. The outward symbol of fellowship is the sacred Supper of the Lord, at which, by means of simple emblems, we are divinely enabled to feed, after a spiritual sort, upon the flesh and blood of the Redeemer. This is a pearly gate of fellowship, a royal road which our feet delight to tread. Moreover, we draw near to God even in our sighs and tears, when our desolate spirits long for His sacred presence, crying, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee!" And as often as we read the promise written in the Word, and are enabled to receive it and rest upon it as the very words of a Covenant God, we do really "Draw near to Him."

Nevertheless, *prayer* is the best used means of drawing near to God. You will excuse me, then, if in considering my text this morning, I confine myself entirely to the subject of prayer. It is in prayer mainly, that we draw near to God, and certainly it can be said emphatically of prayer, it is good for every man who knoweth how to practise that heavenly art, in it to draw near unto God. To assist your memories, that the sermon may abide with you in after days, I shall divide my discourse this morning in a somewhat singular manner; first, I shall look upon my text as being a *touchstone*, by which we may try our prayers, aye, and try ourselves too. Then I shall take the text as *a whetstone* to sharpen our desires, to make us more earnest, and more diligent in supplication, because "it is good to draw near to God"; and then, I shall have the solemn task in the last place of using it as *a tombstone*, with a direful epitaph upon it for those who do not know what it is to draw near to God; for "A prayerless soul is a Christless soul."

I. First, then, regard my text as A TOUCHSTONE by which you may test your prayers, and thus try yourselves.

That is not prayer of which it cannot be said that there was in it a drawing near unto God. Come hither then with your supplications. I see one coming forward who says, "I am in the daily habit of using a form of prayer both at morning and at evening. I could not be happy if I went abroad before I had first repeated my morning prayer, nor could I rest at night without again going over the holy sentences appointed for use at eventide. Sir, my form is the very best that could possibly be written: it was compiled by a famous bishop, one who was glorified in martyrdom, and ascended to His God in a fiery chariot of flame." My friend, I am glad to hear, if you use a form, that you use the best. If we must have forms at all, let them be of the most excellent kind. So far so good. But let me ask you a question, I am not about to condemn you for any form you may have used, but

tell me now, and tell me honestly from your inmost soul, have you drawn near to God while you have been repeating those words? for if not, oh solemn thought! all the prayers you have ever uttered have been an idle mockery. You have *said* prayers, but you have never prayed in your life. Imagine not that there is any enchantment in any particular set of words. You might as well repeat the alphabet backwards, or the "Abracadabra" of a wizard, as go over the best form in the world, unless there is something more than form in it. Have you drawn near to God? Suppose that one of you should be desirous of presenting a petition to the House of Commons. We wisely ask in what manner the petition should be worded: we procure the exact phrases; and suppose that in the morning we rise and read this form, or repeat it to ourselves, and conclude with, "And your petitioners will ever pray," and the like. We do the same again at night, the same the next day, and for months we continue the practice. One day meeting some member of the House we accost him and astonish him by saying, "Sir, I wonder I have never had an answer from the House, I have been petitioning these last six months, and the form that I used was the most accurate that could be procured." "But," says he, "how was your petition presented?" "*Presented!* I had not thought of that; I have repeated it." "Aye," he would say, "and you may repeat it many a long day before any good comes from it; it is not the repeating it, but the presenting of the petition, and having it pleaded by some able friend that will get you the boon you desire." And so it may be, my friend, that you have been repeating collects and prayers; and have you ignorantly imagined that you have prayed? Why, your prayer has never been presented. You have not laid it before the bleeding Lamb of God, and have not asked Him to take it for you into the sacred place where God abideth, and there to present the petition with His own merits before His Father's throne. I will not bid thee cease from thy form; but I do beseech thee by the living God, either cease from it, or else beg the Holy Spirit to enable thee to draw near to God in it. Oh, I beseech you, take not what I may say for any censoriousness; I speak now as God's own messenger in this matter. Thy prayer has not been heard, and it neither can nor will be answered unless there be in it a true and real desire to draw near to God.

"Ah," saith another, "I am pleased to hear these remarks, for I am in the habit of offering extempore prayer every morning and evening, and at other times; besides I like to hear you speak against the form, sir." Mark, I did not speak against the form, that is not my business upon this occasion. One class of sinners is always pleased to hear another class of sinners found fault with. You say you offer an extempore supplication. I bring your prayer to the same touchstone as the former. What is there in the form that you can extemporize, that it should be so much better than that which was composed by some holy man of God? Possibly your extempore form is not worth a farthing, and if it could be written, might be a disgrace to prayermakers. I bring you at once to the test—have you in your prayer drawn near to God? When you have been on your knees in the morning, have you thought that you were talking to the King of heaven and earth? Have you breathed your desires, not to the empty winds, but into the ear of the Eternal? Have you desired to come to Him and tell to Him your wants, and have you sought at His hands the answer to your requests? Remember, you have not prayed successfully or acceptably unless you have in prayer endeavoured to draw near to God. Suppose now (to take a case), that I should desire some favour of a friend; I shut myself up alone, and I commence delivering an oration, pleading earnestly for the boon I need. I repeat this at night, and so on month after month. At last I meet my friend and I tell him that I have been asking a favour of him, and that he has never heard my prayer. "Nay," saith he, "I have never seen you, you never spoke to me." "Ah, but you should have heard what I said; if you had but heard it surely it would have moved your heart." "Ah," saith he, "but then you did not address it to me. You wrote a letter, you tell me, in moving strains, but did you post the letter? Did you see it was delivered to me?" "No, no," you say, "I kept the letter after I had written it. I never sent it to you." Now mark, it is just the same with extempore prayer. You plead; but if you are not pleading with God, to what effect is your pleading? You talk; but if you are not talking to a manifestly present God, to what effect is all your talking? If you do not seek to come near to Him, what have you done? You have offered sacrifice, mayhap, but it has been upon your own high places, and the sacrifice has been an abomination. You have not brought it up to God's *one* altar; you have not come up to the mercy-seat, where is His own visible presence! You have not drawn near to God, and consequently your prayers, though they be multiplied by tens of thousands, are utterly valueless to your soul's benefit. Drawing near to God is an indispensable requisite in accepted prayer.

But, now, lest I should be misunderstood as to this drawing near to God, let me attempt to describe it in its degrees; for all men cannot draw near to God with the same nearness of access. When first the life of grace begins in the soul you will draw near to God, but it will be with great fear and trembling. The soul conscious of guilt, and humbled thereby, is overawed with the solemnity of its position; it is cast to the earth with the grandeur of that God in whose presence it stands. I remember the first time I ever sincerely prayed in my life; but the words I used I remember not. Surely there were few enough words in that petition. I had often repeated a form. I had been in the habit of continually repeating it. At last I came really to pray; and then I saw myself standing before God, in the immediate presence of the heart-searching Jehovah, and I said within myself, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." I felt like Esther when she stood before the King, faint and overcome with dread. I was full of penitence of heart, because of His majesty and my sinfulness. I think the only words I could utter were something like these: "Oh!—Ah!" And the only complete sentence was, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" The overwhelming splendour of His majesty, the greatness of His power, the severity of His justice, the immaculate character of His holiness, and all His dreadful grandeur—these things overpowered my soul, and I fell down in utter prostration of spirit. But there was in that a true and real drawing near to God. Oh, if some of you, when you are in your churches and chapels, did but realise that you are in God's presence, surely you might expect to see scenes more marvellous than any of the convulsions of the Irish revival. If

you knew that God was there, that you were speaking to Him, that in His ear you were uttering that oft repeated confession, "We have done the things that we ought not to have done; we have left undone the things that we ought to have done"—ah, my friends, there would be then a deep humility and a solemn abasement of spirit. May God grant to us all, as often as we offer prayer of any sort, that we may truly and really draw near to Him, even if it be only in this sense.

In after life, as the Christian grows in grace, although he will never forget the solemnity of his position, and never will lose that holy awe which must overshadow a gracious man, when he is in the presence of a God, who can create or can destroy, yet that fear has all its terror taken out of it; it becomes a holy reverence, and no more a slavish abject dread. Then the man of God, walking amid the splendours of deity, and veiling his face like the glorious cherubim, with those twin wings, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, will, reverent and bowed in spirit, approach the throne, and seeing there a God of love, of goodness, and of mercy, he will realise rather the covenant character of God than His absolute deity. He will see in God rather His goodness than His greatness, and more of His love than of His majesty. Then will the soul, bowing again as reverently as before, enjoy a sacred liberty of intercession; for while humbled in the presence of the Infinite God, it is yet sustained by the divine consciousness of being in the presence of mercy and of love in infinite degree. This is a state to which men reach after they have had their sins forgiven, after they have passed from death unto life; then they come to rejoice in God, and draw near to Him with confidence.

There is yet a third and higher stage, which I fear, too few among us ever arrive at; when the child of God, awed by the splendour, and delighting in the goodness of God, sees something which is more enchanting to him than either of these, namely, the fact of his relationship to God. He sees on the throne, not simply goodness, but his Father's goodness, not merely love, but love which has from all eternity been set upon *him;* love which has made *him* its darling, which has written his name upon its breast, love which for his sake did even deign to die. Then the child of God comes near to the throne; then he taketh hold of his Father's knees, and although conscious of the greatness of the God, yet is he still more alive to the loveliness of the Father, and he cries, "My Father, hear my prayer and grant me my request, for Jesu's sake." In this position it sometimes happens that the child of God may pray in such a way that others cannot understand him at all. If you had heard Martin Luther pray, some of you would have been shocked; and perhaps it would have been presumption if you had prayed as he did, because Martin Luther was God's own son, and you, alas, are destitute of sonship. He had a liberty to talk to God as another man had not. If you are not a son of God; if you have no realisation of your adoption, the utmost you can do is to come into the King's court as a humble beggar. May God give you grace to get further; may you come there, not simply as a petitioner, but as a follower of the Son of God—a servant. But happy is the man who has received his full adoption, and knows himself to be a son. It were rudeness for any one to do that to a king which a king's son may do. A king's own child may talk familiarly to his own parent, and there are love-doings and words of high and hallowed familiarity, and of close and sacred communing, between God and His own adopted child, that I could not tell you—things that are something like what Paul heard in Paradise; it is scarce lawful for a man to utter them in public, though in private he knows their sweetness. Ah! my dear hearers, some of you, I doubt not, know more about this than I do, but this I know, it is the happiest moment in one's life when we can go up to our Father and our God in Christ Jesus, and can know and feel of a surety that His infinite love is set on *us*, and that our love is gone forth to Him. There is a sweet embrace that is not to be excelled. No chariots of Amminadib the heavenly rapture can describe, even Solomon's Song itself, glowing though its figures be, can scarcely reach the mystery—the length, the breadth, the height of the embracing of God by the creature, and the embracing of the creature by its God. Now, I repeat, it is not essential to the success of your prayers that you should come up to this last point. Possibly you never may attain to this eminence of grace. Nor even do I think that it is absolutely necessary that your prayer should come to the second point to be prayer. It should be so, and it will, as you grow in grace. But, mark, you must draw near to God in some one of these three grades, either in a lowly sense of His majesty, or in a delightful consciousness of His goodness, or in a ravishing sense of your own relationship to Him, or else your prayer is as worthless as the chaff, it is but as whispering to the wind, or the uttering of a cry to the desert air, where no ear can hear nor hand can help. Bring your prayers, then, to this touchstone, and God help you to examine them, and be honest with yourselves, for your own souls' sake.

II. I have thus concluded the touchstone. I now come to the second head of the discourse, which was THE WHETSTONE, to whet your desires, to make you more anxious to be much in prayer, and to be more earnest in it. "It is good for me to draw near to God."

Now, first and foremost, let us remark that the goodness of prayer does not lie in any merit that there is in prayer itself. There is no merit whatever in prayer; and wherever the idea of the merit of prayer could come from one is at a loss to know, except that it must have come from a near relative of the Father of Lies who resides somewhere in Italy. There is no doubt that old Rome was the birthplace of the idea; it is too absurd and wicked to have come from any less abominable place. If a beggar should be always on your door-step, or should be always meeting you in the street, or stopping you on your journeys, and asking you to give him help, I suppose the last thing you would understand would be the merit of his prayers. You would say, "I can understand their impudence, I can allow their earnestness, I can comprehend their importunity, but as for *merit*, what merit can there be in a beggar's cry?" Remember, your prayers at the best are nothing but a beggar's cry. You still stand as beggars at the gate of mercy, asking for the dole of God's charity, for the love of Jesus. And He gives freely. But He gives, not because of your prayers, but because of Christ's blood and Christ's merit. Your prayers may be the sacred vessel in which He puts the alms of His mercy; but the merit by which the mercy comes is in the veins of Christ, and nowhere else. Remember that there can be no merit in a beggar's cry.

But, now, let us note that it nevertheless is good,

practically good for us to pray and draw near to God; and the first thing which would whet our desires in prayer is this:—*Prayer explains mysteries.* I utter that first because it is in the psalm. Poor Asaph had been greatly troubled. He had been trying to untie that Gordian knot concerning the righteousness of a providence which permits the wicked to flourish and the godly to be tried; and because he could not untie that knot, he tried to cut it, and he cut his own fingers in the act, and became greatly troubled. He could not understand how it was that God could be just and yet give riches to the wicked while His own people were in poverty. At last Asaph understood it all, for he went into the house of his God, and there he understood their end. And he says—looking back upon his discovery of a clue to this great labyrinth—"It is good for me to draw near to God." And now, my dear hearers, if you would understand the Word of God in its knotty points, if you would comprehend the mystery of the gospel of Christ, remember, Christ's scholars must study upon their knees. Depend upon it, that the best commentator upon the Word of God is its author, the Holy Ghost; and if you would know the meaning, you must go to Him in prayer. Often when a psalm has staggered me in reading it, and I have not understood it,—if I have knelt down and tried to read it over in that position, and see if I could realise the meaning in my own heart, some one word in the text has glistened, and that one word has been the key to the whole. John Bunyan says that he never forgot the divinity he taught, because it was burnt into him when he was on his knees. That is the way to learn the gospel. If you learn it upon your knees you will never unlearn it. That which men teach you, men can unteach you. If I am merely convinced by reason, a better reasoner may deceive me. If I merely hold my doctrinal opinions because they seem to me to be correct, I may be led to think differently another day. But if God has taught them to me—He who is Himself pure truth—I have not learned amiss, but I have so learned that I shall never unlearn, nor shall I forget.

Behold, believer, thou art this day in a labyrinth; whenever thou comest to a turning place, where there is a road to the right or to the left, if thou wouldst know which way to go, fall on thy knees, then go on; and when thou comest to the next turning place, on thy knees again, and so proceed again. The one clue to the whole labyrinth of providence, and of doctrinal opinion, and of sacred thought, is to be found in that one hallowed exercise—prayer. Continue much in prayer, and neither Satan nor the world shall much deceive you. Behold before you the sacred ark of truth. But where is the key? It hangs upon the silver nail of prayer; go reach it down, unlock the casket and be rich.

A second whetstone for your prayers shall be this:—*Prayer brings deliverances.* In an old author I met the following allegory; as I found it so I tell it to you. Once upon a time, the king of Jerusalem left his city in the custody of an eminent Captain, whose name was Zeal. He gave unto Zeal many choice warriors, to assist him in the protection of the city. Zeal was a right-hearted man, one who never wearied in the day of battle, but would fight all day, and all night, even though his sword did cleave to his hand as the blood ran down his arm. But it happened upon this time, that the king of Arabia, getting unto himself exceeding great hosts and armies, surrounded the city, and prevented any introduction of food for the soldiers or of ammunition to support the war. Driven to the last extremity, Captain Zeal called a council of war, and asked them what course they should take. Many things were proposed, but they all failed to effect the purpose, and they came to the sad conclusion that nothing was before them but the surrender of the city, although upon the hardest terms. Zeal took the resolution of the council of war, but when he read it, he could not bear it. His soul abhorred it. "Better," said he, "to be cut in pieces, than surrender. Better for us to be destroyed while we are faithful, than to give up the keys of this royal city." In his great distress, he met a friend of his, called Prayer; and Prayer said to him, "O! captain, I can deliver this city." Now, Prayer was not a soldier, at least he did not look as if he was a warrior, for he wore the garments of a priest. In fact he was the king's chaplain, and was the priest of the holy city of Jerusalem. But nevertheless this Prayer was a valiant man, and wore armour beneath his robes. "O, captain," said he, "give me three companions and I will deliver this city—their names must be Sincerity, Importunity, and Faith." Now these four brave men went out of the city at the dead of night; when the prospects of Jerusalem were the very blackest, they cut their way right through the hosts that surrounded the city. With many wounds and much struggling they made their escape, and travelled all that night long as quickly as they could across the plain, to reach the camp of the king of Jerusalem. When they flagged a little, Importunity would hasten them on; and when at any time they grew faint, Faith would give them a drink from his bottle, and they would recover. They came at last to the palace of the great king; the door was shut, but Importunity knocked long, and, at last it was opened. Faith stepped in; Sincerity threw himself on his face before the throne of the great king; and then Prayer began to speak. He told the king of the great straits in which the beloved city was now placed, the dangers that surrounded it, and the almost certainty that all the brave warriors would be cut in pieces by the morrow. Importunity repeated again and again the wants of the city. Faith pleaded hard the royal promise and covenant. At last the king said to Captain Prayer, "Take with thee soldiers and go back; lo, I am with thee to deliver this city." At the morning light, just when the day broke—for they had returned more swiftly than could have been expected, for though the journey seemed long in going there, it was very short in coming back, in fact they seemed to have gained time on the road—they arrived early in the morning, fell upon the hosts of the king of Arabia, took him prisoner, slew his army, and divided the spoil, and then entered the gates of the city of Jerusalem in triumph. Zeal put a crown of gold upon the head of Prayer, and then decreed that henceforth whenever Zeal went forth to battle, Prayer should be the standard-bearer, and should lead the van. The allegory is full of truth; let him that heareth understand. If we would have deliverance in the hour, "Let us pray." Prayer shall soon bring sweet and merciful deliverances from the throne of our faithful God. This is the second sharpening of your desires upon the whetstone.

And now a third. It was said of Faith, in that mighty chapter of the Hebrews, that Faith stopped the mouth of lions and the like. But one singular thing that Faith did, which is as great a miracle as any of them, was this: Faith obtained promises. Now the

like can be said of Prayer. *Prayer obtains promises;* therefore "it is good for thee to draw near to God." We read a story in the History of England, whether true or not we cannot tell, that Queen Elizabeth gave to the Earl of Essex a ring, as a token of her favour. "When thou art in disgrace," she said, "send this ring to me. When I see it I will forgive thee, and accept thee again to favour." You know the story of that ill-fated noble, how he sent the ring by a faithless messenger, and it was never delivered; and therefore he perished at the block. Ah! God has given to each one of His people the sacred ring of promise. And He saith, "As often as thou art in need, or in sorrow, show it to Me, and I will deliver thee." Take heed then, believer, that thou hast a faithful messenger. And what messenger canst thou employ so excellent as true, real, earnest prayer? But, take heed it be real prayer; for if thy messenger miscarry, and the promise be not brought to God's eye, who knoweth, thou mayest never obtain the blessing. Draw near to God with living, loving prayer; present the promise, and thou shalt obtain the fulfilment. Many things might I say of prayer: our old divines are full of encomiums concerning it. The early fathers speak of it as if they were writing sonnets. Chrysostom preached of it as if he saw it incarnate in some heavenly form. And the choicest metaphors were gathered together to describe in rapturous phrase the power, nay, the omnipotence of prayer. Would to God that we loved prayer as our fathers did of old. It is said of James the Less, that he was so much in prayer that his knees had become hard like those of a camel. It was doubtless but a legend, but legends often are based on truths. And certain is it that Hugh Latimer, that blessed saint and martyr of our God, was accustomed to pray so earnestly in his old age, when he was in his cell, that he would often pray until he had no strength left to rise, and the prison attendants had need to lift him from his knees. Where are the men like these? O angel of the covenant, where canst thou find them? When the Son of man cometh shall He find prayer on the earth? Ours are not worthy of the name of supplication. Oh that we had learned that sacred art, that we could draw near to God, and plead His promise. Watts hath put several things together in one verse. Prayer clears the sky;—

"Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw."

Prayer is a heaven-climber;—

"Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw."

Prayer makes even Satan quake,—

"For Satan trembles when he sees,
The weakest saint upon his knees."

I have thus given you three reasons why we should be diligent in prayer. Let me add yet another, for we must not leave this part of the whetstone until we have thoroughly entered into the reasons why "it is good for us to draw near unto God." Let me remark, that *prayer has a mighty power to sustain the soul in every season of its distress and sorrow.* Whenever the soul becomes weak, use the heavenly strengthening plaster of prayer. It was in prayer the angel appeared unto the Lord and strengthened Him. That angel has appeared to many of us, and we have not forgotten the strength we received when on our knees. You remember in the ancient mythology the story of him who as often as he was thrown down recovered strength because he touched his mother earth. It is so with the believer. As often as he is thrown down upon his knees he recovers himself, for he touches the great source of his strength—the mercy-seat. If thou hast a burden on thy back, remember prayer, for thou shalt carry it well if thou canst pray. Once on a time Christian had upon his back a terrible burden that crushed him to the earth, so that he could not carry it; he crept along on his hands and knees. There appeared to him a fair and comely damsel, holding in her hand a wand, and she touched the burden. It was there, it was not removed; but strange to say the burden became weightless. It was there in all its outward shape and features, but without weight. That which had crushed him to the earth, had become now so light that he could leap and carry it. Beloved, do you understand this? Have you gone to God with mountains of troubles on your shoulders, unable to carry them, and have you seen them, not removed, but still remaining in the same shape, but of a different weight? They became blessings instead of curses; what you thought was an iron cross suddenly turned out to be a wooden one, and you carried it with joy, following your Master.

I will give but one other reason, lest I should weary you, and that certainly is not my desire, but to quicken you rather than to weary you. Beloved, there is one reason why we should pray, those of us who are engaged in the Lord's work in any way, because *it is prayer they will ensure success.* Two labourers in God's harvest met each other once upon a time, and they sat down to compare notes. One was a man of sorrowful spirit, and the other joyous, for God had given him the desire of his heart. The sad brother said, "Friend, I cannot understand how it is that everything you do is sure to prosper. You scatter seed with both your hands very diligently, and it springs up, and so rapidly too, that the reaper treads upon the heels of the sower, and the sower himself again upon the heels of the next reaper. I have sown, said he, "as you have done, and I think I can say I have been just as diligent; I think too the soil has been the same, for we have laboured side by side in the same town. I hope the seed has been of the same quality, for I have found mine where you get yours in the common granary. But alas, my seed, friend, mine never springs up. I sow it. It is as if I sowed upon the waves, I never see a harvest. Here and there a sickly blade of wheat I have discovered with great and diligent search, but I can see but little reward for all my labours." They talked long together, for the brother who was successful was one of a tender heart, and therefore he sought to comfort this mourning brother. They compared notes; they looked through all the rules of husbandry, and they could not solve the mystery, why one was successful and the other laboured in vain. At last one said to the other, "I must retire." "Wherefore?" said the other, "Why this is the time" said he "when I must go and steep my seed. "Steep your seed?" said the other. "Yes, my brother, I always steep my seed before I sow it. I steep it till it begins to swell, and germinate, and I can almost see a green blade springing from it, and then you know it speedily grows after it is sown." "Ah," said the other, "but I understand not what you mean. How do you steep your seed, and in what mysterious mixture?" "Brother," said he, "it is a composition made of one part of the tears of agony for the souls of men, and the other part of the tears of a holy agony which

wrestles with God in prayer:—this mixture if you drop your seed in it, hath a transcendent efficacy to make every grain full of life, so that it is not lost." The other rose and went on his way, and forgot not what he had learned, but he began to steep his seed too; he spent less time in his study, more time in his closet; he was less abroad, more at home; less with man, and more with God. And he went abroad and scattered his seed, and he too, saw a harvest, and the Lord was glorified in them twain. Brethren, I do feel with regard to myself, and therefore, when I speak of others I speak not uncharitably, that the reason of the non-success of the ministry in these years (for compared with the days of Pentecost, I cannot call our success a success) lies in our want of prayer. If I were addressing students in the college, I think I should venture to say to them, set prayer first in your labours; let your subject be well prepared; think well of your discourse, but best of all, pray it over, study on your knees. And now in speaking to this assembly, containing Sabbath-school teachers, and others who in their way are labouring for Christ, let me beseech you whatever you do, go not about your work, except you have first entreated that the dew of heaven may drop on the seed you sow. Steep your seed and it shall spring up. We are demanding in our days more labourers—it is a right prayer; we are seeking that the seed should be of the best sort, it is a right demand; but let us not forget another which is even more necessary than this, let us ask, let us plead with God, that the seed may be steeped, that men may preach agonizing for souls. I like to preach with a burden on my heart—the burden of other men's sins, the burden of other men's hard-heartedness, the burden of their unbelief, the burden of their desperate estate, which must ere long end in perdition. There is no preaching, I am persuaded, like that: for then we preach as though—

> "We ne'er might preach again,
> As dying men to dying men."

And, oh, may each of you labour after the latter fashion in your own sphere, ever taking care to commit your work to God.

I will tell you here an incident of the revival. It is one I know to be correct; it is told by a good brother who would not add a word thereunto, I am sure. It happened, not long ago, that in a school which is sustained by the Corporation of the City of London, in the north of Ireland, one of the bigger boys had been converted to God; and one day, in the midst of school, a younger youth was greatly oppressed by a sense of sin, and so overwhelmed did he become that the master plainly perceived that he could not work, and, therefore, he said to him, "You had better go home, and plead with God in prayer in private." He said, however, to the bigger boy, who was all rejoicing in hope, "Go with him; take him home and pray with him." They started together: on the road they saw an empty house; the two boys went in and there began to pray; the plaintive cry of the young one, after a little time changed into a note of joy, when, suddenly springing up, he said, "I have found rest in Jesus; I have never felt as I do now; my sins, which are many, are all forgiven." The proposal was to go home; but the younger lad forbade this. No, he must go and tell the master of the school that he had found Christ. So hurrying back, he rushed in and said, "Oh! I have found the Lord Jesus Christ." All the boys in the school, who had seen him sitting sad and dull upon the form, remarked the joy that flashed from his eye, when he cried "I have Christ," The effect was electric. The boys suddenly and mysteriously disappeared; the master knew not where they were gone; but looking over into the playground, he saw by the wall were a number of boys one by one, in prayer asking for mercy. He said to the elder youth, "Cannot you go and tell these boys the way to salvation—tell them what they must do to be saved?" He did so, and the silent prayer was suddenly changed into a loud piercing shriek; the boys in the school understood it, and, impelled by the Great Spirit, they all fell on their knees, and began to cry aloud for mercy through the blood of Christ. But, this was not all. There was a girls' schoolroom in the same building overhead. The ear had been well tutored to understand what that cry meant, and soon interpreted it, and the girls too, affected by the same Spirit, fell down and began to cry aloud for the forgiveness of their sins. Here was an interruption of the school! Was ever such a thing known in a school-room? Classes are all put aside, books forgotten; everything cast to the winds, while poor sinners are kneeling at the foot of the cross seeking for pardon. The cry was heard throughout the various offices attached to this large school, and it was heard also across the street, and passers by were attracted—men of God, ministers and clergymen of the neighbourhood were brought in—the whole day was spent in prayer, and they continued until almost midnight; but they separated with songs of joy, for that vast mass of girls and boys, men and women, who had crowded the two school-rooms, had all found the Saviour.

Our good brother, Dr. Arthur, says, that he met with a youth while travelling in Ireland, and he said to him, "Do you love the Saviour?" And he said, "I trust I do." "How did you come to love Him?" "Oh," said he, "I was converted in the big schoolroom that night. My mother heard that there was a revival going on there, and she sent me to fetch my little brother away; she did not want him, she said, to get convinced; and I went to fetch my brother, and he was on his knees crying, 'Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner.' I stopped, and I prayed too, and the Lord saved us both." Now to what are we to attribute this? I know many of the brethren there—the Presbyterians and others—and I do not think there is any difference or any superiority in their ministry over anything we can see or hear in London, and I think they themselves would subscribe to the truth of what I assert. The difference is this: there has been prayer there; living, hearty prayer has been offered continually, perhaps by some who did not live in Ireland. God alone knows where that revival really began. Some woman on her bed may have been exercised in her soul for that district, and may have been wrestling with God in prayer; and then the blessing has descended. And if God shall help you and help me to lay near to heart the neighbourhood in which we live, the family over which we preside, the congregation we have to address, the class we have to teach, the labourers we employ, or any of these, surely then by mighty prayer we shall bring down a great blessing from high; for prayer is never lost; preaching *may* be, but prayer *never* is. Praying breath can ne'er be spent in vain. The Lord send to all the Churches of Great Britain, first of all, the power of prayer, and then shall there come conversions of multitudes of

souls through the outpoured energy of the Holy One of Israel!

III. I shall have little time to close up the third point, further than to remark that while I have been preaching I do hope there have been some here who have heard for themselves. Ah, my hearers, religion is more solemn work than some men think of. I am often shocked with the brutality of what are called the lower classes of society, and with their coarse blasphemies; but there is one thing—and I speak honestly to you now, as fearing no man—there is one thing that is to me more shocking still, and that is the frivolous way in which the mass of our higher classes spend all their time. What are your morning calls but pretences for wasting your time? What are your amusements but an attempt to kill the time that hangs laboriously on your hands? And what are many of your employments but an industrious idleness, spinning and knitting away of precious hours which God knows will be few enough when you come to look back upon them from a dying bed. Oh! if you did but know what you are made for, and your high destiny, you would not waste your time in the paltry things that occupy your hands and your souls. God Almighty forgive those wasted hours which if you be Christians ought to be employed for the good of others. God forgive those moments of frivolity which ought to have been occupied in prayer. If such a congregation as this could but be solemnly alive to the interests of this land and the poverty of it, to its miseries, to its wickedness: if but such a host as I have here could solemnly feel this matter, how much good would certainly come to us! This would be the best missionary society; so many hearts of tenderness and affection, all beating high with an anxious desire to see sinners brought to Christ. Ah! we cannot approve of the doctrines of the Romish Church, but still sometimes we have to be abashed at their zeal. Would God that we had sisters of mercy who were merciful indeed; not dressed in some fanciful garb, but going from house to house to comfort the sick and help the needy! Would that ye all were brothers of the heart of Jesus, and all of you sisters of Him, whose mother's heart was pierced with agony, when He died that we might be saved. O, my dear hearers, this I speak with an earnest anxiety that the words may be prophetic of a better age.

But now, there are some of you here, perhaps, that never prayed in your lives, toying like glittering insects, wasting your little day. Ye know not that death is near ye; and oh, if ye have never sought and have never found the Saviour; however bright those eyes, if they have never seen the wounds of Christ, if they have never looked to Christ, they shall not simply be sealed in death, but they must behold sights of fearful woe eternally. Oh may God grant you grace to pray; may He lead you home to your houses, to fall on your knees, and for the first time to cry, "Lord have mercy upon me!" Remember you have sins to confess, and if you think you have not, you are in a sad state of heart; it proves that you are dead in trespasses and sins—*dead* in them. Go home and ask the Lord to give you a new heart and a right spirit, and may He who dictates the prayer graciously hear; and may you, and I, and all of us, when this life has passed away and time is exchanged for eternity, stand before the throne of God at last. I have to preach continually to a congregation in which I know there are many drunkards, swearers, and the like—with these men I know how to deal, and God has given me success; but I sometimes tremble for you amiable, excellent, upright daughters, who make glad your father's house, and wives that train up your children well. Remember, if you have not the root of the matter in you—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And as we must be honest with the poor, so must we be with the rich; and as we must lay the axe to the root of the tree with the drunkard and the swearer, so must we with you. You are as much lost as they are, and shall as surely perish as they do, unless you be born again. There is but one road to heaven for you all alike. As a minister of the gospel, I know no rich men and no poor men; I know no working classes and no gentlemen; I know simply God's sinful creatures, bidden to come to Christ and find mercy through His atonement. He will not reject you. Put the black thought away. He is able to save; doubt Him not. Come to Him; come and welcome: God help you to come.

God Almighty bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE ARROWS OF THE BOW BROKEN IN ZION

"There brake He the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle."—Psalm lxxvi. 3.

THE writer of this song of triumph gloried as a patriot in the defeat of his country's foes: he did better, he triumphed as a believer in Jehovah in the victories which were wrought by the power of the Lord his God. I have sometimes wished that we English Christians blended in ourselves a little more the two characters of patriots and believers. I am persuaded that if our poets had been holy and devout men, and at the same time bold patriots, like David, they would not have lacked subjects for the most glorious national hymns. The events of English history are not less stirring than the annals of Judah and Israel. What a theme for a master singer would be the defeat of the proud Spanish Armada, or the frustration of Rome's knavish tricks on November the fifth, or the gallant fights of Oliver and his valiant Ironsides, or the landing of William III., and the overthrow of the hopes of the enemies of the gospel! Our national minstrelsy has never been so devout as it should be, and we are poor in holy national song as compared to the Hebrews; may the taste of coming ages improve in this respect. Let us, in the events which occur in our own time, see the hand of God, and if we cannot write psalms and hymns, yet at any rate let us feel the spirit of glowing thanksgiving to that

God who has bidden the ocean gird our native isle, and thus protected her with a better guard than gates of brass or triple steel. Blessed be the Lord our God, who till now hath held the shield of omnipotence over this land, and made it the citadel of liberty, the refuge of the oppressed, and the stronghold of the gospel of Christ.

We will not, however, detain you with such subjects, but invite you to more spiritual considerations. Our Salem is the peaceful church of God, and our Zion is the abode of gospel worship, where the general assembly of the first-born unite in holy joy.

The psalmists of Israel, when they rehearsed the Lord's mighty acts in the midst of His people, spake of the overthrow of Pharaoh in the Red Sea; and we who believe in Jesus can join with the song of Moses the song of the Lamb, while we behold the overthrow of sin, death, and hell, by our all-glorious Champion, and cry with all our hearts and voices, "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." Israel chanted her pæon of victory over the accursed Canaanites whom Joshua slew with great slaughter. They were firmly established in their own country, they dwelt in cities which were walled up to heaven, and they rushed forth to war, riding in chariots of iron, with sharp scythes upon their axles, and spearmen darting their javelins afar. Their warriors were swift and valiant, and their numbers like the sand of the sea, but behold their boasted armies dissolved at the advance of Joshua as the hoar frost melts in the sun! Hittites and Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites, fell before the sword of the Lord, and Israel magnified Jehovah who "smote great kings, and slew famous kings, and gave their land for an heritage, even an heritage unto Israel His servant: for His mercy endureth for ever." We also have a better Canaan in prospect, and more terrible enemies have been subdued by Jesus, the Captain of our salvation: let us not be slow to praise the name of the Lord. No Jew could forget the victories achieved under the leadership of David over the Philistines. They had giants among them, and their ranks were filled with veterans, men of war from their youth up, yet the sling and the stone brought down the champion, and the troops of God were made valiant in fight, turning to flight the armies of the aliens. Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength; give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name, for even thus has Jesus vanquished evil, and given His servants grace to conquer through His blood. The grand defeat of Sennacherib, which this psalm commemorates, when no swords or spears were used, but the Lord sent an angel who cut off all the mighty men of valour, and all the leaders and captains in the camp, so that the proud Assyrian returned with shame of face to his own land, was the subject of many a holy song in Judah's happy land; but the everlasting defeat of the accuser of the brethren by the angel of the covenant of grace, should waken yet more thrilling music in the choirs of the church of the living God.

All the wonders recorded in the book of the wars of the Lord are eclipsed in the gospel annals, for they are but the destruction of men's bodies, the temporary deliverance of cities and of nations from the oppression of war; but the gospel tells of eternal redemption. As spiritual affairs far exceed material interests, so the spiritual victories of God in the midst of His church are far more resplendent than His triumphs against His foes on the behalf of Israel. May the Holy Spirit quicken us, raise our courage, strengthen our faith, and confirm our confidence in Him while we think upon what God has done and is doing in the midst of His church. "There brake He the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." Right valiantly has the Lord wrought *for us* and *in us;* and He will also do great things *by us*.

I. First, He has fought victoriously FOR US. Our God has wrought for us great spiritual victories by which all the ingenious weapons of our many adversaries have been snapped.

Let me remind you, beloved, in the first place, of what the Lord our God did in the day of our redemption by the sufferings of Christ. Let us celebrate *the triumphs of Calvary*. The Lord of angels descended from heaven, and left the glories of His Father's throne to take upon Himself the form of a servant, and to be made in the likeness of man; throughout the whole of His life of humiliation He was attacked by the enemy, but He was victorious at every point. Hell strove to empty out all its quivers upon Him, and the sword of Satanic malice sought with its keenest edge to wound Him, but never was He staggered, or so much as scarred, He quenched every fiery dart and repelled every barbed arrow. The prince of this world watched Him with jealous eye, and scanned Him from head to foot, but found no place for the entrance of sin, nothing within His soul upon which evil could gain a footing. Jesus was unconquerable, to show us that in the power of grace manhood may overcome the sword of evil, and break the arrows of temptation. At length the fulness of time ushered in that dreadful night when all the powers of darkness met, and collected all their infernal might for one last tremendous charge; buckler, and sword, and arrow, and every weapon of offence and defence were wielded by the leagured hosts of hell, but all in vain. Our Champion was hard put to it; He sweat as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground; He was numbered with the transgressors; He was led away like a malefactor, tried and condemned, the Lord Jehovah made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all, but in all and over all He was more than conqueror. You never can forget, for it is written upon the fleshy tablets of your grateful hearts, how His enemies dragged Him to the mount of crucifixion, fastened Him to the accursed tree, lifted Him up all bleeding and suffering, exposed Him to the glare of the sun, dashed the cross into its place, dislocating all His bones, sat around and stared upon Him, and mocked His miseries, but in all this He remained invincible. These griefs, which were outward and conspicuous to our eyes, were but a small part of His agonies—the inward strife, the internal conflict, the soul-desertion and depression were heavier far; sin's utmost weight, the fury of vengeance, the curse of the law, the sword of justice, the malice of Satan, the bitterness of death—all these He knew and more; and yet, single-handed, He sustained the fight and earned the crown.

That glorious cry of "It is finished," was the death-knell of all the adversaries of His people, the breaking of "the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." I think I see before me the Hero of Golgotha using His cross as an anvil, and His woes as a hammer, and dashing to shivers

bundle after bundle of our sins, those poisoned "arrows of the bow;" trampling on every charge, and destroying every accusation. What glorious blows the Mighty Breaker gives! How the weapons fly to fragments, beaten small as the dust of the threshing floor! Behold, I see Him drawing from its sheath of hellish workmanship the dread sword of hellish power! See He snaps it across His knee, as a man breaks the dry wood of a fagot, and casts it into the fire. Like David, He crieth, "He teacheth My hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by Mine arms." "I have pursued Mine enemies, and destroyed them; and turned not again until I had consumed them. And I have consumed them and wounded them, that they could not arise: yea, they are fallen under My feet. . . . . Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth; I did stamp them as the mire of the street." Beloved, no sin of a believer can now be an arrow mortally to wound Him, no condemnation can now be a sword to kill Him, for the punishment of our sin was borne by Christ, a full atonement has been made for all our iniquities by our blessed Substitute and Surety. Who now accuseth? Who now condemneth? Christ hath died, yea, rather hath risen again. Let hell, if it can, find a single arrow to shoot against the beloved of the Lord; they are all broken, not one of them is left. Christ has emptied the quivers of hell, has quenched every fiery dart, and broken off the head of every arrow of wrath; the ground is strewn with the splinters and relics of the weapons of hell's warfare, which are only visible to us to remind us of our former danger, and of our great deliverance. Sin hath no more dominion over us. Jesus has made an end of it, and put it away for ever. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end. Talk ye of all the wondrous works of the Lord, ye who make mention of His name, keep not silence.

When our Lord, after a short sojourn in the grave, rose again on the third day, *His resurrection* effectually crushed all the remaining hopes of hell. So long as He was in the tomb, it might seem as though His people were in jeopardy; but when He "rose again for our justification," our security was undoubted. In His death He paid the debt, in His resurrection He obtained the receipt, and exhibited the precious writing to heaven, and earth, and hell, by nailing the handwriting of ordinances to His cross. The rising of Christ from the grave is to us the warrant of our final perseverance. Hath He not Himself said, "Because I live, ye shall live also"? It is to us the pledge of our resurrection, for as the Head has arisen, so all the members of the body must arise. Had Jesus seen corruption, had the grave still held His body in durance vile, our hope would have been but slender; but now that Jesus liveth, and death hath no more dominion over Him, we rejoice that by one sacrifice He hath perfected for ever them that are set apart. Our risen Lord shines forth in transcendent majesty beside the empty tomb, surrounded by the broken swords and bucklers of His people's foes.

"Shout, ye seraphs! Gabriel, raise
Fame's eternal trump of praise:
Let the earth's remotest bound
Hear the joy-inspiring sound. Hallelujah."

"Lives again our glorious King!
'Where, O death, is now thy sting?'
Once He died our souls to save;
'Where's thy victory, boasting grave?'"

Yet further, when, after forty days, our Lord *ascended* from us to take possession of the purchased possession, in our name, and to prepare a place for us at the right hand of the Father, in that day He again gave to hell such a defeat as it shall never be able to recover. Had Jesus Christ remained still upon the earth, it had been thought that heaven was still shut to believers, and we might have entertained a fear that between us and the celestial gate there would be such hordes of enemies that we should never be able to hew a pathway to our rest. But Jesus has completely cleared the King's highway to glory for all His saints, and they traverse in safety the road to the celestial gate. As the watchmen fled from the grave's mouth when the living Lord arose, and as the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre, so all the fiends that might have kept us out of heaven have fled also, and every barrier to our entrance to the celestial reward is effectually removed. See the incarnate God returning to His throne! Your imaginations can conceive the splendour of His triumphal entrance when all the angels hailed Him with glad acclaim, and disembodied spirits, who had long ago been redeemed by the foresight of His death, met Him with their congratulations when the Paternal Deity said, "Well done!" and bade Him take His reward at His right hand. Ah! then, He led captivity captive, and made a show of His enemies openly. Then He finally brake the "arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle," and gave to His people a confirmation of the assurance that it shall never be possible to keep so much as one of them out of the eternal rest, since their Covenant Head has taken possession on their behalf, to hold it safely for each one until "the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

Nor is the story quite ended yet. Jesus is now *exalted* far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, but the enemy of our souls, though defeated, continues maliciously to attempt our destruction. Satan's head is bruised, but still he lives, and continues perpetually to assault the saints of God. We seldom stand before the angel without Satan comes forward as our accuser. The accuser of the brethren unceasingly clamours against the saints, but here is our joy—whatever may be the arrows of Satan's bow, whatever sword he may wield against us, there *He* stands, our great Captain, our Shield and the Lord's Anointed, and as fast as the arrows are shot He breaks them, and as often as the sword is drawn He turns aside its edge. Courage, Christian! Your foes may be unceasing in their attacks, but Jesus Christ is unfailing in your protection. For Zion's sake He does not hold His peace, and for Jerusalem's sake He does not rest, but His intercession comes up perpetually before the eternal throne, and the constant presentation of His omnipotent merit evermore preserves the tempted, succours the needy, and upholds those that are ready to fall. Let us be of good cheer, for there, in the New Jerusalem to which our labouring souls aspire, the intercession of Jesus breaks "the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle."

Nor does it end there, for here below our exalted Lord is Master over all events; *providence* is ruled and guided by the Man whose head was surrounded with the crown of thorns.

"Lo! in His hands the sovereign keys
Of heaven, and death, and hell."

To this hour the adversaries of truth seek the overthrow of the Church of God. *We* may be sometimes idle, but they are always diligent. "The enemy goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He assails the people of God in successive ages from different points of the compass with cunning and fury, and we should have poor hope, we who are like a few lambs in the midst of wolves, if it were not that our Master is present by His Eternal Spirit, and rules all things by His providential government. He can make those wheels which are so high that they are terrible, so to revolve that the greatest enemies of the church shall be cut off or shall be converted, and He can raise up from the dunghill men that shall be princes in the midst of Israel, to be defenders of the truth, and shepherds to His people. He can cause to be born in a humble cottage in the wood a Luther, who shall shake off the fetters from the nations; He can bring forth from the wildest village of France a Calvin, whose words shall be as nails fastened by the Master of assemblies; and He can raise a flaming Knox, and nourish his fiery spirit in Geneva till Scotland needs him; or raise up in the quiet parsonage of Lutterworth a Wickliffe, to shine as the morning star of the Reformation in England. God is never short of men. He never has to bethink Himself of means. He knows no difficulties or dilemmas. If His Church needed it, He could to-morrow make emperors repent of their sins, and doff their crowns to become ministers of the Word, and constrain the most violent persecutors of the Church to crouch at her feet, and lick the dust. Let us be confident in the reigning power of our ever-loving Saviour; let us be reassured by the history of the Church in the past, and expect to see divine interpositions in our own day. Fear not, for still it shall so be said of Zion, "There brake He the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle."

For His redeemed ones, it is most evident that the Lord Jesus is more than conqueror, not only putting adverse darts aside, but breaking them; not merely averting the violence of the sword, but breaking that sword; tearing the buckler from the enemy and leaving him defenceless; stripping him of all his arms, both of offence and defence, that his defeat may be total and irretrievable. "Arms and the man, I sing," said the great Roman poet; a nobler theme by far would be "*Arms and the Son of God.*"

II. May we have help from on high while we now ask you to consider the victories which Jesus Christ has WON IN US.

Brethren, we who are members of the Church of Christ, have been subdued by sovereign grace. Whereas we were enemies, we are now reconciled unto God by the death of His Son. Now, if we could each tell his story of conversion, the children of God would be ready to burst out with one simultaneous shout of joy, as they perceived that in the midst of His Church the Lord, in the hearts of His people, has broken the arrows of the bow. Let me take you back to the time of your *conversion*. Some of us were very stout-hearted. We knew the truth, but we did not love it; we understood the gospel, but we abhorred it. We were often entreated to consider the welfare of our souls, but we cared for the frivolities of the moment, and we let the realities of eternity slip by. We were thundered at by the law, we were gently wooed by the gospel; the tears of a mother united with the earnest warnings of a teacher, and the admonitions of a pastor; but all these were powerless upon our slumbering conscience. Some of us went to great lengths of rebellion, and hardened ourselves more and more, and it seemed impossible for us to do enough against the Lord our God. When we talk of great and black sinners, it brings tears to our eyes as we remember that such were some of us, but we have been washed. Ah! brethren, the bringing in of great sinners is indeed a glory to Christ—and the salvation of great moralists is not a secondary victory, for perhaps of the two it is more difficult to subdue the righteous self than the sinful self of men. To have made those who have been kept pure outwardly to feel their inward impurity, and to bewail it, is a triumph great and masterly. Rejoice when the harlot bows before the Saviour with breaking heart, be glad when Saul of Tarsus yields his persecuting heart to the Saviour's sceptre, but equally adore the majesty of love when the young man who has kept all these commandments from his youth up seeks the one thing which he lacks, and trusts his heart with Jesus Christ without delay! When we shall get to heaven, we will astonish the angels with what we shall have to tell, the depths of sin out of which we have been delivered, the fiery lusts from which we have been rescued, the stiff necks that have been made to bow, and the unyielding knees that have been compelled to bend. Glory be unto God. I cannot help saying so again, Glory be to God, for as I look around this place and think of some of you in whom God's great and wondrous arm has been revealed in redeeming you from all your iniquities, dare make it my boast that here the Lord has broken "the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle."

Since conversion, dear friends, how often has the great Conqueror been obliged to interpose on our behalf to save us from our rebellious lusts. I do not know how you find it, but it strikes me that conflict is the principal feature of the Christian life this side heaven. We do know what communion is; we are no strangers to the banqueting-house, where the banner of love is waving, but still to contest every inch of ground on the road to immortality, to wrestle hard with sins, and doubts, and fears, is our average experience. We do get beyond this sometimes, but not for long; we have soon to come back again, either to fight with the lions, or Apollyon, or to climb the Hill Difficulty, or to traverse the valley of death-shadow, or to pass through Vanity Fair, or to endure the sleepy influences of the enchanted ground, or to lie in Doubting Castle. It is not an easy path to heaven, it is warfare from beginning to end. There are times with us when we are so sore beset with temptations that our feet had almost gone, our steps had well nigh slipped. We had long ere this fallen, to our shame and confusion of face, if another arm than ours had not held us up. Oh, what strong temptations some of us have endured! Those of us who have passionate, fiery, strong, wilful natures, have to fight frequently against suggestions which we would scarcely whisper in the ear of those we love the best. We have overcome as yet, we have been upheld till now, but who could have held us up but the Lord Himself? Our temptations occasionally are plied so craftily, and are so exactly fitted to the situation, so precisely adapted to the state of our bodily health, or the condition of our outward business, that it is a wonder that we have not yielded. Aye, and we have almost yielded, as

we must mournfully acknowledge, and then Apollyon has hissed at us from between his teeth: "Thou hast been unfaithful to thy Lord already in thy heart. Thou knowest thou hast gone back in thy soul, and broken thy covenant. How canst thou hope to be accepted at the last? Go back to the world at once, for thou art playing the hypocrite, thou knowest thou art," saith he, "for thy heart is deceitful. Go back, therefore, in thine outward life." Though we have been able still to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and have kept the weapon of all-prayer in our hand, yet we have been almost overcome, and have narrowly escaped. We have to bless God that we have escaped like a bird out of the snare of the fowler, but only escaped as by the skin of our teeth. *We* have not broken the arrows of the bow, *we* have not been able to break the sword of the enemy; but Christ has done it, blessed be His name! We have fled to the foot of His cross, we have looked up and seen the streaming of His precious blood; we have cowered down beneath the shadow of the atonement, and we have come away strong to fight with our corruptions and to overcome our besetting sins.

Further than this, those who know anything of the inner life, if their inward struggles are at all like mine, will frequently have to contend with *doubts and fears*, suspicions and forebodings. Glory be to God, it is not always so. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." My brethren, we often walk in darkness, and see no light. Many of God's people are harassed with questions as to their interest in Christ, or are afflicted with deep depression of spirit; and when it is so, if we try to comfort them, what a task it is! I have tried all the promises of the Bible which I could remember upon some of the sorely troubled ones. I have reminded them of the person of Christ, and His consequent power; of the suffering of Christ, and His consequent ability to cleanse from sin; but I have had this answer, "When God shutteth up, who can deliver?" and I have been made to feel, as a pastor, very often, that *I* could not quench the fiery darts of the enemy for other people, that I could not break the sword of the enemy for others, or even for myself. What a sweet relief it is to be assured that Jesus can break the arrows of the bow, subdue our doubts, and cause His people with reviving courage to say, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, for when I fall I shall rise again!" I have seen many excellent believers, whose lives have been examples to us all, who, nevertheless, have said, "If you knew what was in my heart, you would not speak to me as a Christian. Oh, how great are my sins! I feel that I live at a great distance from God; I am of little or no service to His Church. When I am in trouble, I do not act like a believer, and cast my burden upon the Lord, but I bear it till my soul is sore burdened." Then I have read to them such a psalm as the one which follows our text, where David says, "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. . . . Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" I have always found such souls get relief when they have come to Christ just as they did at first; and if they have said, "I am afraid I never did come," they have soon rejoiced in the light of His countenance, when they have been able to add, "But if I never came, I will now:"—

> "Just as I am—though toss'd about
> With many a conflict, many a doubt,
> Fightings within, and fears without,
> O Lamb of God, I come."

To creep to the cross foot feeling as if the earth would open and swallow you up, and yet resolved that if you perish, you will perish with your arms about the atonement, resting on the expiatory sacrifice, this is the sure way to comfort. Tried one, thou canst not perish beneath the cross, thou must be safe there; standing there, thou shalt understand that there Jesus breaketh "the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle."

Not to leave this subject for a moment, I would notice that all which is yet to come in the inner life is secured by our Lord Jesus Christ. As up till now we have not been mortally wounded, nor have cast away our confidence altogether, so shall it be to the close. No doubt, other conflicts will arise: the past seems to warrant our prophesying that the future will not be calm and peaceful; the hours of old age and consequent debility are stealing apace. The days of sickness, and all the depression of spirit which sickness usually brings, are drawing nigh. Last of all, and most terrible to some, the solemn article of death approaches, and speak of it as we may, death is terrible to a living man. The river of death is cold and chill, and for a man to plunge into it boldly, will need courage more than ordinary. But let us not sit down and deplore our future ills, nor petulantly wish to avoid life's trials—we cannot if we would; let us set our face steadfastly towards Jerusalem, and go onward, persuaded that every foe in advance is already defeated. Christ Jesus leads the way. No enemy has been able to stand against Him, and none shall stand against us all the days of His life. Death has lost its sting since Jesus died. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I wish that I had the power to speak of these things as they deserve, but I leave them with you as topics for your thankfulness. O my brethren, how ought we to praise and bless God for what He has wrought in us from the first day until now. A dear friend said just before service, "I am very grateful, and what is more, if I am not grateful, I ought to be, for I owe so much." Oh, if ever I get to heaven, I will sing the loudest of any there, for I am sure I shall owe more to God than any of you. The responsibilities of my office overwhelm me; when I sit and think of the many, many, many who call me by the name of pastor, and the tens of thousands that read the word which I preach every week, I am overwhelmed. If I shall at the close of life be able to say as George Fox, the Quaker, said after his last sermon, "I am clear! I am clear!"—I would give all the world if I had it, to know that I shall be able to say that; for this is my one and sole desire, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, but being wrapped about with

the fair white linen of His righteousness. If safe at last, I shall have to praise Him who has delivered me from a thousand temptations, and kept my feet in slippery places. I know that to each one of you your place seems as peculiar as mine does to me; I do not doubt but what I am as much fitted for mine as you are for yours, and therefore, I believe that your condition has its peculiar dangers, and I doubt not you receive peculiar helps and special deliverances. Defraud not my Master of your gratitude. Give Him your hearts. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar, for God is our God which hath showed us light. Let what He hath done for us bind us to Him, and encourage us to hope in Him. "Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

III. And now, lastly, as this has been done for us, and in us, it will be done BY US.

The Church of God is God's battle-axe and weapons of war in fighting His battles for truth and righteousness; and, up till now, history shows that none have been able to stand against God in the midst of His people. If I could give you a brief epitome of church history, I should be glad to do so, but there is not time this morning, and will not be, I fear, at any of our services; but it is the fact, that along the whole line of spiritual battle the victory has been to God's people. At first the enemy attacked the church with persecution. Those rough and barbarous weapons of war were used which were to be found in the Colosseum, with its wild beasts and cruel men, or in the axe, the stake, and the rack. Men have grown somewhat wiser now, but in those days, men and devils sought to destroy the testimony of our God by the destruction of the saints; and what was the result? O persecution, where are thy trophies? The virgin daughter of Zion hath shaken her head at thee, and laughed thee to scorn. The church, like a good ship beaten by the waves, has cut through every billow, and has been hastened on her way by the storm. Washed and cleansed and purged by opposition, the more the Church has been opposed the more brightly glorious has she shone forth. God was in the midst of her and helped her; He helped her, and that right early. Our pulse beats fast, and our blood grows hot when we read of the persecutions of old pagan Rome. And when we turn to the story of the Reformation, and see the hunted ones among the Alps, the Huguenots driven out of France, our own Lollards and the Covenanters of Scotland, we feel proud to belong to such a race of men, we glory in their lineage, and are amazed that the policy of persecution should so long have been continued by shrewd, sharp-witted men, when it ought to have been clear to them that in every case in which they persecuted the Church, it multiplied the more exceedingly. God has indeed broken "the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle," by sustaining His people in times of persecution.

The church has also been assailed with deadly errors. There is scarcely a doctrine of our holy faith which has not been denied. Every age produces a new crop of heretics and infidels. Just as the current of the times may run, so doth the stream of infidelity change its direction. We have lived long enough, some of us, to see three or four species of atheists and deists rise and die, for they are short lived, an ephemeral generation. We have seen the Church attacked by weapons borrowed from geology, ethnology, and anatomy, and then from the schools of criticism fierce warriors have issued, but she survives all her antagonists. She has been assailed from almost every quarter, but the fears that tarry in the church to-day are blown to the wind to-morrow; yea, the church has been enriched by the attacks, for her divines have set to work to study the points that were dubious, to strengthen the walls that seemed a little weak, and so her towers have been strengthened, and her bulwarks consolidated. To disprove the Word of God and to overthrow Christianity, is still the fond dream of wicked men, and therefore we may expect yet worse attacks. There are looming in the future, even now, fresh clouds of sceptical theory, but as certainly as God has blown away these things like chaff before the wind in times gone by, so will He in the days that are yet to come.

It is in the church itself that the victory is generally won. I am inclined to believe that the writers against different heresies, when they have done their best, have done comparatively little with the masses; and that our learned men, when they assail new forms of scepticism, however successful they may be with the few, do but very little with the many. The true place of victory is not in the scholar's study, nor in the class room of the university, but in the church itself. If you want to answer the infidel, live a holy life. If you desire to stop the sceptic, let your faith bring forth patience, your patience experience, your experience hope that maketh not ashamed. Zeal for the truth as it is in Jesus, earnest prayer for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and industrious effort for the spread of the truth, will be much more victorious over the insinuations of evil men than the most cogent arguments that reason can devise. There, on the death-bed of the consumptive girl, with scarce strength enough to speak, who bears witness that Christ is precious, and His love a sweet savour in her departing moments, there our precious Jesus breaks the arrows of the bow. There, in the working man's cottage, which was once the haunt of drunkenness and the den of vice, and the abode of misery—but which has now become a little paradise, where the children are trained for heaven, where father and mother are knit together in love, there the grace of God breaks the shield, and the sword, and the battle. There where the weeping sinner finds peace, where the troubled merchant wins rest to his spirit, where the tempted young man overcomes the temptation, and stands fast in the day of trial—there it is where suffering is endured with patience, where labour is performed with perseverance, where the command is obeyed with holiness, and sin is resisted with steadfastness; there it is that the gospel of Jesus breaks the "arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." My dear friends, let nothing ever daunt us as a church. God has given us some signal triumphs in the conversion of remarkable sinners; let nothing therefore ever hinder us in seeking the conversion of men. Some of you I know are industrious every day in seeking to turn men to Christ. Do not give up the most hardened cases, where you get nothing but a sneer, where the door is slammed in your face. Do not be cast down at rebuffs or blasphemies, those who are most opposed frequently yield the first. It is harder work to deal with those who say, "Yes, yes, yes," but who forget what we say—it is more hopeless work to deal with them than with those who turn

against us and seek to rend us. In God's name push on, ye soldiers of the cross! The darkest alley may be made light; the back courts of London may become the courts of King Jesus; the house that is now a den of infamy may be purged, and be made to have a church within its walls. Be confident in the energy of the Eternal Spirit, that He can subdue the obdurate heart! Be steadfast in the exercise of ministry, and continue to preach the gospel, for it is by preaching through the Holy Spirit that men shall be saved.

Brethren and sisters, we anticipate the happy day when the whole world shall be converted to Christ. We are looking forward to the time when the gods of the heathen shall be cast to the moles and to the bats; when Romanism shall be exploded, and the crescent of Mahommed shall wane, never again to cast its baleful rays upon the nations. We expect the time when every sail that whitens the deep shall bear the herald of the cross, when kings shall bow down before the Prince of Peace, and all nations shall call their Redeemer blessed. I know that some despair of this. They look upon the world as a vessel that is breaking up and going to pieces, never to float again. We are to pluck, they say, the elect from off her, but the world itself is to be destroyed, and cast away as an unclean thing. We are of another mind, and look for something more glorifying to God than this desponding theory. We know that the world and all that is therein is one day to be burnt up, and afterwards we look for new heavens and for a new earth; but we cannot read our Bibles without the conviction that

> "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Doth his successive journeys run."

We are not discouraged by the length of His delays, we are not disheartened by the long period which He allots to the church in which to strive and struggle with little success and much defeat. We believe that God will never suffer this world, which has once seen Christ's blood shed upon it, to be always the devil's stronghold. Brethren, Christ came here to take the lion by the beard and to rend him, and to deliver this world entirely and altogether from the detested sway of the powers of darkness. It shall be so, for Jesus cannot lose His reward. We expect to see the mountain of the Lord arise; it has risen now—it is no mean hill already; but we expect to see it rise higher, and higher, and higher, till it shall be exalted upon the top of the hills, above all the highest peaks of earth, and nations *shall* flow unto it. The handful of corn upon the top of the mountains shall yet shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. What a shout shall that be when men and angels shall join together to cry "Hallelujah, hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" What a satisfaction will it be in that day to have had a share in the fight, to have helped to break the arrows of the bow, and to have aided in winning the victory for our Lord Jesus.

In closing, let me solemnly remark how unhappy are those who are on the side of evil! It is a losing side, and it is a side whereon to lose is to lose for ever. Be ye reconciled unto God! this is the gospel message. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, while His wrath is kindled but a little."

Lastly, how happy are they who trust themselves with this conquering Lord, and who fight side by side with Him, doing their little in His name and by His strength! Thrice happy, my brethren, are we, to have the honour of winning souls! Let us seek to get more of such honour! Let us be insatiable to promote Christ's gospel! Let us be ambitious, to the highest bent of our minds, to extend the Redeemer's kingdom! And God do so to you, and more also, as ye shall seek to do unto Him, and unto the sons of men for their good, evermore. Amen.

A SERMON FOR THE MOST MISERABLE OF MEN

"My soul refused to be comforted."—Psalm lxxvii. 2.

IN this refusal to be comforted, David is not to be imitated. His experience in this instance is recorded rather as a warning than as an example. Here is no justification for those professors who, when they suffer bereavements or temporal losses, repine bitterly, and reject every consoling thought. We have known persons who made mourning for departed ones the main business of life, years after the beloved relative had entered into rest. Like the heathen, they worship the spirits of the dead. The sufferer has a right to mourn, a right which Jesus Christ has sealed, for "Jesus wept," but that right is abused into a wrong, when protracted sorrow poisons the springs of the heart, and unfits the weeper for the duties of daily life. There is a "hither to" beyond which the floods of grief may not lawfully advance. "What," said the Quaker, to one who wore the weeds of mourning many years after the death of her child, and declared that she had suffered a blow from which she should never rally—"What, friend, hast thou not forgiven God yet?" Much of unholy rebellion against the Most High will be found as a sediment at the bottom of most tear-bottles. Sullen repining and protracted lamentation indicate the existence of idolatry in the heart. Surely the beloved object must have been enshrined in that throne of the heart which is the Lord's alone, or else the taking away of the beloved object, though it caused poignant sorrow, would not have excited such an unsubmissive spirit. Should it not be the endeavour of God's children to avoid excessive and continued grief, because it verges so closely upon the two deadly sins of rebellion and idolatry? Sorrow deserves sympathy, but when it springs from a want of resignation, it merits censure more. When believers refuse to be comforted,

they act as mere worldlings might do with some excuse, for when unbelievers lose earthly comforts they lose their all; but for the Christian to pine and sigh in inconsolable anguish over the loss of a creature good, is to belie his profession, and degrade his name. He believes of his trial that the Lord has done it, he calls God his Father, he knows that all things work together for good, he is persuaded that a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory is being wrought out for him, how then can he sit down in sullen silence, and say, "I will not be comforted"? Surely then the truths which he professes to believe have never entered into his soul; he must be a mere speculative theoriser, and not a sincere believer. Beloved, shame on us, if with such a faith as ours we do not play the man. If the furnace be hot, let our faith be strong; if the burden be heavy, let our patience be enduring. Let us practically admit that He who lends has a right to reclaim His own; and as we blessed the giving, so let us bless the taking hand. At all times let us praise the Lord our God. Though He slay us, let us trust Him; much more, let us bless Him when He only uses the rod.

Our text, however, might very fittingly describe individuals who, although free from outward trial or bereavement, are subject to deep depression of spirits. There are times with the brightest-eyed Christians when they can hardly brush the tears away. Strong faith and joyous hope at times subside into a fearfulness which is scarcely able to keep the spark of hope and faith alive in the soul; yea, I think the more rejoicing a man is at one time, the more sorrowful he will be at others. They who mount highest descend lowest. There are cold-blooded individuals who neither rejoice with joy unspeakable nor groan with anguish unutterable; but others of a more excitable temperament, capable of lofty delights, are also liable to horrible sinkings of heart, and just because they have gazed in ecstasy within the gates of pearl, they are too apt to make a descent to the land of deathshade, and to stand shivering on the brink of hell. I know this, alas! too well. In the times of our gloom, when the soul is well nigh overwhelmed, it is our duty to grasp the promise and to rejoice in the Lord; but it is not easy to do so. The duty in indisputable, but the fulfilment of it impossible. In vain for us at such seasons the star of promise and the candle of experience: the darkness which may be felt seems to smother all cheering lights. Barnabas, the son of consolation, would be hard put to it to cheer the victims of depression when their fits are on them. The oil of joy is poured out in vain for those heads upon which the dust and ashes of melancholy are heaped up. Brethren, at such times the unhappy should wisely consider whether their disturbed minds ought not to have rest from labour. In these days, when everybody travels by express and works like a steam-engine, the mental wear and tear are terrible, and the advice of the Great Master to the disciples to go into the desert and rest awhile is full of wisdom, and ought to have our earnest attention. Rest is the best, if not the only medicine for men occupied in mental pursuits and subject to frequent depression of spirit. Get away, ye sons of sadness, from your ordinary avocations for a little season if you possibly can, and enjoy quiet and repose—above all, escape from your cares by casting them upon God: if you bear them yourself, they will distract you, so that your soul will refuse to be comforted; but if you will leave them to God, and endeavour to serve Him without distraction, you will overcome the drooping tendency of your spirits, and you will yet compass the altar of God with songs of gladness. Let none of us give way to an irritable, complaining, mournful temperament. It is the giving way which is the master-mischief; for it is only as we resist this devil that it will flee from us. Let not your *heart* be troubled. If the troubles outside the soul toss your vessel and drive her to and fro, yet, at least, let us strain every nerve to keep the seas outside the bark, lest she sink altogether. Cry with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" Never mourn unreasonably. Question yourself about the causes of your tears; reason about the matter *till* you come to the same conclusion as the Psalmist, "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him." Depend upon it, if thou canst believe in God, thou hast, even in thy soul's midnight, ten times more cause to rejoice than to sorrow. If thou canst humbly lie at Jesus' feet, there are more flowers than thorns ready to spring up in thy pathway; joys lie in ambush for thee; thou shalt be compassed about with songs of deliverance. Therefore, companions in tribulation, give not way to hopeless sorrow; write no bitter things against yourselves; salute with thankfulness the angel of hope, and say no more, "My soul refused to be comforted."

My main bent, this morning, to which I have set my whole soul, is to deal with these mourners who are seeking Christ, but up till now have sought Him in vain. Convinced of sin, awakened and alarmed, these unhappy ones tarry long outside the gate of mercy, shivering in the cold, pining to enter into the banquet which invites them, but declining to pass through the gate which stands wide open for them. Sullenly—no, I will not use so hard a word—tremblingly they refuse to enter within mercy's open door, although infinite love itself cries to them, "Come, and welcome: enter, and be blessed."

I. Concerning so deplorable a state of heart alas! still so common, we will remark in the first place that IT IS VERY WONDERFUL.

It is a most surprising thing that there should be in this world persons who have the richest consolation near to hand, and persistently refuse to partake of it. It seems so unnatural, that if we had not been convinced by abundant observation, we should deem it impossible that any miserable soul should refuse to be comforted. Doth the ox refuse its fodder? Will the lion turn from his meat? Or the eagle loathe its nest? The refusal of consolation is the more singular because *the most admirable comfort is within reach.* Sin can be forgiven; sin has been forgiven; Christ has made an atonement for it. God is graciously willing to accept any sinner that comes to Him confessing his transgressions, and trusting in the blood of the Lord Jesus. God waiteth to be gracious. He is not hard nor harsh; He is full of mercy; He delights to pardon the penitent, and is never more revealed in the glory of His Godhead than when He is accepting the unworthy through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is so much comfort in the Word of God that it were as easy to mete the heavens above, or set the limits of space, as to measure the grace revealed therein. You may seek, if you will, to comprehend all the

sweetness of divine love, but you cannot, for it passeth knowledge. Like the vast expanse of the ocean is the abounding goodness of God made manifest in Jesus Christ. Wonderful is it, then, that men refuse to receive what is so lavishly provided. It is said that some years ago, a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent, was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as "Dying for water!" "Dip it up then," was the response, "you are in the mouth of the Amazon river." There was fresh water all around them, they had nothing to do but dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst, because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea. How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad, that they should perish for lack of knowledge!

But suppose after the sailors had received the joyful information, they had still refused to draw up the water which was in boundless plenty all around them, would it not have been a marvel? Would you not at once conclude that madness had taken hold upon the captain and his crew? Yet, so great, dear friends, is the madness of many who hear the gospel, and know that there is mercy provided for sinners, that unless the Holy Spirit interferes they will perish, not through ignorance, but because, for some cause or other, like the Jews of old, they judge themselves "unworthy of everlasting life," and exclude themselves from the gospel, refusing to be comforted. This is the more remarkable because *the comfort provided is so safe.* Were there suspicions that the comforts of the gospel would prove delusive, that they would only foster presumption, and so destroy the soul, men would be wise to start back as from a poison-cup; but many have satisfied themselves at this life-giving stream, not one has been injured, but all who have partaken have been eternally blessed. Why, then, doth the thirsty soul hesitate, while the river, clear as crystal, flows at his feet? Moreover, *the comfort of the gospel is most suitable,* it is *fully adapted* to the sinful, the weak, and the broken-hearted, adapted to those who are crushed by their need of mercy, and adapted equally as much to those who are least sensible of their want of it. The gospel bears a balm in its hand suited to the sinner in his worst estate, when he has no good thing about him, and nothing within which can, by possibility, be a ground of hope. Does not the gospel declare that Christ died for the ungodly? Is it not a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, said the apostle, "I am chief"? Is not the gospel intended even for those who are dead in sin? Read we not such words as these, "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ (by grace are ye saved)"? Are not the invitations of the gospel, so far as we can judge, just the kindest, tenderest, and most attractive that could be penned and addressed at the worst emergency in which a sinner can be placed? "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." No qualifying adjectives are used to set forth a degree of goodness in the person invited, but the wicked are bidden to come and the unrighteous are commanded to turn to God. The invitation deals with base, naked, unimproved sinnership. Grace seeks for misery, unworthiness, guilt, helplessness, and nothing else. Not because we are good, but because the Lord is gracious, we are bidden to believe in the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and so to receive comfort. Strange that where consolation is so plentiful—where comfort is so safe, where the heart-cheer is so suitable, souls should be found by thousands who refuse to be comforted.

The fact grows the more remarkable because *these persons greatly need comfort,* and from what they say, and I trust also from what they feel, you might infer that comfort was the very thing they would clutch at as a drowning man at a rope. Why, they scarcely sleep at night by reason of their fears. By day their faces betray the sorrow, which, like a tumultuous sea rages within. They can scarcely speak a cheerful sentence. They make their household miserable; the infection of their sorrow is caught by others. You would think that the very moment the word "hope" was whispered in their ears, they would leap towards it at once; but it is not so. You may put the gospel into what shape you please, and yet these poor souls who need your pity, though, I fear, they must also have your blame, refuse to be comforted. Though the food be placed before them, their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death; yea, you may even put the heavenly cordial into their very mouths, but they will not receive the spiritual nutriment; they pine in hunger rather than partake of what divine love provides.

Need I enlarge on this strange infatuation? It is a monstrosity unparalleled in nature. When the dove was weary, she recollected the ark, and flew into Noah's hand at once; these are weary and they know the ark, but they will not fly to it. When an Israelite had slain, inadvertently, his fellow, he knew the city of refuge, he feared the avenger of blood, and he fled along the road to the place of safety; but these know the refuge, and every Sabbath we set up the sign-posts along the road, but yet they come not to find salvation. The destitute waifs and strays of the streets of London find out the night refuge and ask for shelter; they cluster round our workhouse doors, like sparrows under the eaves of a building on a rainy day; they piteously crave for lodging and a crust of bread; yet crowds of poor benighted spirits, when the house of mercy is lighted up and the invitation is plainly written in bold letters, "Whosoever will, let him turn in hither," will not come, but prove the truth of Watts' verse—

> "Thousands make a wretched choice
> And rather starve than come."

'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange, 'tis wonderful!!

II. Secondly, this wonderful madness has a method in it, and MAY BE VARIOUSLY ACCOUNTED FOR.

In many, their refusal to be comforted arises from *bodily and mental disease.* It is in vain to ply with scriptural arguments those who are in more urgent need of healing medicine, or generous diet, or a change of air. There is so close a connection between the sphere of the physician and the divine, that they do well to hunt in couples when chasing

the delusions of morbid humanity; and I am persuaded there are not a few cases in which the minister's presence is of small account until the physician shall first of all wisely have discharged his part. I shall not, this morning, therefore, further allude to characters out of my line of practice, but I shall speak of those whose refusal to accept comfort arises from moral rather than physical disease.

In some the monstrous refusal is suggested by a *proud dislike to the plan of salvation.* They would be comforted, aye, that they would, but may they not do something to earn eternal life? May they not at least contribute a feeling or emotion? May they not prepare themselves for Christ? Must salvation be all gratis? Must they be received into the house of mercy as paupers? Must they come with no other cry but "God be merciful to me a sinner?" Must it come to this—to be stripped, to have every rag of one's own righteousness torn away, as well righteousness of feeling as righteousness of doing? Must the whole head be confessedly sick, and the whole heart faint, and the man lie before Jesus as utterly undone and ruined, to take everything from the hand of the crucified Saviour? Ah! then, saith flesh and blood, I will not have it. The crest is not easy to cleave in twain; the banner of self is upheld by a giant standard-bearer; it floats on high long after the battle has been lost. But what folly! Forsooth, for the sake of indulging a foolish dignity we will not be comforted. O sir, down with you and your dignity: I beseech you, bow down now before the feet of Jesus, and kiss the feet which were nailed for your sins. Roll yourself and your glory in the dust. What are you but an unclean thing, and what are your righteousnesses but filthy rags? Oh take Christ to be your all-in-all, and you shall have comfort this very morning; let not pride prompt a fresh refusal, but be wise and submit to sovereign grace.

In others it is not pride, but *an unholy resolve to retain some favourite sin.* In most cases when the Christian minister tries to heal a wound that has long been bleeding, he probes and probes again with his lancet, wondering why the wound will not heal. It seems to him that all the circumstances augur a successful healing of the wound. He cannot imagine why it still continues to bleed, but at last he finds out the secret, "Ah, here I have it; here is an extraneous substance which continually frets and aggravates the wound. It cannot heal while this grit of sin lies within it." In some cases we have found out that the sorrowing person indulged still in a secret vice, or kept the society of the ungodly, or was undutiful to parents, or unforgiving, or slothful, or practised that hideous sin, secret drunkenness. In any such case, if the man resolves, "I will not give up this sin," do you wonder if he is not comforted? Would not it be an awful thing if he were? When a man carries a corroding substance within his soul, if his wound is filmed over, an internal disease will come of it and prove deadly. I pray God none of you may ever get comfort till you get rid of every known sin and are able to say—

> "The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from its throne,
> And worship only Thee."

There must be a plucking out of the right eye and a losing of the right arm, if we are to inherit eternal life: foolish indeed is he, who for the sake of some paltry sin—a sin which he himself despises, a sin which he would not dare to confess into the ears of another—continues to reject Christ. Might I take such a one by the hand and say, "My brother, my sister, give it up. Oh, for God's sake, hate the accursed thing, and come now with me! Confess to Jesus, who will forgive all your foolishness and accept you this morning, so that no longer you shall refuse to be comforted."

Some refuse to be comforted because of *an obstinate determination only to be comforted in a way of their own selecting.* They have read the life of a certain good man who was saved with a particular kind of experience. "Now," say they, "if I feel like that man, then I shall conclude I am saved." Many have hit upon the experience of Mr. Bunyan, in "Grace Abounding;" they have said, "Now, I must be brought just as John Bunyan was, or else I will not believe." Another has said, "I must tread the path which John Newton trod—my feet must be placed in the very marks where his feet went down, or else I cannot believe in Jesus Christ." But, my dear friend, what reason have you for expecting that God will yield to your self-will, and what justification have you for prescribing to the Great Physician the methods of His cure? Oh, if He do but bring me to heaven, I will bless Him, though He conduct me by the gates of hell. If I be but brought to see the King in His beauty, in the land which is very far off, it shall make no trouble to my heart by what method of experience He brings me there. Come, lay aside this foolish choosing of yours, and say, "Lord, do but have mercy on me, do but give me to trust Thy dear Son, and my whims and my fancies shall be given up."

I fear, in a great many, there is another reason for this refusing to be comforted, namely, *a dishonouring unbelief in the love and goodness and truthfulness of God.* They do not believe God to be gracious; they think Him a tyrant, or if not quite that, yet one so stern that a sinner had need plead and beg full many a day before the stern heart of God will be touched. Oh, but you do not know my God! What is He? He is love. I tell you He wants no persuading to have mercy any more than the sun needs to be persuaded to shine, or a fountain to pour out its streams. It is the nature of God to be gracious. He is never so godlike as when He is bestowing mercy. "Judgment is His strange work"; it is His left-handed work; but mercy, the last manifested of His attributes, is his Benjamin, the child of His right hand. He delights to exercise it. Is it not so written, "He delighteth in mercy"? Alas! alas! alas! that God should be slandered by those to whom He speaks so lovingly! "As I live, saith the Lord," here He takes an oath, and will you not believe Him? "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn from his way and live." "Turn ye, turn ye! Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" He even seems to turn beggar to His own creatures, and to plead with them to come to Him. His bowels yearn as He cries, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, My repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man." Oh do not, I pray you,

be unbelieving any longer, but believe God's word and oath, and accept the comfort which He freely offers to you this morning in the words of His gospel.

Some, however, have refused comfort so long, that they have grown into *the habit of despair*. Ah! it is a dangerous habit, and trembles on the brink of hell. Every moment in which it is indulged a man grows inured to it. It is like the cold of the frigid zone, which benumbs the traveller after a while, till he feels nothing, and drops into slumber, and from that into death. Some have despaired and despaired until they had reason for despair, and until despair brought them into hell. Despair has hardened some men's hearts till they have been ready to commit sins which hope would have rendered impossible to them. Beware of nursing despondency. Does it creep upon you to-day through unbelief? Oh shake it off if possible! Cry to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to loose you from this snare of the fowler; for, depend upon it, doubting God is a net of Satan, and blessed is he who escapes its toils. Believing in God strengthens the soul and brings us both holiness and happiness, but distrusting, and suspecting, and surmising, and fearing, hardens the heart, and renders us less likely ever to come to God. Beware of despair; and may you, if you have fallen into this evil habit, be snatched from it as the brand from the burning, and delivered by the Lord, who looseth His prisoner.

III. Thirdly, this remarkable piece of folly ASSUMES DIVERS FORMS.

If I were to give a catalogue of the symptoms of this disease which I have met with, and have jotted down in my memory, I should need not an hour, but a month; for as each man hath something peculiar to himself, so each form of this melancholy bears about it a measure of distinctness. I can scarcely put them under divers heads and species; they are too many and too mixed. I think they say a sheep has so many diseases that you cannot count them; and I am sure men have a great many more mental maladies than I can tell. You might as well count the sands on the sea-shore as enumerate the soul's diseases. But certain forms are very common. For instance, one is *a persistent misrepresentation of the gospel*, as though it claimed some hard thing of us. Persons have been sitting in these seats now for years, who have heard us say, and who know the truth of it, from God's Word, that all that is asked of the sinner is that he should trust in the work which Jesus Christ has wrought out—should trust Christ, in fact. We have in all manner of ways, as numerous and varied as our ingenuity could suggest, sought to show that there is nothing for the sinner to do, that he is to be nothing, but just get out of the way, and let Christ and the grace of God be everything; we have tried to show that to trust in Christ, which is the great saving act, is looking at Him, resting in Him, depending on Him; we have multiplied figures and metaphors to make this plain, and yet as soon as ever we begin to talk to some of these who refuse to be comforted, they say, "But I am afraid, sir, that I have never been sufficiently made to feel the evil of sin." Now, did we ever say that feeling of sin was the great saving grace? Does not the Word of God put it over and over again, that believing saves the soul, not feeling? Yet these people virtually deny the gospel, and set up another gospel; a gospel of feeling in the place of a gospel of trusting. "Oh! but," they will then say, "I have had these desires so many times before, and they have all gone, and I cannot expect that I should be accepted now." This is another denial of the gospel again. They make it out that God will only accept those who have not experienced good desires before, and repressed them. They reduce the gospel into this kind of thing: Ho, you who never had desires before, and never repressed them, you may come; whereas the gospel saith, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." I could not give you all the shapes and ways in which they will evade and mystify the gospel, but assuredly they use as much ingenuity to make themselves unhappy, as the most ardent spirit that ever lived ever used to discover a country or to win a crown.

Another shape of this malady is this: *many continually and persistently underestimate the power of the precious blood of Jesus*. Not, if you brought them to look, that they would dare affirm that Jesus could not save, or that His blood could not pardon sin, but, virtually, it comes to that. "Oh, I am such a sinner!" And what if you are? Did not Christ come to save sinners, even the very chief? What has the greatness of your sinnership to do with it? Is not Christ a greater Saviour than you are a sinner; towering high, the mountain of His mercy far outtops the hills of your guiltiness? Yes, but you do not think so. Aye, and herein you limit the efficacy of an infinite atonement, and so dishonour the blood of Jesus Christ. There are some who will then say, "But I have sinned such-and-such a sin." What, and cannot the blood of Jesus wash that away? "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." There is no sin which thou canst by any possibly have committed, which Jesus cannot pardon, if thou wilt come to Him and trust Him; for "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Why, believe me, sinner, though thy sin is such that of itself it will damn thee to all eternity, beyond all hope, though it is such that could thy tears for ever flow, not a particle of it could ever be washed out, yet in a moment it shall vanish if thou dost but now trust in that bleeding Saviour. There is nothing in thy sin that now can obstruct the power of the bleeding Saviour. God will at once forgive thee. But I know that thou wilt still slander my Lord Jesus, and refuse His comfort. I pray Him therefore to forgive thee this wrong, and bring thee, by His Holy Spirit, into a saner mind, to believe that He is able and willing, and to doubt no more.

Many cast their doubts into the shape of *foolish inferences drawn from the doctrine of predestination*. I do not find that the doctrine of predestination impresses people in the way of sadness in any way except that of religion. Everybody believes that there is a predestination about the casting of lots, and yet the spirit of gambling is rife everywhere, and men in crowds subscribe to the public lotteries, which to our shame are still tolerated. They know that only two or three can win a large prize, yet away goes the money, and nobody stands at the office door and says, "I shall not invest my money, because if I am to get a prize I shall get a prize, and if I am not to win a prize I shall not do so." Men are not such fools when they come to things of common life as they are when they deal with religion. This predestination sticks in the way of many as a huge stumbling-block when they come to the things of God. The fact is, there is nothing in predestination to stumble a man; the evil lies in what he chooses

to make of it. When a man wants to beat a dog, they say he can always find a stick to do it with; and when a man wants to find excuses for not believing in Christ, he can always discover one somewhere or other. For this cause so many run to this predestination doctrine, because it happens to be a handy place of resort. Now, God has a people whom He will save, a chosen and special people, redeemed by the blood of Christ; but there is no more in that doctrine to deny the other grand truth that whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ is not condemned, than there is in the fact that Abyssinia is in Africa, to contradict the doctrine that Hindustan is in Asia. They are two truths which stand together, and though it may not always be easy for us to reconcile them, it would be more difficult to make them disagree. There never seems to me to be any need to reconcile the two truths, nor, indeed, any practical difficulty in the matter; the difficulty is mataphysical, and what have lost sinners to do with metaphysics? Fixed is everything, from the motion of a grain of dust in the summer's wind to the revolution of a planet in its orbit, and yet man is as free as if there was no God, as independent an actor as if everything were left to chance. I see indelible marks both of predestination and free agency everywhere in God's universe. Then why do you ask questions about your election when God says, "whosoever will"? It is foolish to stand and ask whether you are ordained to come when the invitation bids you come. Come, and you are ordained to come; stay away, and you deserve to perish. Yonder is the gate of the hospital for sick souls, and over it is written, "Whosoever will, let him come," and you stand outside that house of mercy, and say, "I do not know whether I am ordained to enter." There is the invitation man! Why are you so mad? Would you talk like that at Guy's or at Bartholomew's Hospital? Would you say to the kind persons who picked you up in the street, and carried you to the hospital, "Oh, for goodness' sake, do not take me in, I do not know whether I am ordained to go in or not"? You know the hospital was built for such as are sick and wounded, and when you are taken in you perceive that it was built for you. I do not know how you are to find whether you were ordained to enter the hospital or not, except by getting in; and I do not know how you are to find out your election to salvation, except by trusting Jesus Christ, who bids you trust, and promises that if you do so you shall be saved. You may smile, but these things which to some of us are like spiders' nets, through which we break, are like nets of iron to those desponding ones whose soul refuseth to be comforted.

I have known others, and here I shall close this list, who have tried to find a hole in which to hide their eyes from the comforting light in the thought of *the unpardonable sin*. The greatest divines who have written on this subject have never been able to prove anything about it, except that all the other divines are wrong. I have never yet read a book upon the subject which did not, one-half of it, consist in proving that all who had written before knew nothing at all on the subject, and I have come to the conclusion, when I have finished each treatise, that the writer was about as right as his predecessors, and no more. Whatever the unpardonable sin may be, and perhaps it is different in every person—perhaps it is a point of sin in each one, a filling up of his measure, beyond which there is no more hope of mercy—whatever it is, there is one thing that is sure, that no man who feels his need of Christ, and sincerely desires to be saved, can have committed that sin at all, If you had committed that sin, it would be to you death. "There is a sin which is unto death." Now, death puts an end to feeling. You would be given up to hardness and to incorrigible impenitence. The reason why you could not be saved would be because your will would become fast set against all good, and you never would will to be saved. For there is no difficulty in salvation when the will is made right; and if thou hast a will, and God has made thee willing to come to Christ and to be saved, thou hast no more committed the unpardonable sin than has the angel Gabriel who stands at God's right hand. If thy heart palpitates still with fear, if thy soul still trembles before the law of God, and dreads His wrath, then still art thou within the bounds of mercy; and the silver trumpet sounds this morning sweet and shrill, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

IV. We will not continue that dreary catalogue, but turn to a fourth consideration, namely, that this refusal to be comforted INVOLVES MUCH OF WRONG.

Much of it we can readily forgive; still we must mention it. When you hear the gospel and refuse to be comforted by it, there is a wrong done to the minister of God. He sympathizes with you, he desires to comfort you, and it troubles him when he puts before you the cup of salvation, and you refuse to take it. Now, I do not say that we in our private persons claim any great respect from you, but I do say that to reject God's ambassador may not be a light sin, and to cause the man whom God sends to speak words of mercy to you to go with a heavy heart again and again to his knees, may be such a sin as will rankle in your soul in years to come, if it be not repented of.

But worse than that, you wrong God's gospel. Every time you refuse to be comforted, you do as good as say, "The gospel is of no use to me; I do not esteem it; I will not have it." You put it away as though it were a thing of nought. You wrong this precious Bible. It is full of consoling promises, and you read it, and you seem to say, "It is all chaff." You act as if you had winnowed it, and found no food in it. It is a barren wilderness to you. Oh, but the Bible does not deserve to have such a slur cast upon it.

You do wrong to the dear friends who try to comfort you. Why should they so often bring you with loving hands the words of comfort and you put them away?

Above all, you do wrong to your God, to Jesus, and to His Holy Spirit. The crucifixion of Christ is repeated by your rejection of Christ. That unkind ungenerous thought, that He is unwilling to forgive, crucifies Him afresh. Grieve not the Holy Spirit—

> "He's waited long, is waiting still;
> You use no other friend so ill."

He is the Spirit of consolation, and when you refuse the consolation, you virtually reject Him, reject Him to your shame.

Think, dear friends, wherever you may be this morning, your refusing to be comforted is very wrong, because it is depriving the church of what you might do for it. Oh, if you became a cheerful Christian, what a mother in Israel you might be!

I think I hear you sing as the virgin did of old, "He hath remembered the low estate of His handmaiden." How would you rejoice with Hannah that "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes." How would your exultant psalm go up to heaven, "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away."

The world—what a wrong you are doing to it! Why, that part of the world which comes under your influence is led to say, "Religion makes that woman miserable: it is religion which makes that man so sad." You know it is not so. But they put it down to it—they say, "Religion drives people mad." I would sooner lose this right hand, and this right eye too, than have such a thing said of my religion, I cannot bear, when I do anything wrong that men should say, "That's your Christianity." If they lay the blame on me, who so well deserve it, then let me bear it; but to lay it on the cross of Christ—oh! this makes a man shudder.

V. I will close with this remark—that SUCH A REFUSAL SHOULD NOT BE PERSISTED IN.

It is unreasonable to be sad when you might rejoice; it is *unreasonable* to be wretched when mercy provides every cause for making you happy. Why art thou sad, and why is thy countenance fallen? If there were no Saviour, no Holy Spirit, no Father willing to forgive, you might go your way and put an end to your existence in despair; but while all this grace is ready for you, why not take it? One would think you were like Tantalus, placed up to his neck in water, which, when he tried to drink thereof, receded from his lips; but you are in no such condition. Instead of the water flowing away from you, it is rippling up to your lips; it is inviting you but to open your mouth and receive it.

While it is unreasonable to continue such a persistence, it is also *most weakening* to you. Every hour that you continue sad you spoil the possibilities of your getting out of that sadness. You are dissolving the strength even of your bodily frame; and, as for your soul, the pillars thereof are being shaken.

And, mark you, it is most dangerous, too, for may be—oh, I pray God it may not be!—it may be, that God, who gives you light, when He sees you shut your eyes again, will say, "Let his sun be darkened and his moon be turned into blood. The creature which I made for light rejects it, and no light shall ever come to it henceforth, even for ever." The King who kills the fatlings and makes ready the feast, and brings you to the table, if He sees you still refuse to partake, may swear in His wrath that you shall not eat of His supper. I have known parents, when their children cried for nothing, take care to give them something to cry for; and, may be, if you are miserable when there is no cause for it, you may have cause for it—cause that will never end. Oh! by the blood and wounds of Jesus, by the overflowing heart of God, by the eternal promises of grace, by the covenant which God hath made with sinners in the person of His Son, by the Holy Ghost the Comforter, put not from you the consolation which God provides; say no longer, "My soul refuseth to be comforted"; but cast yourself at Jesus' feet, and trust in Him, and you are saved. God bless you and grant this prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen.

TURNING BACK IN THE DAY OF BATTLE

"The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."—Psalm lxxviii. 9.

I DO not think that it has been clearly ascertained to what particular historical event Asaph here refers, but I do not find that any of the commentators mention a very obscure passage in the First Book of Chronicles, which I venture to suggest may give us the explanation. In the first Book of Chronicles, the seventh chapter and the twentieth verse, you read:—"And the sons of Ephraim, Shuthelah, and Bered his son, and Tabath his son, and Eladah, and Tabath his son, and Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle. And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him." This event appears to have occurred while the children of Israel were still in Egypt. It has been supposed by some that these sons of Ephraim made a raid upon the promised land, and attacked the men of Gath. Believing the land to be theirs by promise they went to take it before they had divine authority so to do. They made God's decrees the rule of their life instead of God's revealed will, and so they soon fell into trouble,—as those people always do who make that mistake,—and their father Ephraim mourned over them many days. But it appears to have been rather an attack made upon them by some men of Gath. The people seem some of them to have been of Egyptian origin, and they probably made an attack upon the cattle of the men of Ephraim. These young men defended their cattle for a time, but at last—if this be the event which this psalm refers to—it would appear they turned their backs and so fell slain. That may or may not be. Still there are other passages in history which might serve to illustrate the text. You are aware that Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim, and probably on account of this, the ark of God was first placed at Shiloh. On the occasion when Hophni and Phineas were slain, the children of Israel, we are told, fled. It appears to have been the peculiar duty of the men of Ephraim, in whose tribe Shiloh was, to guard the ark. It may be possible that they were set around the ark as a body-guard to it, but fled at the approach of the Philistines, or fell slain together with Hophni and Phineas on that terrible and disastrous day. If this is the event alluded to you will find the history of it in the fourth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. Perhaps, however, reference is made to the whole history of the tribe of Ephraim that though they were well armed and were dexterous men in the use of the bow, yet on many occasions they turned their backs in the day of battle. Whether

any of these explanations interpret the historical reference or not, the subject in itself will furnish us with a theme for meditation.

I. We will first consider for a little while WHAT THESE MEN DID.

They turned their backs. When the time for fighting came they ought to have shown their fronts. Like bold men they should have kept their face to the foe and their breast against the adversary, but they dishonourably turned their backs and fled. This, I am sorry to say, is not an unusual thing amongst professing Christians. They turn back; they turn back in the day of battle. Some do this *at the first appearance of difficulty.* "There is a lion in the way," saith the slothful man, "I shall be slain in the streets." They hear that there is some trouble involved in Christian service, or that some persecution may be met with in the pursuit of truth, and straightway they look before they leap, as the world hath it, and turn back from the way which they supposed to be that of safety. Timorous and Mistrust come running down the hill crying, "The lions! the lions!" and thus may a pilgrim turns back towards the City of Destruction.

Others are somewhat braver. They bear the first brunt. When the skirmishers begin these are as bold as any; they can return blow for blow, and you hear them boast, as they buckle on their armour, at such a rate, that you would suppose, if you did not know that boasters are seldom good at fighting, that they must certainly be victorious. During the first thrust they stand like martyrs and behave like heroes, but very soon, when the armour gets a little battered, and the fine plume on their helmet a little stained, they turn back in the day of battle.

Some professors bear the fight a little longer. They are not to be laughed out of their religion; they can stand the jeers and jests of their old companions. When they find that they have got the cut direct in the society which once loved them so much they can put up with that, and they are very much complimented by themselves on having done it. "Cowards," say they, "are those who flee; but we shall never do this." But by and by the skirmishers have done their work, and it comes to a hand-to-hand fight; the struggle begins to be somewhat more arduous, and now shall we see what metal they are made of. The enemy gets hold of them, and

> "That desperate tug their soul might feel
> Through bars of brass and triple steel."

Then they find that they are being hugged in the wrong place; they are touched in a tender part, and so they also turn back in the day of battle!

And, alas! sad as it is to say it—firmly as we believe that every child of God is safe, yet is it true that many who profess to be so, after having fought so long that you would suppose the next thing would be for them to rest upon their laurels and receive their crown, just at the very last they fall and turn back! We have seen grey-headed apostates as well as juvenile ones. There have been those who seemed to wear well for a time, but at last one crushing blow came which they could not bear, and they gave way before it! O, brethren, it is only those who persevere to the end that will be saved, and only those who have a true faith in Jesus Christ have a sure evidence of their election of God; these be they who shall be clothed with white raiment, and shall sit down upon His throne for ever. But, how many who bade fair to do this, after all turn back!

I may be describing—I hope I am not—some actual case here. Some of you may say as you turn the thought over in your minds,—

> "My feet had almost gone;
> My steps had well nigh slipped."

That young man over yonder was so much jeered at the other day by those with whom he works, that he felt it was very unkind, and he did think something about renouncing his religion altogether. And my other brother yonder, who has had so many losses, has lately had such a time as he never had before, and he thinks nobody else ever had, and he cries, "God has forsaken me." He cannot just now say, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him"; but he thinks, "Surely I had better turn to the world; I had better leave my religion and give it up, for I am encompassed about with such a terrible conflict that I shall never win the victory!" Ah! brethren, these are often the trials that God sends, and it is by these that he separates the chaff from the wheat, and lets us see who are true soldiers, and who are only the lacqueys who wear regimentals, but have not the soldier's heart pulsing beneath the scarlet. God grant us grace to be found at last men that turned *not* back in the day of battle.

If I take the history of the children of Ephraim, I should say that they turned their backs and *failed to defend the ark.* There are some who, when they are defending the truth, shun controversy. They are of such a timid disposition—a loving disposition they call it—that as soon as ever the war-trumpet sounds they find it to be their duty to attend to the baggage in the rear. They are very brave men indeed in that particular quarter of the conflict where it does not happen to rage; but there in the van, where the corpses are piled on heaps, and where the battle-axes drip with gore, they never will be found, because they have not the courage to fight and to conquer for Jesus. As far as they are concerned the ark of God may be taken by the Philistines, because they turn their backs.

These Ephraimites ought, too, as Joshua had set them the example, *to have conquered Canaan, and to have driven out the Canaanites still left.* Ah! my brethren, there are some of you whose sins still live, because you have turned your backs upon them, but not in the right sense, for you have turned your backs against contending with sin. There is that bad temper of yours—you have given up trying to curb it now. You say, "Well, you know many of God's children have bad tempers," whereas you know that this is very wicked talking. You ought to slay that Agag. You have no business to tolerate a bad temper. You must never have any peace with that spiteful temper, or that hasty temper of yours; you must down with it, or else it will down with you, and if you do not overcome it, it will overcome you. Rest assured that you are guilty, and that you turn your back if you do not fight with it. So too with that worldliness of yours and that want of a prayerful spirit. If you say, "Well, I will be content to be as I am; I will not try after a high state of piety," you turn your backs, my brethren. You ought to slay all these Canaanites, and you must in Christ's name do it, and not spare so much as one of them, but say, "they compass me about, like bees, yea, they compass me

about, but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them."

And then, when these people turned their backs, *Canaan was not won.* So it is with you. The Lord's kingdom is not yet fully extended, and just when you ought to be pushing far and wide the conquests of the cross, and be letting this great city of ours know that the King reigneth mighty to save, you turn back in the day of battle. There are some Christians here who are doing nothing. I should not say this, perhaps, if I were preaching on Sunday, for I thank God that I could not in my own heart say it of my own members ; the most of them are doing, I believe, as much as lieth in them, or if not, I hope they very soon will be. But I am persuaded that there are many other Christians who are not doing what they should do, but are shrinking from practical service. They come in here, perhaps, on a Thursday night, and get a little bit, and they go elsewhere on other evenings of the week and pick up sweet morsels and crumbs. They like feeding very well, but they do not like work so much. There is a certain little company that come here on week-day evenings, into whose ears I should like to whisper, and ask them what they are doing for Christ. They are spiritual vagrants who go from one place to another, but have no settled home where they work for the Master, and they are of very little credit to anybody. We must all of us have a sphere of labour, and though I am glad to see all of you, as many as like to come, yet I pray you do have your own place for your own work, and do not be like the children of Ephraim who " turned back in the day of battle."

II. Having thus observed what these men of Ephraim did, we come to look at the inopportune time WHEN THEY DID IT.

They turned back, and their doing so would not have mattered much had they done it in a day of feasting. They could always be spared then, but that was not when they did it. They always had their faces to the front when there was any feasting to be done. They turned back ; when ? On holidays, when the banners waved high and the silver trumpets sounded ? No ; they were in the front then ! Exeter Hall ! May meetings ! How many people are in the front there and then ? When there is something sweet to feed upon they do not think of turning back. But these people turned back on rather a different occasion ; they turned back *in the day of battle.* They turned back, it seems then, just when they were to be tried. Ah ! how much there is we do that will not stand trial ! How much there is of godliness which is useful for anything excepting that which it is meant for ! It is all in vain for me to say, if I have bought a waterproof coat, that it is good for everything except keeping the water out. Why, then it is good for nothing, and so there are some Christians who have got a religion that is good for every day except the day when it has to be tested, and then it is good for nothing. An anchor may be very pretty on shore, and it may be very showy as an ornament when it lies on the ship's deck or hangs from the side, but what is the good of it if it will not hold when the wind blows and the vessel needs to be held fast ? So, alas ! there is much of religion and of godliness, so called, that is no good when it comes to the day of trial. The soldier is truly proved to be a soldier when the war-trumpet sounds and the regiment must go up to the cannon's mouth. Then shall you know, when the bayonets begin to cross, who has the true soldier's blood in him ; but ah ! how many turn back when it really comes to the conflict, for then the day of trial is too much for them !

They turned back *at the only time when they were of any sort of use.* A man who has to fight is not of any particular use to his country, that I know of, except when there is fighting to be done. Like a man in any other trade, there is a season when he is wanted. Now, if the Christian soldier never fights, of what good is he at all ? That is a very remarkable passage in one of the prophets, where the Lord compares His people to a vine, and then He says of them, in words of which I will give the sense, " If the vine bears fruit it is very valuable, but, if it bears no fruit, then it is good for nothing at all." An oak without fruit is valuable for its timber, and even thorns are useful, for you may make a hedge of them. Smaller plants may be used for some medicinal purposes, but the vine, if it bear no fruit, is absolutely good for nothing. " Will a man even make a peg of it, whereon to hang a vessel ? " saith the prophet. No ; it is of no service whatever. So is it with the Christian. If he be not thorough and true he is no good at all ; you can make nothing of him whatever ; he is, to use Christ's expressive words, " Neither fit for the land nor even for the dunghill, and men cast him out." Who would enlist a soldier that knew he would turn back ? and who amongst us would like to be in his regiment ? Take off his colours, play " The Rogue's March," and turn him out of the barracks ! And this is what will come to some professors who turn back in the day of battle ! Their regimentals will be torn off, and they will be excluded from the Church of God because they turned back in the day of trial and at the time when they were needed.

They turned their backs, too, like fools, *in the day when victory was to be won.* The soldier wants to distinguish himself ; he wants to rise out of the ranks ; he wants to be promoted. He hardly expects an opportunity of doing this in time of peace ; but the officer rises when in time of war he leads a successful charge. And so it is with the Christian soldier. I make no advance while I am not fighting. I cannot win if I am not warring. My only opportunity for conquering is when I am fighting. If I run away when there is a chance of winning the crown, then I am like the ship that does not come out of harbour when there is a fair wind, or like the man who does not avail himself of the high tide to get his vessel over the bar at the harbour's mouth. I cannot win without fighting, and therefore I thank God when the trial comes, and count it a joy when I fall into manifold temptations, because now I may add to my faith one virtue after another, till my Christian character is all complete. To throw away the time of conflict is to throw away the crown. O simple heart ! O silly heart ! to be afraid of suffering for Jesus ! You are, in fact, afraid of reigning with Him, for you must do the one if you would do the other. You, young woman, who are so alarmed at a little laughing, recollect you cannot got to heaven without being laughed at sometimes in the circle in which you move, or the family in which you live. He that will live a godly life in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. Since, then, this is the way to heaven, why do you turn from it ? Be not like these children of Ephraim who turned back when there was a crown to be won.

They turned back, once more, *when turning back involved the most disastrous defeat.* The ark of God was taken. " Ichabod," the enemy cried, for the glory was

departed from Israel, because the children of Ephraim turned back in the day of battle. And so, dear friends, unless God gives you preserving grace to stand fast to the end, do you not see that you are turning back to—what? *To perdition.* You do not turn back merely to the world. That is what it looks like, perhaps, to you, but you really turn back to hell. If, after having once put your hand to the plough, you look back, you are unworthy of the kingdom; but what are you worthy of? Why, those "reserved seats" in hell! Did you ever think of that? There are such, and let me quote a passage which proves it. We are told in one place of darkness "reserved" for some who were "wandering stars, for whom is *reserved* the blackness of darkness for ever!" When *you* turn back you turn back to those reserved places where the darkness is more black and the pain more terrible. Oh! may God save you from ever turning back in the day of battle. This, then, is when they did it—they turned back in the day of battle.

III. But now let us notice, WHO THEY WERE THAT TURNED BACK.

They were "children of Ephraim," and they are described as "being armed and carrying bows," or bows throwing forth sharp arrows. *They were men of a noble parentage.* They were the *children of Ephraim.* Joshua was of that line, and he was the greatest of conquerors, who led the people into the promised land. And you professors, you profess to be descended from our Joshua,—Jesus the Conqueror, and will you turn back? Are you followers of the Saviour who gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and are you afraid or ashamed of anything? He gave His face to be spat upon, and will you hide your faces at the mention of His name, because fools choose to laugh at you? Followers of Joshua, and yet afraid? Followers of Jesus, and yet blush? God grant that we may never blush, except when we think that we ever blushed at the thought of His Son! O! Thou dear, despised, and persecuted One, I see Thee on Thy way amidst the scoffers. One plucks Thy beard; another pulls Thy hair; a third casts His accursed spittle into Thy face; another beats Thee; another cries, "Let Him be crucified." They mock Thee with all forms of mockery. Taunt and jeer they heap upon Thee. They fill Thy mouth with vinegar, and give Thee gall to drink. They pierce Thy hands and Thy feet, and yet Thou goest on along Thy way of kindness and of mercy! And I—what have I ever suffered compared with Thee? And these Thy people—what have any of these endured, or what can they endure, compared with all Thy griefs? Thy martyrs follow Thee. Up from their fiery stakes they mount to their thrones. Confessors follow Thee; from dungeons and from racks their testimony sounds. And, shall we, upon whom the ends of the earth are come, in these softer and gentler times, shall we turn back, and say we know not the Man? O God, forbid! but do Thou keep us faithful unto Thee, that we, the sons of Ephraim, may not turn back in the day of battle.

Then, again, *they were armed, and had proper weapons, weapons which they knew how to use, and good weapons for that period of warfare.* And as Christians, what weapons have we? Here is this "Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Here is a quiver, filled with innumerable arrows, and God has put into our hands the bow of prayer, by which we may shoot them, drawing that bow by the arm of faith against our innumerable foes. What weapons of holy warfare do you want better than those which this sacred armoury supplies? Read the last chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and see how the apostle, with a triumphant glorying, takes you through God's armoury, and bids you look at the various pieces of armour, and the various weapons that are provided for you. If you lose the battle, it is not for want of being armed, and if you desert from the ranks, it is not for the want of bows.

But what is more. Another translation seems to show that these Ephraimites were *very skilful in the use of the bow,* and yet they turned back. Oh! may God grant that none of us who have preached to others, and preached to others with fluency and zeal may ever have our own weapons turned against us. I may make a confession here now. I have read some of my own utterances and have trembled as I have read them, and afterwards I have wept over them, not wanting to alter them, not regretting them, but fearing and trembling lest I should have my own words used in judgment against me at the last great day, for there can be no more dreadful thing than for a man to have known and taught the Word to others, and then to hear the Master say,—just listen to it,—"Thou wicked servant! *Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee!*" O God! Condemn me out of anybody's mouth rather than out of my own. It will be a dreadful thing to have known how to use the bow, and yet not to win the victory one-self; to have been a sort of drill-sergeant to God's people, showing them how to use the weapons, and then not to have fought the battle one-self! This will be a terrible thing! Some of you know how to use this Bible. You are acquainted with it, you have studied its doctrines, you know the points of divinity and theology, you are well read up in the teachings of God's Word; you know how to use the bow. And some of you pray very sweetly at prayer-meeting. Ah! beloved, what I said about myself may well apply to you. Some of you are Sunday-school teachers and others tract distributors, and you all know how to use the bow. I hope I can say to you who sit here that I have, like Saul, taught you to use the bow. We have sought to teach you young men to use God's Word both in prayer and in other exercises of your holy faith; but, beloved, if you turn back, the art which you have learned shall rise up in judgment against you to condemn you! If as professors taught the use of God's Word you are marched out to fight, but have not courage enough for the conflict, and turn your backs and slink into inglorious ease or into vain-glorious self-righteousness, or into false glorious pleasure, oh! how terrible must be your ruin at the last! May you not be like the children of Ephraim, who, though skilled in the use of the bow, yet turned back in the day of battle! This, then, is who they were.

IV. And ask ye now—WHY DID THEY DO IT? Why did they, indeed? We might well have been at a loss to tell, for they were armed and carried bows. What then was the reason? The Word of God tells us and gives us three reasons. You will find them in the verses following the text. "They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law, and forgat His works, and His wonders that He had showed them."

"*They kept not the covenant.*" Oh! that great covenant, "ordered in all things and sure," when you can fall back upon that how it strengthens you!

When you can read in it eternal thoughts of divine love to you, and can hear Jesus say, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." How it encourages you to go forward! You cannot be killed, you are invulnerable, you have been dipped in the covenant stream that makes you invulnerable from head to foot. Why, then, should you fear to face the foe? If you forget that covenant you will soon turn back, and so prove that you are not in it; but the remembrance of it gives strength to God's people to persevere, since they feel that God's purpose is that they shall persevere, and so win the victory. The covenant, however, not only secures safety, but it also provides all sorts of blessings. If a Christian always had his eye on the covenant storehouse he could never desert his God for the world. Will a man leave a treasury that is full of gold to go to a beggar's cottage for money? Will a man turn from the flowing stream that comes cool and fresh from Lebanon's melting snow to go and drink of some filthy stagnant pool? No, not he, and when a man knows the treasures of grace that are in Christ Jesus, and remembers that it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, and that He hath made Him a covenant for the people, will such a man turn back? Assuredly not, but every promise of the covenant will enable him to face his foes and prevent his turning back in the day of battle. Perhaps, however, the covenant which we forget is the covenant we feel we made with Christ in the day when we said, "My beloved is mine, and I am His," when we give ourselves up in a full surrender, body, soul, and spirit, to God. Oh! let us never forget that covenant! Supposing we should lose our character for Christ's sake? Did we not give Christ our character to begin with? You are of no use in the ministry, my dear brother, if you are not quite willing to be called a fool, to be called a thief, or even to be called a devil! You will never be successful if you are afraid of being pelted. The true minister often finds his pulpit to be a place but little preferable to a pillory, and he is content to stand there, feeling that all the abuse and blasphemy which may come upon him are only the means by which the world recognizes and proves its recognition of a God-sent man. Oh! to rest upon the covenant which is made in grace, and to hold fast the covenant which Christ has compelled us to make with Him, resolved that even should He take all away, our joy, our comfort, and our ease, we will still stand to it, and still keep the covenant.

Another reason why they turned back was that "*they refused to walk in His law.*" When we get a proud heart we very soon get beaten, for with the face of a lion, but the heart of a deer, such an one is afraid of the world. If I am willing to do what God tells me, as He tells me, when He tells me, and because He tells me, I shall not turn back in the day of battle.

They also seem to have turned back *because they had bad memories.* "They forgat His works, and the wonders that He had showed them." My dear friends, we the members of this church have seen many of God's wonders, and have rejoiced in them, and if we were to forget these we should lack one means of comfort in our own darkness. Some of you have had very wonderful manifestations of the Lord's kindness, and if you forget all these I should not wonder if you should prove to be a mere professor and turn your back, for God's true people are like that Mary, whom all generations call "blessed," they treasure these things in their hearts. We ought to stir up our remembrances of God's loving-kindness, for if we do not, it will soon be a powerful reason for our turning back in the day of battle. Oh! have we not fought in days gone by, and shall we now be afraid? Have we not slain old Giant Grim? Did we not fight with dragons and with lions? Have we not gone through the Valley of the Shadow of Death? Have we not had a conflict with Apollyon himself foot to foot, and shall Giant Despair or his wife Mrs. Diffidence make us afraid? No, in the name of God we will use the good old sword, the true Jerusalem blade that we wielded aforetime, and we shall yet again be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Let us, then, not forget God's works in the days of yore, lest we fail to trust Him in the days that are to come. This was why they turned back.

V. And now the last enquiry is—WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THEIR TURNING BACK?

One result of their turning back was, *that their father mourned over them.* We are told, in the passage I quoted first, that "Ephraim their father mourned for them many days." What a lamentation it brings into the Christian Church when a professor falls! There is one heart which feels it with peculiar poignancy—the heart of him who thought he was the spiritual father of the person so falling. There are no griefs connected with our work like the grief of mourning over fallen professors, especially if these happen to be ministers, men who are armed and carry bows, for when they turn back, well accoutred and well-skilled in war, it is heart-breaking work indeed! I do not exaggerate, but I know I only speak the sober truth, when I say that if I could submit to any form of corporeal torture that I have ever heard of, I would be willing to bear it sooner than submit to the torture I have sometimes felt over members of this church, or what is worse, over young men educated in our College, or what is worse still, over ministers who have been for some time settled over their flocks. If at any time you desire to be malicious towards the man whom you look upon as your spiritual father; if you would send an arrow through his very liver and smite him with a dagger in the core of his heart, you have nothing to do but to turn back in the day of battle, and you have done it. It were better that you had never been born than that you should go back to the world. It were better that you should be taken out of this house a corpse than that you should live to disgrace the profession which you have espoused, especially those of you who stand in a prominent place. O God, keep us who witness before the multitude, keep us by Thine eternal power, keep us as the apple of Thine eye, hide us beneath the shadow of Thy wings, or else we who are chief and foremost, though armed and carrying bows, shall yet turn back in the day of battle.

Another result, which you perhaps will think more important far, was that owing to their turning back *the enemy remained.* Owing to many Christians not doing what they ought to do in the day of battle, Romanism is still in this land, and infidelity is rife. If in the days of Elizabeth and Cranmer men had acted up to the light they then had, we should not be as we now are, a semi-Popish nation. Had Luther himself been faithful to some of the light

to which he shut his eyes, he might have inaugurated a more perfect Reformation than that for which we are still devoutly grateful to God; and for which we always cherish his memory. There was a want of thoroughness even in that day. And at the present moment, if some of our brethren were but faithful to their own convictions, they would not be bolstering up an alliance of the State with a depraved Church; they would not dare to perform some ceremonies which are atrociously bad, and many of us, if we acted according to our inward monitor, would not do many things which we are now doing. Oh! may God give us grace to smite the foe! What has sin to do in this world? Christ has bought the world with His blood, and oh! for grace to clear sin out of Christ's heritage! The earth is the Lord's, and the kingdoms thereof, the world and they that dwell therein; and if we were but faithful to God we should not turn back in the day of battle, and Rome and all our foes would be slain.

Then, again, if we did not turn our backs, *the country would be conquered for Christ.* I do not like the way in which some brethren say that if we were more faithful half London would be saved. I say that I believe God's purpose is achieved, but still we are bound to speak of our sins according to their tendencies, and the tendency of our want of confidence in God, and our not boldly persevering, is to destroy souls. Paul talked once of destroying with meat him for whom Christ died, that being the tendency to destroy such souls if they could be destroyed. So humanly speaking, the darkness of the world at present is owing to the unfaithfulness of the church, and if the church had been as true to Christ as she was in the first century, long ere this there would not have been a village without the gospel, nor a single empire in the world in which the truth had not been proclaimed. It is our turning back in the day of battle that leaves Canaan unconquered for our Lord.

But, worse than this, the *ark itself was actually taken.* My dear friends, those of you who are armed and carry bows, men of learning, men who understand the Scriptures, I do pray you, do not turn back just now, for just now seems to be a time when the ark of God will be taken. It can never really be so, but still we must mind that it be not the tendency of our actions. We are in great danger from what some people will not believe, but what is most certainly a fact, and that is the marvellous increase of Popery in this land. There are certain brethren who are always harping upon this one string, till we have grown sick of the theme, but, without at all endorsing their alarm, I believe there is quite enough for the most quiet and confident spirit to be alarmed at. The thing has become monstrous, and there is need to awaken the anxious care and the earnest efforts of God's Church. You need not be long without good evidence of this. Every nerve is being strained by Rome to win England to itself, and, on the other hand, while we have less neology, and less of all sorts of scepticism throughout the whole country, I am afraid that we have more of it than we used to have inside the church itself. There are many doctrines that are now matters of question which I never heard questioned ten years ago. I am not altogether sorry for this, but rather glad, because there are some doctrines which are not preached now, but which will be preached more in future in consequence of doubts being thrown upon them. But it is a very ominous sign of the times, that most of those truths which we have been accustomed to accept as being the received and orthodox faith of Christendom are now being questioned, and questioned too by men who are not to be despised, men who from their evident earnestness, from their deep knowledge, and from their close attention to the matter, deserve a hearing in the forum of common-sense, even if they do not deserve it from spiritual men. We must all of us hold fast the truth now. If there is a man who has got a truth, let him draw his bow and shoot his arrows now, and not turn back in the day of battle. Now for your arrows! Now for your arrows! The more our foes shall conspire against Christ, the more do you make war against them. Give them double for their double; reward them as they reward you. Spare no arrows against Babylon. "Happy shall he be that taketh thy little ones and dasheth them against the stones." Happy shall he be who slays the little errors, who kills the minor falsehoods, who does battle against Popery in every shape and form, and against infidelity in all its phases! If we do not come to the front now, the ark of God, as far as we are concerned, will be taken!

And then, worst of all, *we shall hear the Philistines shouting while God's Church is weeping!* The Philistines are good hands at shouting. They shout rather loudly about nothing, but when they get a little they bark loudly enough then. If they see but one Christian turn back what rejoicing there is! They ring the bells and make great mirth over the fall of the very least among us, but if those of us who are armed and carry bows should turn back in the day of battle, oh "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of Philistia rejoice, lest the sons of the uncircumcised triumph!" God grant that we may never make mirth for hell. If Satan must have merriment may he find it anywhere rather than in us. Oh! may we stand at last, and, having done all, may we still stand.

To conclude, brethren. If we do not stand fast, *you know what will come of it.* Supposing the churches of which we are members do not stand fast, what will come of you and what of me? What became of Shiloh? What became of Ephraim? Instead of the ark being any longer in the custody of Ephraim it was taken away from Shiloh, and God transferred the custody of it to Judah, and it rested upon Mount Zion under the government of King David. So, mark you, whenever a church becomes unfaithful, and turns back in the day of battle, God takes away from it the keeping of His ark and entrusts it to others. "I have looked upon a neighbour of thine," saith He, "who is better than thou," and so He takes the sword and gives it to David, and thus perhaps may He do with us. There are many churches that were once flourishing but now are deserted altogether. So it may be with us individually, and with the churches at large unless we are faithful to God.

Now, I have said nothing to the unconverted. My drift seemed to be to speak to professing believers. Some of you say you never went to this war, and therefore you will not turn back; you never made a profession. Ah! dear friends, it will be a very poor excuse at the last great day to say, "I never made a profession." Did you ever hear of a thief being brought up at the Mansion House before the Lord Mayor who said, when he was accused of being a

thief, " Why, my Lord, I am not a very honest man ; I never professed to be ; I never professed that I would not pick people's pockets ; I never professed that I would not steal a watch if I had the chance ; I was regularly known as a thief ; I never professed to be anything else, therefore you cannot blame me." If a man should make such a defence as that, I should think it very likely that the Lord Mayor would give him an extra six months, and I think it would serve him very well right. You smile at this, but the very same argument may be applied to you. " Well," you say, " you know I do not make any profession of religion " ; that is to say, you do not make any pretence of serving and loving the God who made you, who gave you life, and has kept and preserved you in it ; you do not make any profession of being washed in the precious blood of Christ ; you do not make a profession of being on the road to hell. Well, may God save you from that excuse, and may He give you grace to look it in the face and say, " Well, I do not dare even to hope that I am saved ; I know I am not." Then, my brother, if you are not saved, you are lost. I would like to stop while you turn that thought over, and when you have done so I would say, " The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

May God's eternal mercy seek and save you, and, if it be His will, may He find you, and lead you to put your trust in Jesus Christ, and resting upon Him, and looking to His cross, you shall not, as the children of Ephraim did, " turn back in the day of battle."

ONE ANTIDOTE FOR MANY ILLS

" Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts, cause Thy face to shine ; and we shall be saved."—Psalm lxxx. 19.

THIS seems to be the only prayer the Psalmist puts up in this psalm, as being of itself sufficient for the removal of all the ills over which he mourned. Though he sighs over the strife of neighbours and the ridicule of foes ; and lamenting the ill condition of the goodly vine, he deplores its broken hedges, and complains of the wild beasts that waste and devour it, yet he does not petition the Most High against these evils in detail ; but gathering up all his wishes into this one prayer, he reiterates it o'er and o'er—" Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts, cause Thy face to shine ; and we shall be saved." The reason is obvious. He had traced all the calamities to one source, " O Lord God, how long wilt Thou be angry—? " And now he seeks refreshing from one fountain. Let Thy face no longer frown, but let it beam upon us with a smile and all shall be well. This is a sweet lesson for the Church of Christ. " In your troubles, trials and adversities, seek first, chiefly, and above everything else, to have a revival of religion in your own breast, the presence of God in your own heart ; having that, you have scarcely anything beside to pray for ; whatever else may befal you shall work for your good, and all that seems to impede your course, shall really prove to be a prosperous gale, to waft you to your desired haven : only, take care that you seek of God that you yourselves are turned again unto Him, and that He would give you the light of His countenance ; so shall you be saved."

This morning's sermon, then, will be especially addressed to my own church, on the absolute necessity of true religion in our midst, and of revival from all apathy and indifference. We may ask of God multitudes of other things, but amongst them all, let this be our chief prayer : " Lord, revive us ; Lord, revive us ! " We have uttered it in song ; let me stir up your pure minds, by way of remembrance, to utter it in your secret prayers, and make it the daily aspiration of your souls. I feel, beloved, that notwithstanding all opposition, God will help us to be " more than conquerors, through Him that loved us," if we are true to ourselves, and true to Him. But though all things should go smoothly, and the sun should always shine upon our heads, we should have no prosperity if our own godliness failed ; if we only maintained the form of religion, instead of having the very power of the Holy Spirit manifested in our midst.

I shall endeavour to urge upon you this morning, first of all, *the benefits of revival*, as we shall find some of them suggested in this psalm ; and secondly, *the means of revival*—" Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts " ; then, thirdly, I shall exhort you to *use these means, that you may acquire these benefits.*

I. THE BENEFITS OF REVIVAL TO ANY CHURCH IN THE WORLD will be a lasting blessing. I do not mean that false and spurious kind of revival which was so common a few years ago. I do not mean all that excitement attendant upon religion, which has brought men into a kind of spasmodic godliness and translated them from sensible beings, into such as could only rave about a religion they did not understand. I do not think that is a real and true revival. God's revivals, whilst they are attended with a great heat and warmth of piety, yet have with them knowledge as well as life, understanding as well as power. The revivals that we may consider to have been genuine, were such as those wrought by the instrumentality of such men as President Edwards in America, and Whitfield in this country, who preached a free-grace gospel in all its fulness. Such revivals I consider to be genuine, and such revivals, I repeat again, would be a benefit to any church under heaven. There is no church, however good it is, which might not be better ; and there are many churches sunken so lowt hat they have abundant need, if they would prevent spiritual death, to cry aloud, " Lord, revive us."

Among the blessings of the revival of Christians, we commence, by noticing *the salvation of sinners.* When God is pleased to pour out His Spirit upon a church in a larger measure than usual, it is always accompanied by the salvation of souls. And oh, this is a weighty matter, to have souls saved. Some laugh, and think the salvation of the soul is nothing ; but I trust, beloved, you know so much of the value of souls that you will ever think it to be worth the laying down of your lives, if you might but be the means of the saving of one single soul from death.

The saving of souls, if a man has once gained love to perishing sinners, and love to His blessed Master, will be an all-absorbing passion to him. It will so carry him away, that he will almost forget himself in the saving of others. He will be like the stout, brave fireman, who careth not for the scorch or for the heat, so that he may rescue the poor creature on whom true humanity hath set his heart. He must, he will pluck such a one from the burning, at any cost and expense to himself. Oh the zeal of such a man as that Whitfield to whom I have alluded! He says in one of his sermons, "My God, I groan day by day over the salvation of souls. Sometimes," he says, "I think I could stand on the top of every hackney-coach in the streets of London, to preach God's Word. It is not enough that I can do it night and day, labouring incessantly by writing and by preaching; I would that I were multiplied a thousand-fold, that I might have a thousand tongues to preach this gospel of my blessed Redeemer." Ah, you find too many Christians who do not care about sinners being saved. The minister may preach, but what heed they the results? So long as he has a respectable congregation, and a quiet people, it is enough. I trust, my friends, we shall never sink to so low a state as to carry on our services without the salvation of souls. I have prayed my God many a time, and I hope to repeat the prayer, that when I have no more souls to save for Him, no more of His elect to be gathered home, He may allow me to be taken to Himself, that I may not stand as a cumberground in His vineyard, useless, seeing there is no more fruit to be brought forth. I know you long for souls to be converted. I have seen your glad eyes when, at the church-meetings, night after night, sinners have told us what the Lord has done for them. I have marked your great joy when drunkards, blasphemers, and all kinds of careless persons have turned with full purpose of heart unto God, and led a new life. Now, mark you, if these things are to be continued, and above all, if they are to be multiplied, we must have again a revival in our midst. For this we must and will cry, "O Lord our God, visit Thy plantation, and pour out again upon us Thy mighty Spirit."

Another effect of a revival in a church, is generally *the promotion of true love and unanimity in its midst.* I will tell you the most quarrelsome churches in England, if you will tell me the most lazy churches. It has actually become a proverb now-a-days. People say, when persons are sound asleep, "He is as sound asleep as a church"; —as if they really thought the church was the soundest asleep of anything that exists! Alas that there should be so much truth in the proverb. Where a firm, established for business would have all its eyes open—where a company that had for its object the accumulation of wealth, would be ever on the watch—churches, for the most part, seem to neglect the means of doing good, and fritter away holy opportunities of advancing their Master's cause; and for this reason, many of us are split in sunder. There are heart-burnings, achings, ranklings of soul, quarellings amongst each other. An active church will be a united church; a slumbering church will be sure to be a quarrelsome one. If any minister desires to heal the wounds of a church, and bring the members into unanimity, let him ask God to give them all enough to fill their hands; and when their hands are full of their Master's work, and their mouths are full of His praise, they will have no time for devouring one another, or filling their mouths with slander and reproach. Oh, if God gives us revival, we shall have perfect unanimity. Blessed be God, we have much of it; but oh for more of it, that our hearts may be knit together as the heart of one man,—that we, being one army of the Living God, may none of us have any anger or ill-will towards each other, but being—as I trust we all are—brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, we may live as becometh such. Oh that Christ would give us that spirit that loveth all, hopeth for all, and will bear burdens for all, passing by little things, and differences of judgment and opinion, that so we may be united with a three-fold cord that cannot be broken. A revival, I think, is necessary for the unanimity of the Church.

A revival is also necessary, *in order that the mouths of the enemies of the truth may be stopped.* Do they not open wide their mouths against us? Have they not spoken hard things against us?—aye, and not only against us, but against the truth we preach, and against the God we honour. How shall their mouths be stopped? By our replying to them? No; foul scorn we think it to utter one single word in our own defence. If our conduct be not sufficiently upright to commend itself, we will not utter words in order to commend it. But the way we can shut our adversaries' mouths is this: by seeking a revival in our midst. What! do they rail against our ministry? If more souls are saved, can they rail against that? Aye, let them if they will. Do they speak against the doctrines? Let them; but let our lives be so holy that they must lie against us when they dare to say that our doctrines lead any into sin. Let us seek of God that we may be so earnest, so eminently holy, so God-like, and so Christ-like, that to all they say their own consciences may tell them, "Thou utterest a falsehood whilst thou speakest against him." This was the glory of the Puritans: they preached doctrines which laid them open to reproach. I am bold to say I have preached the doctrine of the Puritans; and I am bold to say, moreover, that those parts which have been most objected to in my discourses, have frequently been quotations from ancient fathers, or from some of the Puritans. I have often smiled when I have seen them condemned, and said, "There now, sir, thou hast condemned Charnock, or Bunyan, or Howe, or Doddridge," or some other saint of God whom it so happened I quoted at the time. The word condemned was theirs, and therefore it did not so much affect me. They were held up to reproach when they were alive; and how did they answer their calumniators? By a blameless and holy life. They, like Enoch, walked with God; and let the world say what they would of them, they only sought to keep their families the most rigidly pious, and themselves the most strictly upright in the world; so that while it was said of their enemies, "They talk of good works," it was said of the Puritans, that "They did them"; and while the Arminians, for such they were in those days, were living in sin, he who was called Calvinist, and laughed at, was living in righteousness, and the doctrine that was said to be the promoter of sin was found afterwards to be the promoter of holiness. We defy the world to find a holier people than those who have espoused the doctrines of free-grace, from the first moment until now. They have been distinguished in every history, even by their enemies, as having been the most devotedly pious, and as having given themselves especially to the reading of God's Word and the practice of His law; and whilst they said they were justified by faith alone, through

the blood of Christ, none were found, so much as they, seeking to honour God in all the exercises of godliness, being "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Their faith let us follow, and their charity let us emulate. Let us seek a revival here; and so our enemies' mouths, if not entirely shut, shall be so far stopped that their consciences shall speak against them whilst they rail against us. We want no eminent reply to silence their calumny; no learned articles brought out in our vindication; no voice lifted up in our favour. I thank my friends for all they do; but I thank them little for the true effect it produces. Let us live straight on; let us work straight on; let us preach straight on, and serve our God better than heretofore; then let hell roar, and earth resound with tumult; the conscious integrity of our own spirit shall preserve us from alarm, and the Most High Himself shall protect us from their fury. We need a revival, then, for these three reasons, each of which is great in itself.

Yet, above all, we want a revival, *if we would promote the glory of God.* The proper object of a Christian's life is God's glory. The Church was made on purpose to glorify God; but it is only a revived Church that brings glory to His name. Think you that all the churches honour God? I tell you nay; there are some that dishonour Him—not because of their erroneous doctrines, nor perhaps because of any defect in their formalities, but because of the want of life in their religion. There is a meeting for prayer; six people assemble besides the minister. Does that proclaim your homage to God? Does that do honour to Christianity? Go ye to the homes of these people; see what is their conversation when they are alone; mark how they walk before God. Go to their sanctuaries and hear their hymns; there is the beauty of music, but where is the life of the people? Listen to the sermon; it is elaborate, polished, complete, a masterpiece of oratory. But ask yourselves, "Could a soul be saved under it, except by a miracle? Was there anything in it adapted to stir men up to goodness? It pleased their ears; it instructed them in some degree, perhaps, but what was there in it to teach their hearts?" Ah, God knows there are many such preachers. Notwithstanding their learning and their opulence, they do not preach the gospel in its simplicity, and they draw not near to God our Father. If we would honour God by the church, we must have a warm church, a burning church, loving the truths it holds, and carrying them out in the life. Oh that God would give us life from on high, lest we should be like that church of old of whom it was said, "Thou hast a name to live, and art dead." These are some of the benefits of revivals.

II. WHAT ARE THE MEANS OF REVIVAL? They are two-fold. One is, "Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts"; and the other is, "Cause Thy face to shine." There can be no revival without both of these. Allow me, my dear hearers, to address you one by one, in different classes, in order that I may apply the former of these means to you.

"Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts." Your minister feels that he needs to be turned more thoroughly to the Lord his God. His prayer shall be, God helping him, that he may be more fearless and faithful than ever; that he may never for one moment think what any of you will say with regard to what he utters, but that he may only think what God his Master would say concerning him; that he may come into the pulpit with this resolve—that he cares no more for your opinion with regard to the truth than if you were all stones, only resolving this much: come loss or come gain by it, whatsoever the Lord God saith unto him, that he must speak; and he desires to ask his Master that he may come here with more prayer himself than heretofore, that whatever he preaches may be so burnt into his own soul that you may all know, even if you do not think it true yourselves, that at any rate he believes it, and believes it with his inmost soul. And I will ask of God that I may so preach to you, that my words may be attended with a mighty and a divine power. I do forswear all pretence to ability in this work. I forswear the least idea that I have aught about me that can save souls, or anything which could draw men by the attractions of my speech. I feel that if you have been profited by my preaching, it must have been the work of God, and God alone, and I pray to Him that I may be taught to know more my own weakness. Wherein my enemies say aught against me, may I believe what they say, but yet exclaim,

> "Weak though I am, yet through His might,
> I all things can perform."

Will you ask such things for me, that I may be more and more turned to God, and that so your spiritual health may be promoted.

But there are some of you who are workers in the church. Large numbers are actively engaged for Christ. In the Sabbath-school, in the distribution of tracts, in preaching the Word in the villages, and in some parts of this great city—many of you are striving to serve God. Now what I ask and exhort you to is this: cry unto God—"Turn us again, O God." You want, my dear working friends, more of the Spirit of God in all your labours. I am afraid we forget Him too much, we want to have a greater remembrance of Him. Sunday-school teachers, cry unto God that you may attend your classes with a sincere desire to promote God's glory, leaning wholly on His strength. Do not be content with the ordinary routine, gathering your children there, and sending them home again; but cry, "Lord, give us the agony which a teacher ought to feel for his child's soul." Ask that you may go to the school with deep feelings, with throes of love over the children's hearts, that you may teach them with tearful eyes, groaning before heaven that you may be the means of their salvation and deliverance from death. And you who in other ways serve God, I beseech you do not be content with doing it as you have done. You may have done it well enough to gain some approval of your fellows: do it better, as in the sight of the Lord. I do not mean better as to the outward form, but better as to the inward grace that goeth with it. Oh! seek from God that your works may be done from pure motives, with more simple faith in Christ, more firm reliance on Him, and with greater prayer for your success. "Turn us again," is the cry of all, I hope, who are doing anything for Jesus.

Others of you are intercessors; and here I hope I have taken in all who love the Lord in this place. Oh! how much the strength of a church depends upon these intercessors! I had almost said we could do better without the workers than the intercessors. We want in every church, if it is to be successful, intercessors with God—men who know how to plead with Him and to prevail. Beloved, I must stir you up again on this point. If you would see great things done in this place, or in any other place, in the sal-

vation of souls, you must intercede more earnestly than you have done. I thank God our prayer-meetings are always full; but there are some of you whom I do not see so often as I would desire. There are some of you business-men who are accustomed to come in for the last half-hour, and I have seen you, and called on you to pray. For six months I have not seen some of you at all. There are others whom I know to be as much engaged as you are, who somehow or other manage to be always here. Why is it not so with you? If you do not love prayer, then I wish you not to come until you do. But I do ask of God to bring you into such a state of mind, that your soul may be more thoroughly with the Lord's Church, and you may be more thoroughly devoted to His service. Our prayer-meeting is well attended, and is full; but it shall be better attended yet, and we shall have the men among us coming up "to the help of the Lord against the mighty." We do want more prayer. Your prayers, I am sure, have been more earnest at home than ever they were, during the last three weeks; let them be more earnest still. It is by prayer we must lean on God; it is by prayer that God strengthens us. I beseech you, wrestle with God, my dear friends. I know your love to one another, and to His truth. Wrestle with God, in secret and in public, that He would yet open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing upon us, such as we shall not have room enough to receive. There must be a turning again to God of the intercessors in prayer.

Again: we want a turning again to God of all of you who have been accustomed to hold communion with Jesus, but who have in the least degree broken off that holy and heavenly habit. Beloved, are there not some of you who were accustomed to walk with God each day? Your morn was sanctified with prayer, and your eventide was closed in with the voice of praise. You walked with Jesus in your daily business; you were real Enochs; you were Johns; you did lay your head on the bosom of your Lord. But ah! have not some of you known suspended communion of late? Let us speak of ourselves personally, instead of addressing you; have not we ourselves held less communion with Jesus? Have not our prayers been fewer to Him, and His revelations less bright to us? Have we not been content to live without Emmanuel in our hearts? How long is it with some of us since our morsel was dipped in the honey of fellowship? With some of you it is weeks and months, since you had your love visit from Jesus. O! beloved, let me beseech you, cry unto God, "Turn us again." It will never do for us to live without communion; we cannot, we must not, we dare not live without constant hourly fellowship with Jesus. I would stir you up in this matter. Seek of God that you may return, and experience the loveliness of Jesus in your eyes, that you may know more and more of your loveliness in His eyes.

And once more, beloved, "Turn us again" must be the prayer of all you, not only in your religious labours, but in your daily lives. Oh! how I do groan over each one of you, especially those of you who are my children in Christ, whom God has granted me to be the means of bringing from nature's darkness into marvellous light; that your lives may be an honour to your profession. Oh! my dear hearers, may none among you who made a profession, be found liars to God and man. There are many who have been baptized, who have been baptized into the waters of deception; there are some who put the sacramental wine between their lips, who are a dishonour and a disgrace to the church in which they assemble. Some who sing praises with us here can go and sing the songs of Satan elsewhere. Aye, are there not some among you, whom I cannot detect, whom the deacons cannot, nor your fellow-members either, but whose consciences tell you, you are not fit to be members of a church? You have crept into our number, you have deceived us, and there you are, like a cancer in our midst. God forgive you, and change your hearts; God turn you to Himself! And O my brethren, one and all of us, though we hope we have the root of the matter in us, yet how much room there is for improvement and amendment! How are your families conducted? Is there as much of that true and earnest prayerfulness for your children as we could desire? How is your business conducted? Are you above the tricks of trade? Do you know how to stand aloof from the common customs of other men, and say, "If all do wrong it is no reason why I should—I must, I will do right?" Do you know how to talk? Have you caught the brogue of heaven? Can you eschew all foolishness, all filthy conversation, and seek to bear the image of Jesus Christ in the world? I do not ask you whether you use the "thee" and "thou," and the outward formalities of ostentatious humility, but I ask you whether you know how to regulate your speech by the Word of God. I trust in some degree, that you all do, but not as we could desire. Cry out, then, ye Christians, "Turn us again, O God!" If others sin, I beseech you, do not you sin; remember how God is dishonoured by it. What! will you bring shame on Christ, and on the doctrines we profess? There is enough said against them without our giving cause of offence; lies enough are made up, without our giving any cause that men should truthfully speak ill of us. Oh! if I thought it would avail, methinks I would go down upon my knees, my brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, to beg of you, as for my very life, that you would live close to Jesus. I do pray the Holy Spirit that He may so rest on you in every place, that your conversation may be "such as becometh the gospel of Christ"; and that in every act, great or small, and in every word of every sort, there may be the influence from on high, moulding you to the right, keeping you to the right, and in everything bidding you to become more and more patterns of godliness, and reflections of the image of Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, to be personal with each other again, are we where we want to be just now, many of us? Can we put our hands to our hearts, and say, "O Lord, I am, in spiritual things just where I desire to be?" No; I don't think there is one of us that could say that. Are we now what we should desire to be if we were to die in our pews? Come now, have we so lived during the past week, that we could wish this week to be a specimen-week of our whole lives? I fear not. Brethren, how are your evidences?—are they bright for heaven? How is your heart?—is it wholly set on Jesus? How is your faith?—doth it dwell on God alone? Is your soul sick, or is it healthy? Are you sending forth blossoms and bearing fruit, or do you feel dry and barren? Remember, blessed is the man who is planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. But how about yourselves? Are not some of you so cold and languid in prayer, that prayer is a burden to you? How about your trials? Do they not

break your heart more, almost, than ever they did? That is because you have forgotten how to cast your burden on the Lord. How about your daily life? Have you not cause to grieve over it, as not being all you could desire it? Ah! beloved, do not reckon it a light matter to be going backwards; do not consider it a small thing to be less zealous than you used to be. Ah! it is a sad thing to begin to decline. But how many of you have done so! Let our prayer be now,—

"Lord, revive us, Lord, revive us,
All our help must come from Thee."

Do, I beseech you, I entreat you, in the name of God our Father, and Jesus Christ our Brother, search into your own hearts; examine yourselves, and put up this prayer, "Lord, wherein I am right, keep me so, against all opposition, and conflict; but wherein I am wrong, Lord make me right, for Jesus' sake. We must have this turning again unto God, if we would have a revival in our breast. Every unholy life, every cold heart, every one who is not entirely devoted to God, keeps us back from having a revival. When once we have all our souls fully turned unto the Lord, then, I say, but not till then, He will give us to see the travail of the Redeemer's soul; and "God, even our own God shall bless us, and all the ends of the world shall fear Him."

The other means of revival is a precious one—"Cause Thy face to shine." Ah! beloved, we might ask of God, that we might all be devoted, all His servants, all prayerful, and all what we want to be; but it would never come without this second prayer being answered; and even if it did come without this, where would be the blessing? It is the causing of His face to shine on His Church that makes a church flourish. Do you suppose that, if to our number there were added a thousand of the most wealthy and wise of the land, we should really prosper any the more without the light of God's countenance? Ah! no, beloved, give us our God, and we could do without them; but they would be a curse to us without Him. Do you imagine that the increase of our numbers is a blessing, unless we have an increase of grace? No, it is not. It is the crowding of a boat until it sinks, without putting in any more provision, for the food of those who are in it. The more we have in numbers, the more we need have of grace. It is just this we want every day: "Cause Thy face to shine." Oh! there have been times in this house of prayer, when God's face has shone upon us. I can remember seasons, when every one of us wept, from the minister down almost to the child; there have been times, when we have reckoned the converts under one sermon by scores. Where is the blessedness we once spoke of? Where is the joy we once had in this house! Brethren, it is not all gone; there are many still brought to know the Lord; but O! I want to see those times again, when first the refreshing showers came down from heaven. Have you never heard that under one of Whitfield's sermons there have been as many as two thousand saved? He was a great man; but God can use the little, as well as the great to produce the same effect; and why should there not be souls saved here, beyond all our dreams? Aye, why not? We answer, there is no reason why not, if God does but cause His face to shine. Give us the shining of God's face; man's face may be covered with frowns, and his heart may be black with malice, but if the Lord our God doth shine, it is enough.

"If He makes bare His arm,
Who can His cause withstand?
When He His people's cause defends,
Who, who can stay His hand?"

It is His good hand with us we want. I do think there is an opportunity for the display of God's hand at this particular era, such as has not been for many years before; certainly, if He doeth anything, the crown must be put on His head, and on His head alone. We are a feeble people: what shall we do? But if He doeth anything, He shall have the crown and the diadem entirely to Himself. Oh that He would do it! Oh that He would honour Himself! Oh that He would turn unto us that we might turn unto Him, and that His face may shine! Children of God, I need not enlarge on the meaning of this. You know what the shining of God's face means; you know it means a clear light of knowledge, a warming light of comfort, a living light poured into the darkness of your soul, an honourable light, which shall make you appear like Moses, when he came from the mountain—so bright, that men will scarce dare to look upon you. "Cause Thy face to shine." Shall we not make this our prayer, dearly beloved? Have I one of my brethren in the faith, who will not this day go home to cry out aloud unto his God, "Cause Thy face to shine"? A black cloud has swept over us, all we want is that the sun should come, and it shall sweep that cloud away, There have been direful things; but what of them, if God, our God, shall appear? Let this be our cry, "Cause Thy face to shine." Beloved, let us give no rest unto our God, until He hears this our prayer, "Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

III. Come, now, let me stir you all up, all of you who love the Saviour, to seek after this revival. Some of you, perhaps, are now resolving in your hearts that you will at once, when you reach your homes, prostrate yourselves before your God, and cry out to Him that He would bless His Church; and oh! do so I beseech you. It is common with us under a sermon to resolve, though after the sermon we are slow to perform. You have often said, when you left the house of God, "I will carry out that injunction of my pastor, and will be much in prayer." You thought to do it so soon as you arrived at home, but you did not, and so there was an untimely end of the matter—it accomplished not what was designed. But this time, I beseech you, while you resolve be resolute. Instead of saying within yourselves, "Now I will devote myself more to God, and seek to honour Him more," anticipate the resolution by the result. Ye can do more in the strength of God than ye can think or propose to yourselves in the utmost might of man. Resolves may pacify the conscience very frequently for a while, without really benefitting it. You say you will do it; conscience therefore does not reproach you with a disobedience to the command; but ye do it not after all, and so the effect has passed away. Let any holy and pious resolution you now form be this instant turned into prayer. Instead of saying, "I will do it," put up the prayer, "Lord enable me to do it; Lord, grant me grace to do it." One prayer is worth ten thousand resolutions. Pray to God that you, as a soldier of the cross, may never disgrace the banner under which you fight. Ask of Him that you may not be like the children of Ephraim, who turned back in the day of battle, but that you may stand fast in all weathers, even as good old Jacob, when "in the day the drought consumed him and

the frost by night,"—so may you serve that God who has called you with so high a calling. Perhaps others of you think there is no need of a revival, that your own hearts are quite good enough; I hope but few of you think so. But if thou dost think so my hearer, I warn thee. Thou fanciest thou art right, and therein thou dost prove that thou art wrong. He who says within himself, "I am rich and increased with goods," let him know that he is "poor, and naked and miserable." He who says he needs no revival knoweth not what he says. Beloved, you shall find that those who are noted as best among God's people need to write themselves the worst; and those who fancy all goes well in their hearts oft-times little know that an under-current of evil is really bearing them away as with a tide where they would not wish to go, whilst they fancy they are going on to peace and prosperity.

O! beloved, carry into effect the advice I have just given. I know I have spoken feebly. It is the best I can do just now, I have only stirred you up by way of remembrance. Think not my desires are as feeble as my words; imagine not that my anxiety for you is or can be represented by my speech. Ask, I beseech you, ask of God, that to every one of you brethren and sisters, the simple exhortation of one who loves you as his own soul, may be blessed. God is my witness, beloved, that for Him I seek to live: no other motive have I in this world, God knoweth, but His glory. Therefore do I bid and exhort you, knowing that you love the same God, and seek to serve the same Christ, do not now, in this hour of peril, give the least cause to the enemy to blaspheme. Oh! in the bowels of Christ, I entreat you for His sake who hung upon the tree, and who is now exalted in heaven by His bloody sacrifice offered for your redemption, by the everlasting love of God, whereby you are kept, I exhort, I beseech, I entreat you, as your brother in Christ Jesus, and such an one as your pastor, be in nothing moved by your adversaries. "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, when they shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for our Saviour's sake." But do ask that your life and conversation may be an honour to your Lord and Master; in nothing give occasion for the enemy to malign our sacred cause; in everything may your course be "like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

But O! ye who come here and approve the truth with your judgment but yet have never felt its power in your hearts or its influence in your lives, for you we sigh and groan; for your sake I have stirred up the saints among us to pray. Oh how many of you there are that have been pricked in your consciences and hearts many a time. Ye have wept, aye, and have so wept that you have thought with yourselves "Never souls wept as we have done!" But ye have gone back again. After all the solemn warnings ye have heard, and after all the wooings of Calvary, ye have gone back again to your sins. Sinner! thou who heedest little for thyself, just hear how much we think of thee. Little dost thou know how much we groan over thy soul. Man! thou thinkest thy soul nothing; yet morning, noon, and night, we are groaning over that precious immortal thing which thou despisest. Thou thinkest it little to lose thy soul, to perish, or mayhap to be damned. Dost thou account us fools that we should cry over thee? Dost thou suppose we are bereft of reason, that we should think thy soul of so much concern, whilst thou hast so little concern for it? Here are God's people; they are crying after thy soul; they are labouring with God to save thee. Dost thou think so little of it thyself, that thou wouldst fool away thy soul for a paltry pleasure, or wouldst procrastinate thy soul's welfare beyond the limited domain of hope; O! sinner, sinner, if thou lovest thyself, I beseech thee, pause and think that what God's people love must be worth something; that what we labour for, and strive for, must be worth something; that what was reckoned worth a ransom so priceless as Jesus paid must have its sterling value in the sight of heaven. Do, I beseech thee, pause? think of the value of thy soul; think how dreadful it will be if it is lost; think of the extent of eternity; think of thine own frailty; bethink thee of thine own sin, and of thy deserving. May God give thee grace to forsake thy wicked ways, turn unto Him and live; for He "hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but rather that he should turn unto Him and live!" Therefore, saith He, "Turn thee, turn thee, why wilt thou die?"

And now, oh Lord God of Hosts, hear our ardent appeal to Thy throne. "Turn us again." Lighten our path with the guidance of Thine eye; cheer our hearts with the smiles of Thy face. O God of armies, let every regiment and rank of Thy militant Church be of perfect heart, undivided in Thy service. Let great grace rest upon all Thy children. Let great fear come upon all the people. Let many reluctant hearts be turned to the Lord. Let there now be times of refreshing from Thy presence. To Thine own name shall be all the glory, "O Thou that are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey!"

OPENING THE MOUTH

"Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."—Psalm lxxxi. 10.

SOME have considered that our text contains an allusion to a singular custom of showing favour which has been occasionally adopted by eastern monarchs. It is not a very long time ago that a former Shah of Persia bade an ambassador, who was in great favour with him, open his mouth, and when he had done so the monarch filled it with pearls and gems of great value, which of course were a present to him. This certainly affords an illustration of the text, even if the passage contains no allusion to it. If we will but open the mouth of our desire, God will give to us mercies infinitely more precious than the rarest gems. I warrant you that if any emperor or king should bid us open our mouths that we might have them filled with diamonds, we should be very sure to extend them to their largest possible capacity,

and hence this custom may serve as a good enforcement of the text. Open thy mouth wide, for God will not fill it with secondary things, but will satisfy thee with divine mercies of exceeding preciousness.

I think, however, that the illustration which we have mentioned is far fetched, and I seldom like an explanation of a passage of Scripture which demands the introduction of a very rare incident. Illustrations are used in Scripture not to perplex us, but to render the teaching more clear. We will therefore look to some commoner act of eastern life for the explanatory allusion. Those who have been at the tables of the Orientals know that there is another very common custom which meets the case. The host, when you are at supper, will take the fattest portions of the lamb, if that happens to be the viand, and he will apportion them to you. He may even take up the fattest and choicest morsels in his hand, and, asking you to open your mouth, he will place them in it. This is a common practice of the country, and lies at the bottom of many a Scriptural expression. "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles"; "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips"; and a great many other texts which I might quote, all allude to that custom. A man greatly beloved would be asked to open his mouth wide that he might receive a very large portion of the dainties before him.

I confess, however, that I am not much enamoured with even this simile. I believe it to be a valuable side light, but I had rather, after all, look to nature for an illustration than dwell upon a custom which is purely oriental, and is hardly relished by our western delicacy. Come with me, then, to the woods, where the songsters of the grove have built their habitations. Look at the little birds in the nest: for there you have the text. They are newly-hatched, and unable to feed themselves, and therefore they are wholly dependent upon the parent birds. When I have peeped into their abode they seemed to me to be all mouth and beak, with but faint trace of wing. If you put out your finger, or dangle a worm near them, no feature strikes you but those gaping ravenous mouths! When the mother-bird brings food she never has to ask the little ones to open their mouths wide; her only difficulty is to fill the great width which they are quite sure to present to her: appetite and eagerness are never lacking, they are utterly insatiable. If you want my text before your eye in living realisation, only picture a nest of little birds reaching up their mouths, and all opening them as wide as they can. Instead of the poor little mother-bird that has been hard at work to gather a scanty portion for one of them, you have an infinite God filling all open mouths, and bidding them open again, for He is able to fill them however many they may be, or however vast their needs. It is that great Lord of ours of whom it is written, "He shall cover thee with His feathers and under His wings shalt thou trust," who now speaks to us, as little birds, and says, "Open your mouths wide, for I will fill them." That is at any rate a pleasing illustration of the text, even if it be not the exact idea which was in the Psalmist's mind.

The text divides itself into *the exhortation* and *the promise.*

I. The exhortation is, "OPEN THY MOUTH WIDE."

How are we to do this? The precept relates to prayer, and desire, and the like; but there is here also an exhortation to *labour after a great sense of need.* For what makes a bird open its mouth wide but its hunger? The young ravens cry because they want food, and nobody will ever open his mouth wide for spiritual blessings until he has a very deep and solemn sense of his need before God. You sinners will never pray till you know you want something: why should you? All the prayers offered by people who have no wants are so much vain complimenting of God. If you have no sense of need how can you pray? Would you knock at the door of charity, and then tell the good man of the house that you require nothing of him? Is not that man an arrant trifler who rings the surgery bell, but tells the surgeon that he has nothing the matter with him, and does not need his care. Prayers that are not based upon a sense of need are mockeries.

And I say this to Christians too. You never pray, brethren, except when you are in need; and rest assured when you think you have no more needs, you have lost the strongest motive for prayer and the main element of power in it. You may feel at times that there is little to request on your own account, and you may rejoice that the Lord has filled you to the full for the time being; but then there are the needs of the Church and of the world, and these should press upon your heart as if they were your own. You cannot pray without a sense of need, it is out of the question. The man who comes to you begging because he has not a night's lodging, or has not broken his fast all day, how well he begs; you do not need to send him to school to learn the art of mendicancy, his hungry belly makes him eloquent: and so when a man feels he must have heavenly blessings or be lost; or when he feels that being saved he must still be kept by daily grace, or else he will start aside; or when he feels that his work of faith and labour of love will be good for nothing without the divine blessing, or when he feels that the Church must have the anointing of the Holy One, and that the world needs a visitation from God:—when any of these needs solemnly weigh upon his soul, then it is that he prays. The man does not open his mouth wide till he is conscious of a great want, which only the Lord Himself can supply. I exhort you, therefore, dear brethren, to shake off the idea of being rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing, for this proud notion will strangle prayer. You are weakness itself, and emptiness itself, and a mass of sin and misery, apart from God your Father, and Christ your Redeemer, and the Spirit the Indweller; and when you know this, then you will open your mouth wide. Airy notions about having reached a higher life, and being perfect, will make fine gentlemen of you, but will spoil you for being beggars at the mercy-seat. The mouth of dire necessity God always fills, but pride has short commons, for is it not one of the proverbs of His kingdom, "He hath filled the hungry with good, things; but the rich He hath sent empty away?"

Then, dear friends, next *seek after an intense and vehement desire,* for the mouth is opened wide only when the desire becomes intense. You know how David says, "I opened my mouth and panted." You have seen a dog after a long run; how he stands with opened mouth panting for life and breath. Oh, that we had desires after God and divine things strong enough to make us thus open our mouth and

pant! We may never have seen a stag *in extremis*, but I dare say David had. He had seen it in the fierce hunt, when it longed to lave its smoking sides in the water brooks and to drink long draughts, and he said, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." Nothing puts such energy into prayer as intense anguish of desire. Desire comes out of a sense of want; and in proportion as the necessity is overwhelming, the fervency of the desire will be vehement. My brethren, we have not, because, although we ask we use a kind of asking which is as though we asked not. An old Puritan says, "He that prays to God without fervour asks to be denied." There is a way of asking for a thing in which the person to whom the request is made finds it very easy to decline the request, but persons in dire necessity understand how to put the case, so that only a very hard-hearted person could say "no." They know how to place their petition in such a way that the request wins, not merely because of the rightness of the petition, but also because of the very style in which it is put. We must learn how to pray with strong crying and tears, for there are mercies which cannot be gained by any other mode of supplicating. Did you ever try your little child by holding fast in your hand something that he wanted? You wished to see whether he had perseverance enough to pull open your fingers one by one to get what he wished for; and you have shut your hand very tight, and tried his endeavours so long that at last you have seen the big round tear stand in his eye, and then you have held out no longer. The tear opens the hand. I believe that our heavenly Father exercises us in that manner at times until He gets us right down to this—that we *must* have it, and we shall die if we do not have it, because it is for His glory, and we have His promise for it. When we come to that point we are where the Lord meant us to be, and having brought us there He gives us our desire, having already doubled the blessing by stirring us up to vehemency. Open thy mouth wide man! Do not play at praying. Nobody is saved between sleeping and waking, and nobody wins rich blessings by being lukewarm. I have heard mothers say of a child that "he cried all over," and that is the right way to pray. Let your whole man wrestle with the Most High. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Deep necessity and urgent desire are two great openers of the mouth in prayer.

To my mind the pith of the text may be compressed into such words as these—*Ask for large things.* Do not restrict your requests and pray with bated breath, but plead with the great God for great things, such as it will be to His glory to bestow. In this point we too often fail. I remember praying before I preached in a certain provincial town, and asking the Lord that He would enable at least one poor soul to lay hold on Christ. I went home to tea with a very worthy brother, and a fine old Christian gentleman at the tea-table said to me very kindly, "I do not know what you did with your faith this afternoon when you were praying, for you asked the Lord to give you one soul, and the sermon was such that I saw no reason why it should not be blessed to a thousand. I could not say 'Amen' to such a very narrow prayer as that. Why," said he, "Man alive! with such a gospel as you were preaching, and such a crowd of people, you might as well have asked for a thousand souls as one." I thought so too, and confessed the poverty of my prayer. Brethren, many of us have made great mistakes, and have shut ourselves up in the cells of poverty when our feet might have stood in a large room. We have laid down pipes too small to bring us a full current of blessing. We have half killed our prayers by tight-lacing them, even as foolish mothers kill their daughters. Our cup is small, and we blame the fountain. The Israelites, according to this psalm, did not believe in God as they should; they did not expect their enemies to be driven out, nor hope to be fed with the finest of the wheat. They thought their God was a commonplace God, like the gods of Egypt. They did not know what a rich, generous, great-hearted, large-giving God He is, and so they failed in asking, and therefore they did not obtain the richest boons of grace. Christians should elevate the scale of their praying and enlarge their requests, and never let it be said that they lose blessings solely by failing to ask for them.

Dear brethren and sisters, we may well ask great things, for we are asking of *a great God*, who fills immensity, who has all power, who has all blessings in His stores. If we were to ask Him for a world, it is no more for Him to bestow a world than it would be for us to give away a crumb. When the poor widow gave her two mites she gave her all, and knowing her poverty one would ask very little of her, and expect even less; but when you ask of a king you do not expect two mites from him. That poor woman who said "Truth, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the Master's table," was far nearer the mark than most of us, for much as she valued the inestimable blessing which she sought, she reckoned it as being nothing more than a crumb as it came from God. The greatest blessings which can yet be received through Jesus Christ, though we cannot prize them enough, and they are beyond all calculation precious, are little in comparison with the unspeakable gift of His Son, which has already been bestowed. Open your mouth wide, for wide are the supplies of love, and boundless the riches of the sovereign grace of so great a God.

Besides His greatness, remember His *goodness.* The good Lord delights to give, it does not diminish His possessions, but affords Him satisfaction. The sun is just as bright, notwithstanding all his shining, as if he had stored up his light. It is the sun's nature to shine, and it may as well shine upon us as anywhere else; and it is God's delight to distribute His goodness and bless His creatures, and therefore we may well ask large things from One whose very nature it is to scatter His fulness among the poor and needy. Remember, dear brethren and sisters, what He has already done for us. "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee up out of Egypt," says He, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." See what He has done. Is it a trifle to have had all your sins forgiven, to have received a new heart and a right spirit, to have been saved by the precious blood of His dear Son? If we made our prayers to scale, if they were proportioned to the measure of God's past favours, what great prayers they would be! I love a gospel on a grand scale. I cannot bear to see anything about it lowered, or cut down, not even the terrors of it. I am certain that those who make out the punishment of the wicked to be upon a smaller scale must, ere long, diminish the glory of the atonement, and bring down their conceptions of God Himself, for they are all proportioned: but you and I,

who see everything to be grand, vast, infinite, ought to open our mouths wide, to keep our praying somewhat proportionate to the condition of things around us.

Remember, beloved brethren and sisters, what *great pleas* you have to urge when you come before God. Your main argument is the gift of His dear Son. Now, if you pray according to that plea, you will have this consideration to support you—"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things"? What a word is that—"*all* things!" Your prayers cannot outrun those comprehensive words—"*all things.*" Should you not open wide your mouth? Would you employ before God the magnificent plea of the atoning blood, and then come down to ask for pence and halfpence, when you might as well have countless riches? Will you ask for enough grace to keep you out of hell, when you might have grace enough to make you habitually reside in the suburbs of heaven? Will you ask to be useful to two or three, when you might with the same plea prevail to be a spiritual benefactor to hundreds and thousands? He deserves to be poor who has no desire to be rich, and will not even take the trouble to ask for wealth. He who will not so much as open his mouth must expect no pity should he starve. O, beloved, do not pinch yourselves, but ask the largest conceivable boons. Spread your most capacious net, for the multitude of fish will fill it; dig the deepest pools, for the rain will brim them; bring forth all your empty vessels, for the oil shall be multiplied till all are overflowing.

Beloved, let us ask *great things for ourselves.* I do not mean let us ask great temporal blessings: we may leave everything of that kind with God, and this is the limit He puts to such prayer:—"Give us day by day our daily bread." Having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But as for spiritual things, ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. Here the treasury has neither lock nor key. The lid is taken off from the casket; help yourself, and if you are straitened you are not straitened in God, you are straitened in your own bowels. I beseech you, young Christians, do not be satisfied with getting as much grace as the people you live with, who profess to be Christians; for there are hosts of them that I would not like to risk my soul with. I am not their judge, but *I think, I think* it will be an extraordinary thing if they get into heaven. I know some very loud-mouthed talkers whose actions are not pretty at all, and the less said about them the better. I mean some professors when I speak thus. Members of churches, I mean. Now, do not you young people make them your standard: get far beyond them. Outstrip the ordinary run of Christians, who are *consistent,* and no more. I would urge you to seek far higher things than they possess. They are said to be "consistent," though I do not know what they are consistent with. They do nothing that is grossly wrong, and they are good, ordinary, respectable people, but as to joy in the Lord, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, and real faith—daring faith, and love, and zeal for God's glory, and agony for the conversion of souls, why, large numbers of very consistent people know nothing about these things except when they read about them in the Bible. Surely their condition is more consistent with membership in Laodicea than in the New Jerusalem; their consistency is not consistency with the divine will, but a miserable consistency with their own dead-and-alive profession. O, you that are beginners in the divine life, I pray you be not as your fathers. Do not take any of us for a standard. We are a good-for-nothing generation, taking us all round, and there had need be a far better race springing up, that shall really believe and act upon their faith, and so live unto God with an intenser, stronger, mightier life than most of us have ever realised. Open thy mouth wide, young Christian, for a large measure of the Holy Spirit, and for a mighty fulness of the life of God, that it may be in thee a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.

Open your mouths wide, dear friends, and ask *great things for the Church.* The Church of God, I hope, is in a better condition than she was some years ago, but we have not yet learned what it is to believe in great works being done for God. There are still churches which if they were to have half-a-dozen added to them in a year, would be intensely satisfied, if not overjoyed, instead of calling for prayer and fasting and humiliation because so few are brought to Christ. There are church members around us who do not believe in many people being converted at once. If the gospel were preached so that a dozen were brought in at one time, they would impute it to undue excitement, and doubt its being the work of the Spirit of God, though we have the New Testament, and the Acts of the Apostles especially, to lead us to expect such things. There are churches, to which if God were to send a hundred converts at once, they would not receive them, but would put them through a rigid quarantine; and you may be sure our heavenly Father will not send His new-born babes to places where they will not be cheerfully admitted. There are certain churches whose modes of testing and trying are such that the young lambs would be torn to bits before they would get into the green pastures, and there would hardly be two legs and a piece of an ear left after they had passed the examination: the Good Shepherd will not send His lambs where such a tribe of wolves stand gaping for prey. Pray for the Church that she may have greater faith in her God, greater belief in the gospel which she preaches greater closeness of walk with Jesus, greater care to obey her Master's precepts; and then you may open your mouth wide and expect to see the kingdom of Christ more fully come.

Open thy mouth for *this great city.* Who can think what a city we live in without desiring to be mighty in prayer for it? At this moment Scotland is a land where religion has mighty influence, and I trace it mainly to the prayers of John Knox. His mighty pleadings with God anchored Scotland to the gospel, and she cannot get away from it. We have urgent need to pray for England in these evil times. Many are preying *upon* her, we had need to pray *for* her. The darkness thickens; amongst the learned it has blackened into Egyptian night, and among the illiterate it is as the valley of the shadow of death. Scepticism is descending upon us like a horrible mist, chilling faith even to the very marrow of her bones; and superstition like a feverish miasma pollutes the air. We have need to cry to the Lord to do some great work in these days—to smite His enemies upon the cheek-bone, and to send forth His power among His friends.

I think I have explained sufficiently that the text means, ask great things; but one more remark I must offer, and that is that many of us have need to

ask for enlarged capacities. It would be of no use to open your mouth if you could not swallow what was put into it, or if you could not digest it after you had swallowed it; and there are many precious truths of the gospel which uninstructed believers could not digest if they knew them, and therefore there is great need that their minds should be strengthened and fitted to feed upon strong meat. The grand truths of the covenant, the doctrines of election and predestination, the glorious facts of the immutable love of God, and the indissoluble union of the saints with Christ, and their consequent everlasting safety,—all these are sublime matters which cannot be appreciated by every novice, but require a spiritually educated mind to enjoy them. Thousands of professors sneer at these eternal verities because they have not the spiritual digestion which could assimilate such grand soul-feeding meat. They remind me of little, conceited boys affecting to despise the diet of men because they themselves have no taste except for sugar-plums and sponge cakes. There are many mercies which persons ask for, and if God were to bestow them they would not know what to do with them: it would be like giving them a white elephant; they would not know where or how to keep it. Yonder brother asks for more talent, and yet he does not use what he has already. Another brother begs the Lord to make him successful in his work, but he would be top-heavy, and proud, and exalted above measure if he were favoured with a little success. One man craves that he may know, but his knowledge would puff him up; another prays that he may feel, but his feelings would drown his faith. If we had more room for the Lord's gifts we should receive more. I have half a mind to exhort you to imitate the rich fool, and pull down your barns and build greater. He was a fool because he meant to gather a store of wheat and grain of the earth, but if you can build greater barns to hold the precious grace which comes from heaven you will be wise indeed. God will not give you what you cannot receive or put to healthy use. But, oh, pray to Him, "Lord, enlarge my heart, expand my soul, and give me a nobler mind, more free from selfishness, less cramped with ideas of my own consequence; make me less important, more loving, more careful for the souls of others, more ambitious for Thy glory, more intensely consecrated to Thy word and will." While self hoards up its treasures there is no room for divine things, and the surest way for our enlargement is to turn out the vile stuff. Tobiah's furniture is in the chamber of the house of the Lord, and out it must go, and then there will be room for the treasure which the Master bestows.

II. The second head is the promise. "Open thy mouth wide, AND I WILL FILL IT."

You might expect such a promise as that. You could not think it possible for the Lord to say, "Open your mouths for nothing." It would not be according to His usual way of procedure. He does not set His servants praying and then say somewhere behind their backs, "they shall seek My face in vain." Tantalus belongs to the heathen mythology, not to the Christian's experience. "Open thy mouth wide, *and I will fill it.*"

I gather from this promise, first, that *it is a promise only made to those who do open their mouths wide.* Some brethren never get their mouths filled because they never open them to any extent. They ask for some little mercy, and they may get it, or may not; there is no promise about such shut-mouthed prayers, but if they had opened their mouths wide they would to a certainty have had the mouth-filling blessing. With the world it is, the less you ask for the more likely you will be to obtain it, but God's thoughts are not as our thoughts: with God the more you ask the more likely are you to be heard. Half open your mouth and it may or may not be filled, but "Open your mouth *wide*, and I *will* fill it." We always pray well and successfully when the Spirit of God enables us to stand on elevated ground, and plead on Godlike terms for blessings which for value, number, and greatness are worthy of the infinite bounty of Jehovah. We are then dealing with God as He loves to be dealt with, for He is a rich and great God, and loves to be approached with great prayers and great requests; and when we draw near in that fashion we shall be quite sure to succeed. I would encourage dear brethren and sisters who seem to have failed in their supplications to enquire whether they may not have failed because their requests were too little. God seems to say to His servant, "Thou hast not asked enough. Come, man, thou art trifling with Me. Here is My mercy-seat; I am rich, infinitely rich, and willing to give thee according to thy desires, and thou art asking Me for mere odds and ends. Do not play with Me in this way. Ask for something which I can feel a pleasure in giving to you—something worthy of a God." "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Should not this thought greatly strengthen us when next we draw near to God in prayer?

Remember, too, that *this is a promise given by One who can fulfil it and will.* "Open thy mouth wide, and I *will* fill it" is a sort of challenge. "See whether you can ask for more than I can give you. Try whether your faith can outrun your God. See whether you can expect more of God than He will bestow. Take His promise and challenge Him, and see whether He will run back from it. He promises great things and unsearchable, let your soul's necessities impel you to ask for the greatest conceivable blessings, and see whether He will deny you. "Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, and see." Oh, if Israel had been in an experimenting mind what wonders would they have seen! How would the windows of heaven have been flung back, and infinite good have been showered down! But they were not in a praying mood. God encouraged them to ask by the favour with which He had surrounded them, for of old He had scattered manna about their habitations, and from the smitten rock He had drawn forth flowing streams. Thus He seemed to say to them, "Oh, Israel, see how you are surrounded with miracles. Heaven and earth are made subservient to you. Nothing is too hard for Me: I open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the deserts. Believe in Me, and act according to the scale upon which I am acting to you, and see whether I shall fail in anything." Even so the Lord puts it to you, dear brethren, and it is not an empty vaunt. He is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

Oh, what stories I could tell here of my own experience if it did not seem like egotism. When I read, as I continually do, slurs put upon our prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God, and find that it has become a current opinion that there really is no such

a thing as an answer to prayer I feel indignant. Why, sirs, I am as sure that God hears my prayers as I am certain that you hear me. To me the energy of prayer is as self-evident as the weight of a substance, or the force of a motive power. The law of gravitation I might doubt, but the law that God hears prayer I cannot doubt. The wonder to me is that men should stand up and assert that God does not hear prayer when they cannot be supposed to know everything, and dare not claim to have any very special acquaintance with prayer itself, such as to qualify them to calculate its results. Those who deny the efficacy of prayer never pray; nay, are not capable of offering prevalent prayer. Why do they speak so positively? What do they know about it? How dare they, as philosophers, speak dogmatically of that which they have never tried? I can say, and I do say it honestly, that hundreds of times, about all sorts of things, I have taken my case to God and have obtained the desire of my heart or something far better, and that not by mere coincidence, as these objectors assert, but in a manner palpably in reply to my pleadings. There are multitudes of brethren and sisters here who, from their own experience, can bear the same witness. Yet a fellow gets up who never tried prayer, and says it is of no avail. We find it hard to have patience with him. How does he know? He reminds me of the Irish prisoner who was brought up for murder and half-a-dozen people swore that they had seen him do the deed. "Your lordship," said he, "I could bring ten times as many that *didn't* see me do it." Yes, but that was no evidence at all; and in the same way these people have the impudence to set up their theory on no better grounds than the fact that they do not pray and God does not hear them. What is the good of such evidence? We knew He would not hear them if they did not pray. When He does hear simple men and women, guileless persons who, if they were put into the witness-box, would be reckoned to be the best witnesses a court could have, is their witness to go for nothing? And others of us, whose character, I trust, would bear us through any cross-examination,—are we to assert that God has answered our prayers, and be prepared to die to prove our sincerity, if need be, and yet be told that men who have not tried it, and say it is not so, are philosophers, and are to be believed sooner than we are? We may not be philosophers, but we are honest men, and have done nothing to make our testimony unreliable. It is easy to call us fools, but hard names prove nothing but the weakness of those who use them. Take Christians as a rule and they are not less sharp-witted than sceptics; indeed, even when they have been fanatical, they have seldom said or done such unwise things as sceptical philosophers have propounded and attempted to carry out. However, little matters it what the ungodly say, the foundation of God standeth sure. O, brethren, we will prove the power of prayer more than ever. If we have asked and had, we will ask more and we shall have more. If we have opened our mouths and God has filled them, we will open our mouths wider and obtain a larger blessing. The very best way to put to rout the falsehood of these philosophic atheists is more real prayer: facts are unanswerable.

Christian brethren, look at the promise again. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," and then answer the question—*how will the Lord fill our mouth?*

First, He will fill it with *prayers*. Do you ever feel as if you could not pray? Do not yield to the feeling, for then is the time to pray. When you cannot pray you *must* pray. Hold your empty mouth open before God, for the Holy Spirit to put the prayer into it. I have come away from attempting to pray, and felt I did not pray; and the next time I have knelt down I have been very fluent in prayer, and yet there was more real prayer in my groaning and sighing and heaving heart when I thought I failed, than there was in the fluency of the second occasion. Open thy mouth wide, dear brother, and God will fill it with petitions of an acceptable kind. The Holy Spirit will give you "groanings that cannot be uttered." No prayer excels that in which the creature feels as if it could not pray and did not pray, and yet the Creator Himself strives mightily within.

Then, open thy mouth wide, and He will fill it with *the actual blessings*. He will not merely put blessings into your hands, but He will fill your mouth with them. It is one thing to have the cup of blessing in your hand, and quite another thing to drink thereof. Many a man possesses what he never enjoys: the fruit on the tree is his own, but its sweet flavour never gladdens his mouth. When the Lord in love bestows a blessing He teaches us how to enjoy it. He gives us the essence of the meat, the soul of the solace, the juice of the vine, the heart of the joy, not merely the legal claim to it but the actual enjoyment of it. This is the cream of the cream, the mercy of the mercy, the filling of the mouth with the promised good.

The Lord will also fill our mouth with *praises*. Open thy mouth wide, and God will fill it with songs, with shouts, with gratitude which cannot be expressed in words. Some of us know what it means to have our mouths so full of God's praises all the day long that we have wanted all mankind and all the angels to help us magnify the Lord. Open your mouths wide, then, and God will fill them with prayer, with blessing, and with praise.

In conclusion, is there not very much of rebuke in this to most of us? Parents, have you prayed for the salvation of your children—vehemently and earnestly? All your children? Teachers in the classes, have you expected the conversion of all your children, and prayed for it? Preachers of the gospel, have you looked for many conversions and prayed for them? Brethren who labour for Christ, in any capacity, have you expected to see London converted to God, and looked for it and worked for it? In gospel fisheries we generally catch what we fish for; if we angle with a fly we may get one fish, but if we know how to use the great drag-net, by mighty faith we shall take one hundred and fifty and three great fishes, and for all that the net will not be broken. Open thy mouth wide, brother, and be rebuked to think thou hast not opened it wide before.

But is there not also a word here of consolation to the sinner? "Open thy mouth wide," saith God, even to thee, "and I will fill it." What do you want, sinner? "Well, I want a little comfort." Do not ask for it, brother. Ask for the Lord Jesus Christ at once. "Open thy mouth wide." "Oh, I want a little peace. I am so troubled." Do not ask for it, brother. Ask for a whole Christ and a perfect salvation now. "I want to feel some measure of impression under this sermon." Do not pray for it, brother. Ask God for a new heart and a right spirit outright, and now. "Open thy mouth wide." "Should I have it if I asked for it?" It is written, "He that asketh receiveth; he that seeketh findeth;

and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." If thou believest on the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt have this unspeakably great blessing of being immediately saved; for "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life." "Open thy mouth wide." "But I am such a sinner." Open thy mouth, man: the promise makes no limit as to who you are. "But I am—I am—." There, I mind not *what* you are. Open your mouth, man! Open your mouth wide. If we were to gather together in one place all the little waifs and strays of London streets, and were to say to them, "Children, we are going to give you a good dinner, and all you have to do is to open your mouths," I do not suppose one little hungry wretch would shut his mouth, or turn away muttering, "I am not fit." Oh dear, no! Be you quite sure that they would open their mouths if they were hungry, and would need no pressing either: and so will you too, if the Spirit of God has made you hunger and thirst after righteousness. Open your mouth wide; believing that Jesus is the Christ; trust your soul with Him, and ask now for immediate pardon through His precious blood, and you will not be denied. May the Holy Spirit make you hungry, and then your longing mouth shall be filled, and God shall have all the glory.

May His blessing rest upon you for Christ's sake.

SHAME LEADING TO SALVATION

"Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek Thy name, O Lord."—Psalm lxxxiii. 16.

THIS is a very terrible psalm. It contains some prayers against the enemies of God and of His people that crash with the thunder of indignation. You know that we are bidden to love our enemies, but we are never commanded to love God's enemies. We may not hate any men as men; but as they are opposed to God, to truth, to righteousness, to purity, we may, and we must, if we are ourselves right-minded, feel a burning indignation against them. Did you ever read the story of "the middle passage" in the days of the African slave trade, when the negroes died by hundreds, or were flung into the sea to lighten the ship? Did you ever read of those horrors without praying, "O God, let the thunderbolts of Thy wrath fall on the men who can perpetrate such enormities"? When you heard the story of the Bulgarian atrocities, did you not feel that you must, as it were, pluck God's sleeve, and say to Him, "Why does Thy justice linger? Let the monsters of iniquity be dealt with by Thee, O Lord, as they deserve to be."

Such is the spirit of this psalm. But I like best this particular verse in it because, while it breathes righteous indignation against the wicked, it has mixed with it the tender spirit of love. "Fill their faces with shame"; prays the Psalmist, "but overrule Thy severity for their everlasting good 'that they may seek Thy name, O Lord.'" The worst fate that I wish to any hearer of mine who is without God, and without hope in the world, is that this prayer may be prayed by honest and loving hearts for him and for others like him, "Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek Thy name, O Lord."

I. To begin with, let me remind you that UNGODLY MEN HAVE GOOD CAUSE TO BE ASHAMED.

Let us talk a little, first, of *their wrong to their Maker.* If I might take each one of you by the hand, I should say to you, "Friend, you believe in the existence of God, your Maker, do you not? Well, then, have you treated Him rightly? If you have lived in the world twenty years, or perhaps even forty or fifty years, and yet you have never served Him, do you think that is quite just to Him? If He made you, and has fed you, and kept you in being all these years, has He not a right to expect some service from you? I might go further, and say, has He not a right to expect your love? Does He ask more than He should ask when He says, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might'? Yet you have lived these many years, and scarcely thought of Him; certainly, you have not spoken to Him, you have never confessed your faults to Him, or sought His forgiveness. To all intents and purposes, you have lived as if there were no God at all. Yet, in your earthly affairs, you are a very honest man, and you pay everybody else his due; why do you, then, rob your God of what is justly His? There is not a man in the world who could say truly of you that you had dealt dishonourably with him. You pride yourself upon your uprightness and integrity; but must God alone, then, be made to suffer through your injustice? Out of all beings, must He alone who made all other beings be the only one to be neglected? He is first of all; do you put Him last? He is best of all; do you treat Him worst? If so, I think that such conduct as this is a thing to be ashamed of, and I pray that you may be heartily ashamed of it."

Let me quit that line of thought, and remind you, next, that there are many ungodly men, and I suppose some here present, who ought to be ashamed because they are acting *in opposition to light and knowledge, contrary to their conscience, and against their better judgments.* There are many unconverted men who can never look back upon any day of their lives without having to accuse themselves of wrong; and although they are not Christians, they would scarcely attempt to justify their position; when they act wrongly, there is a voice within them which tells them that they are doing wrong. They are not blind; they could see if they chose to see. They are not deaf, except that there are none so deaf as those who will not hear. It is a horrible thing for a man to be always holding down his conscience, like a policeman holding down a mad dog. It is a terrible thing for a man to have to be at war with himself in order to destroy himself; his better self resisting, and struggling, as it were, after salvation, but his worse self thrusting back the higher part of his being, stifling his conscience, and drowning the cries of any

approach to betterness that may be within him. God forbid that men should act thus, and sin against light and knowledge! I venture very quietly, but very solemnly, to tell any who are doing so that they ought to be ashamed of such conduct, they ought to blush at the very thought of acting thus against such light as they have, and against the convictions of their own conscience.

There are some also of my hearers—I speak very positively upon this point,—who ought to be ashamed because of *their postponements of what they know to be right.* They have again and again put off the observance of duties which they know and admit to be incumbent upon them. "I ought to repent of sin," says one; and then he adds, "and I will one of these days." "I ought to be a believer in Christ,"—he admits that,—"and I shall be, I hope, before I die." Oh, how fairly you talk, Mr. Procrastinator! You know what ought to be done at once, but you leave it all for the future. Do you not know that, every time a man neglects a duty, he commits a sin? That which you admit is your duty, causes you, every moment it is delayed, to commit sin by the delay; and by delay obedience becomes more difficult, and you yourself become continually more likely to commit yet greater sin. I do think that a man who says, "I ought to believe in Christ, I ought to repent of sin, I ought to love God," and yet says, "Well, I will do so at a more convenient season," ought to be ashamed of himself for talking and acting in such a wicked fashion; I pray God that he may be.

I shall come more pointedly home to some when I say that they ought to be ashamed because of *their violation of vows which they have made.* You were very ill, a little while ago, and you said, "O God, if Thou wilt spare my life, and restore me to health and strength, I will rise from this bed to be a better man!" God did raise you up, but you are not a better man. You were seriously injured in an accident and likely to die, and in your distress you prayed, "O God, if Thou wilt prolong my unworthy life, I will turn over a new leaf; I will be a very different man in future!" Well, you *are* a different man, for you are worse than you used to be before the accident; that is all the change that has been wrought in you. God keeps a register of the vows that are so lightly broken here below, but so well remembered up in heaven, and the day will come when they shall be brought out to the condemnation of those who made them, and then failed to keep them. If thou art determined to be a liar, lie not unto God. If thou art resolved to make promises, only to break them, at least trifle not with Him in whose hand thy life is, and whose are all thy ways. He who must play the fool, had better do it with some fellow-fool, and not parade his folly before "Him that rideth upon the heavens by His name JAH." Think then, dear friends, of vows violated, and blush because of them.

Moreover, it seems to me—and I shall leave it to your judgment to consider and approve what I say,—that every man ought to be ashamed of not loving the Lord Jesus Christ, and *not trusting such a Saviour as the Lord Jesus Christ is.* God in human flesh, bleeding, dying, bearing the penalty of human sin, and then presenting Himself freely as our Sacrifice, and saying that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life; do you push *Him* away from you? Will you trample on His blood, and count it an unholy thing? Will you despise His cross? It sometimes seems to me that blasphemy and adultery and murder—tremendous evils though these be,—scarcely reach the height of guilt that comes through refusing the great love of Christ, thrusting Him aside whom God took from His bosom, and gave up to die that men might live through Him. If you must spite anybody, spite anybody but the Christ of God. If you mean to refuse a friend, refuse any friend but the bleeding Saviour, who spared not His very life, but poured out the floods from His heart that He might save the guilty.

So, you see, dear friends, that he who loves not Christ, and trusts not Christ, has good cause to be ashamed.

I will not say any more upon this first point, except just one thing; that is, *a man ought to be ashamed who will not even think of these things.* There are great numbers of our fellow-citizens in London, and our fellow-creatures all the world over, who have resolved not to think about religion at all. There stands the house of God, but in that same street there is hardly one person who ever enters it. There is a Bible in almost every house, but many, nowadays, will not read it, or try to understand it. I should have thought that common and idle curiosity alone might have made men anxious to understand the Christian religion, the way of salvation by a crucified Saviour. I should have fancied that they would have strayed in to see what our worship was like; if it had been the worship of Mumbo Jumbo, they would have wanted to see *that,* but when it is the worship of the Lord God Almighty, and of His Son Jesus Christ, the multitudes seem to be utterly indifferent to it. From the cross I hear my dying Master cry, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow." Even the voice of His gaping wounds, and the voice of His bloody sweat, and the voice of His broken heart seem to fall upon hearts that will not listen, and upon ears that are as deaf as stones. Many who come to hear the gospel go their way to their farms and to their merchandise, but they care nothing for Him who is worth more than all beside. O sirs, in that day when this solid earth shall rock and reel, when the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, when the stars shall fall like the leaves of autumn, and when there shall sail into the sky, conspicuous to the gaze of all, the great white throne, and on it shall sit the despised Redeemer, you will repent then, and regret when it is too late that you gave Him none of your thoughts, but put the affairs of religion wholly on one side! Investigate this matter, I charge you. By what your immortal souls are worth, by an eternal heaven and an endless hell,—and there are both of these, despite what some say,—I charge you, as I shall meet you at the judgment seat, and would be clear of your blood, do give earnest attention to the things that make for your peace, and consider the claims of God and of His Christ, and seek to find the way of salvation by faith in Jesus.

Thus, surely, I have said enough upon this first point; ungodly men have good cause to be ashamed.

II. Now, secondly, concerning these ungodly people, let me show you that SHAME IS A VERY DESIRABLE THING IF IT DRIVES THEM TO GOD. Hence the prayer, "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Thy name, O Lord."

I have known shame to drive men to God in various ways. Sometimes, shame attends *the breaking up of self-righteousness.* I knew a young fellow, who had been a very upright moral man all his days. He seemed to think that he should go to heaven by his own good works; but he had no notion of a Saviour, and no regard for the things of Christ. One day, being in the workshop, he upset an oil can; and as the master was rather a bad-tempered man, he enquired sharply who had wasted the oil; and this man, who had always till then been truthful, on this occasion told a lie, and said that he did not upset the can. Nobody found him out, mark you; he was so highly respected that his employer fully believed that he had not done it; but he went down greatly in his own esteem. He said to me, "Sir, my righteousness went all to pieces in a moment. I knew that I had told a lie; I felt disgusted with myself, and when I got out of the shop, for the first time in my life I cried to God for mercy, for I saw myself to be a sinner." Now I do not wish any of you to commit further sin, in order that you may realise your true condition in God's sight. You have done enough evil already, without doing any more; but I should like some one of these sins to come so sharply home to you, that it would make you feel ashamed, and give up all pretence of self-righteousness, and just come by faith to Christ, and take His righteousness to be your perfect covering before God.

I have known this shame to operate in some when they have done wrong, and have *lost the repute they enjoyed among their fellow-creatures.* They have been found out in doing wrong, and, sad as it was to them, yet when they felt that they could no longer come to the front, and lead as they used to do, when they knew that they must get somewhere in the rear rank, and that, if their true character became known, people would shun them, then it was that, like the prodigal son, they said, "I will arise, and go to my Father." There is many a man who stands high in popular esteem, but who is never likely to be saved, for he is too proud and self-conceited ever to seek the Saviour. But there have been some others who, for a grave fault, have had all their glory trailed in the mire, and then they have sought the face of Christ. I scarcely care how or why they do seek that blessed face, so long as they find it, and are saved.

There are two instances, then, in which shame drives men to God: first, when a man has lost his own good opinion of himself, and next, when he has lost the good opinion of others. Filled with shame, he has often fled to Christ.

So have I seen it in the case of *failure driving a man to the Strong for strength.* There is a young man who has come lately from the country; he knew the temptations of London, but he said to his father and mother, "You will never hear of your son John doing such things." Ah, John! they have not heard of it yet, but you have done a great many evil things by now, and you ought to be ashamed. If your father finds it out, as likely enough he will, you will be ashamed; but, seeing that you have found yourself out, I wish that you would be ashamed before the Lord now. O that virtuous John, that excellent youth, that dear young man! You were just going to join the church, were you not? Where were you last night? Ah, not drinking of the communion cup, I will warrant you! Where are you now? O John, if you could have seen yourself, six months ago, to be what you now are, you would not have held your head so high when you came away from your native town! But your failure, that wretched broken back of yours, with which you meant to stand so bolt upright, should all help to drive you to God, your father's God and your mother's God. My dear friend, I pray you seek the face of the Most High, and begin again; for, John, though you cannot stand by yourself, God can make you to stand. With a new heart and a right spirit, you can do a deal better than you have done in the past in your own strength, which is utter weakness. I have known a teetotaller, who has felt himself quite safe because he wore a blue ribbon, to become a drunkard, notwithstanding that very desirable badge. If that is your case, my brother, when you are ashamed of yourself on that account, as well you may be, go to the Lord for a new heart and a right spirit, and then begin again, that you may truly be what you aspire to be, an example to others. So, you see, that shame in such a case of failure as I have described, may bring a man to Christ.

I have also known men brought to Christ with shame of another sort, *shame of mental error leading to a humble faith.* A young gentleman felt that he had heard the old-fashioned gospel long enough, and he should like to go and hear the new gospel. More light is said to have broken out of late; I can only tell you that it comes from some very dark places, and I do not think there is much light in it. But this gentleman thought that he must know about this new light, and he has kept going further and further, and the new light has led him, like the will-o'-the-wisp does, into all sorts of boggy places; and now he begins to feel that he can do a great many things which once he dared not do, until suddenly the thought occurs to him, "Where have I got to now?" He has become an unbeliever altogether; he who was once almost persuaded to be a Christian has run into very wild ways, and nothing is sure with him; it is all rocking to and fro before him, like the waves of the sea, and there is nothing solid left. Ah! now you begin to be ashamed, do you? You are not, after all, so full of wisdom as you thought you were. Come back, then; come back, and believe the old Book, and trust the Saviour who has brought so many to the eternal kingdom. Believe His words, follow in His track, and this very shame on account of your fancied intellectual prowess, which has turned out to be sheer folly, will bind you in future to the simple cross of Christ, and you will never go away from it again.

I want to suggest one thing more before I leave this part of my subject. In this congregation there must be a good many men and women who might do well to look back upon *the utter uselessness of their past lives.* As I looked along these galleries, at the immense preponderence of men in the congregation, which is so usual with us, I thought, "What a number there must be here who, if they threw the weight of their influence in with us, and sought to do good to others, would be immensely valuable to the Church of God!" But are there not many, perhaps even professing Christianity, who, in looking back upon their past lives, will be obliged to say that they have done nothing? What did *you* ever accomplish, dear friends? There was a lady, who had a large sum of money in her possession, much more than sufficient for her needs; she was a Christian

woman, living a quiet, comfortable life by the seaside. One night, as she walked up and down the beach, she said to herself, "What have I ever done for Him who died for me? If I were to die now, would anybody miss me? When my life is finished, shall I have accomplished anything?" She felt that she had done nothing; so she went home, and ruminated upon what she could do. She began to live very hard that she might save all she could, and she accumulated quite a large amount, for she had an object to live for. The Orphanage at Stockwell is the outcome of that good woman's thought at the seaside; she consecrated her substance to the starting of a home where boys and girls, whose fathers were dead, might be housed. I cannot but think of her, and then say to myself, "Are there not many ladies, many gentlemen, many men, many women, who might walk up and down, and say, 'Well, now, when I die, who will miss me?'" I believe that there are numbers of people who call themselves Christians, who might be tied hand and foot, and flung into the Atlantic, and nobody would miss them beyond the two or three members of their own families. They do nothing; they are living for nothing. "Oh, but!" they say, "we are accumulating money." Yes, yes; that is like a jackdaw hiding rubbish behind the door, putting away everything he can get. Poor jackdaw! That is what you are doing, nothing more. To get money is well enough, if you get it that you may use it well; and to learn is right enough, if you learn with the view of teaching others. If our life is not to be wasted, there must be a living unto God with a noble purpose; and they who have lived in vain with multitudes of opportunities of doing good, ought to be ashamed; and such shame should bring them to the Saviour's feet in humble penitence. God give such shame as that to any here who ought to have it, that they may at once seek the name of the Lord!

III. I must close by speaking only briefly upon the last head of my discourse, which is, THE LORD IS WILLING NOW TO RECEIVE THOSE WHO ARE ASHAMED OF THEMSELVES. Let me say that again. The Lord is waiting and willing now to receive to the love of His heart those who are thus ashamed of themselves.

I do not think that I need say much to enforce this great truth. Is there one person here who is ashamed of himself because of his past sin? Then, you are the man I invite to come to that Saviour who bore your shame in His own body on the tree. You are the sort of man for whom He died. Remember how He Himself said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"; and one mark of the lost is their deep sense of shame, when they get to be so ashamed of themselves that they try to hide away from the gaze of their fellow-creatures. If you are ashamed of yourself, Christ is willing to receive you; behold, He stands before you with open arms, and bids you come and trust Him, that He may give you rest.

You are the sort of man to come to Christ, because, first, *you have the greatest need of Him.* In the time of famine, we give the meal away first to the most hungry family. He who has alms to distribute to the poor, if he be wise, will give the most speedy relief to those who are the most destitute; and you, my dear hearer, are like that; if you are ashamed of yourself, you are the bankrupt, you are the beggar, you are the sort of sinner whom Jesus came to save. God's elect are known by this mark,—in their own natural estate they are as poor as poverty itself. If thou art empty, there is a full Christ for thee. If thy last mite is gone, heaven's treasures are all open for thee. Come and take them, take them freely, as freely as thou dost breathe the air, as freely as thou wouldst drink of the flowing river. Come and take Christ without question and without delay, take Him now and happy be; and the way to take Him is to trust Him, to trust thyself with Him absolutely. He is a Saviour; let Him save *thee.* Have no finger in the work thyself, but leave it all to Him. Commit thou thyself entirely and absolutely to that mighty hand that moulded the heavens and the earth, to that dear hand that was nailed to the tree. Jesus can save you, He will save you, He must save you, He is pledged to save you; if you have believed in Him, He *has* saved you, and you may go your way, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Next, if you are ashamed of yourself, you are the man to come to Christ, because *you will make no bargains with Him.* You will say, "Save me, Lord, at any price, and in any way!" And you are the man who will *give Him all the glory if you are saved.* That is the kind of sinner Jesus loves to save; not one who will run away with the credit of his salvation, and say, "I was always good, and I had many traces of an excellent character about me before Christ saved me." Such a man might try to divide with the Lord the glory of his salvation, so he is not likely to be saved; but God delights to save those in whom there is no trace of goodness, no hope of goodness, no shadow of goodness, the men who not only feel that God may well be ashamed of them, but who are absolutely ashamed of themselves.

In preaching on this important theme, I have not used any grace of diction, nor have I made any display of oratory; but I have plainly told you the gospel message, and I have expostulated with those of you who have not considered it. I wish that, by the grace of God, even ere this night passes away, you would come and rest yourselves on Christ. The Holy Spirit is here, blessedly working upon some hearts. If He is not yet working upon others of you, I pray that He may now begin to do so. Remember, my dear hearers, that you are all mortal, and some of you may soon be gone from earth. During the past week, I personally have lost some very choice friends who died quite suddenly. There was a young friend, who was here a Sabbath or so ago; he was taken ill last Sunday afternoon, and he was gone in a few hours. His sorrowing friends are absent to-day, for he was laid in Norwood Cemetery yesterday afternoon, almost to the breaking of the hearts of his parents and other relatives. I had a dear old friend with whom I have often stayed at Mentone. On Monday last she seemed as well as ever, and on Wednesday she too was dead. Last Friday week, I had a letter from a friend at Plymouth, saying that he was coming up to see me, and asking at what hour I could meet him? I said, "Five in the afternoon." It was our honoured friend, Mr. Serpell. He did not come, but I received a note to say that he was not quite well. On Monday he addressed the Chamber of Commerce, and while he was speaking he fell back, apparently in a fainting fit, and so died. I have, therefore, lost some who have always been good helpers and kind friends to me, and I seem to feel more than ever I did that I

am living in a dying world. It might have been any one of you, it might have been myself. Come, then, and let us all seek the Lord at once; let us each one seek Him now. "If *thou* seek Him, He will be found of thee." God grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

THE SPARROW AND THE SWALLOW

"Yes, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God."—Psalm lxxxiv. 3.

WHEN David was far away from the services of the tabernacle, he envied the birds that had built their nests near the sacred shrine; and Christians, in like manner, when they are debarred from the holy associations of Christian fellowship and united worship, always sigh over the lost privilege of meeting with their brethren and sisters in Christ. With even greater emphasis we may say that, when a Christian loses the realisation of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the "Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man"; then it is, above all other seasons, that he sighs and cries for a renewal of communion with Christ. We would envy any, however poor and insignificant they may be, who can maintain unbroken fellowship with their Lord; and when it falls to our lot, through our own sin or neglect, or in the inscrutable wisdom of divine sovereignty, to be, for a while, spiritually in the dark seeking our Saviour, and not finding Him, we would willingly take the place of the godly captive pining in the persecutors' dungeon, or of the dying yet enraptured saint, if we could but once again enjoy the presence of our Master. This was David's state of heart when he languished for the ancient tabernacle services; or, more probably, when he longed for that communion with his Lord which, perhaps, had been suspended together with his attendance upon the public worship of God's house. It was then, as I believe, that he was inspired to pen this "Pearl of the Psalms," including the verse upon which I am going to try to speak, praying that the Holy Spirit may enable me to utter words which shall be to the profit of both hearers and readers.

It seems that the birds which came to David's mind, when he wrote this psalm, had found two things,—*houses for themselves*, and *nests for their young*; and these two things Christians find in Christ, and also, in a certain sense, in the assemblies of His servants for public worship in His name.

I. First, I want to remind you that CHRISTIANS FIND IN CHRIST, AND, IN A CERTAIN SENSE, IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF THE FAITHFUL, HOUSES FOR THEMSELVES.

Turn to the text and read: "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house"; and upon that our first question shall be, *What were those creatures that there found a house?*

Well, they were only sparrows, yet they found a house near the altars of God, and therefore David envied them. Now, *sparrows are very insignificant things*. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?" said Christ to His disciples; and you and I, dear friends, when we really know ourselves as we are in God's sight, are led to feel that, because of our sin, we are even more insignificant than sparrows, and to realise that our being blotted out of the universe would be rather a gain to it than a loss. What unworthy creatures we see ourselves to be when once God pours upon us the bright light of His Word! Then, we think that any mercy is too great, and any blessing is far too good, for us to receive. Yet, as the sparrows were permitted to find their house under the eaves of God's ancient tabernacle, we, insignificant and worthless as we are, may come and build under the shelter of God's great house of mercy. There we may find a safe refuge from every danger, a perfect security for all time, and even for all eternity. O ye who think yourselves despised and forgotten, remember that the sparrow hath found a house on God's altar; come, then, and see if there be not space there also for you! Jesus said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out"; and the apostle Paul writing under inspiration, says, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." Therefore, poor despised one, though you feel yourself to be a nobody, come and welcome to the Saviour, come to Him with cheerful confidence, for He will not, He cannot reject you.

The sparrows were not only very insignificant they were also *very needy*. They needed a house, they needed a place of shelter; and they found it at God's altar. How needy also are we! Though we are insignificant, our wants are anything but insignificant. How much we need! Who can tell what we do not want? Were it not for God's superabounding mercy, we should all be in hell. Were it not for His unspeakable goodness, we should this day have no hope of grace, no prospect of pardon, no assurance of a holy, happy heaven hereafter. Our wants are countless; every moment brings a fresh one, and all the supplies of the past and the present are not sufficient to meet the voracious demands that will come upon us in the future. The sparrow, needy creature that she was, having nothing to bring to God's house, found there a house freely given to her; and, ye needy souls, the infinite supply of divine mercy, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is freely given to you. You need not bring anything with you when you come to Christ, only come and trust Him, and all your wants shall be supplied. Whatever your souls can need to bear them safely through the troubles of earth, and bring them to the bliss of heaven, you shall have it freely given to you if you do but come, flying with the wings of faith, to find a house and a home in Jesus Christ. At the great altar where Christ was offered

as the one sacrifice for sin for ever the most needy soul that ever lived on the face of the earth will find a hearty welcome.

These sparrows were *uninvited guests*, yet they found a house, and took possession of it, and they were never blamed for doing so; but, in this verse, David seems to commend them, and he certainly envied them. But, my dear hearers, you who have never come to the Lord Jesus Christ, are not uninvited guests. The gospel invitation rings through this building every Sabbath day,—

> "come and welcome,
> Come to Jesus, sinner come!"

We not only invite you, but we earnestly press you, in Christ's name, to come and put your trust in His great sacrifice, assuring you that, if you do so, you shall find an everlasting and blessed home for your souls. So, as the sparrows came to God's house without an invitation, will not you come to Christ with one? They were bold enough to find a house when no man bade them do so; therefore, will not you be bold enough, trembler though you be, to take what divine mercy freely proffers to you? Do you not remember how Agur commends the spider as being "exceeding wise" because she "taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces?" No one ever asked the spider to come into the palace; she was a loathsome creature, quite out of place in a palace, and her web would mar the beauty of the place; yet the spider knew by instinct that a storm was coming on, and so sought shelter in the king's palace. There was Solomon's fine house of the forest of Lebanon, and the spider said within herself, "Why should not I, spider though I am, abide here?" So she crept about till she found a window open, and in she slipped, and made herself at home by taking hold with her hands, first of one wall and then of another, till she found herself at ease. There came along one who said, "Let that spider and her web be removed; what business has she to be here?" But Solomon thought otherwise, so the spider is immortalized in this Book of Proverbs, because of her wisdom in taking hold with her hands even on the walls of a royal palace. O soul, perhaps thou art, consciously to thyself, as loathsome as that spider was, and the King's great house of mercy seems too fair a place for thee to enter. You ask, unbelievingly, "Shall I ever be made a saint? Shall I ever be cleansed from sin? Shall I ever be taken up to dwell with the great King in heaven?" Talk not so, but rather see whether thou canst not find an entrance into the King's palace; and if thou canst find it, go in thereat. Surely, there is a window open for thee where it is written by the King Himself, as I reminded you just now, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Then there is another window where the King has hung up the invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Doth not that avail thee? Come in, poor spider-sinner! Take hold of the walls of Christ's great house of love and mercy, and I can assure thee that my royal Master will not be angry with thee; but when He seeth thee there, He will immortalize thee in His "book of life." Thou shalt have a name and a place there, and He will think thee wise, not intrusive, in daring to believe Him, and to come into His palace, spider-sinner as thou art. He delights to have great things thought of Him; and if you will but think great things of His love and mercy, I will warrant you that you will never think thoughts that shall outstrip the reality, for what He hath said is true, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Let us learn, then, from the sparrow finding her house near to God's altar, that although we are inconsiderable and insignificant, although we are full of needs, and although we may even deem ourselves to be uninvited, yet we are at liberty to come to the Saviour, and find in Him our eternal dwelling-place.

Next, *what does the text tell us that these sparrows did?* We should learn something from that.

The text says, "Yea, the sparrow hath *found* an house"; then, first of all, *she looked for it.* The sparrow wanted a house, and she searched to see where she could find it. One great reason why many do not find salvation is because they do not look for it. Many of them do not even know that they need it; or, if they know it as a matter of doctrine, they do not believe it so as to look for it, and appropriate it as their own. I feel persuaded that no man ever did sincerely seek salvation, through Jesus Christ, without finding it. I do not believe that, amongst all the lost, there is one who will be able to tell the Lord that he honestly and earnestly sought His mercy, yet could not obtain it. If you have not found Christ, my dear hearer, it is because you have not sought Him, for He said, "He that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." I grant you that the blessing may be delayed for a while; you may be some time in finding peace, perhaps through your ignorance, or through some cherished sin that you have not given up; but if you truly come to the throne of grace, and cry in real earnest for mercy, as surely as God is in Christ Jesus, He will stretch out His silver sceptre toward you, and you shall touch it, and find grace in His sight. Be encouraged, O ye seekers, to persevere in your search after salvation, and ask that the aid of the Holy Spirit may be given to you, that ye may wisely and rightly seek the way of faith, and may speedily find it!

Further, "the sparrow found an house"; then, *there was a house for her, or she could not have found it.* A traveller in Palestine writes in his journal that, as he was wandering among the ruins on the site of the temple at Jerusalem, he noticed a little bird—known in the Hebrew as *tzippor*, or sparrow,—fly out of a crevice between two great stones where the mortar or cement had been removed, and he thought at once of these words, "The sparrow hath found an house." That is just what David meant. The sparrow no doubt found a little vacant place, just what she wanted, and in she went, and there was her "house" ready made for her; and let me say to thee, O seeker, that, if thou wouldst find rest in Christ, there is rest prepared for thee in Him! He who has prepared thy heart to seek Him has prepared that which thou wouldst fain find. It is not for thee to make a salvation for thyself; thy salvation is finished, and thou hast but to find it. It is not for thee to make an atonement for thyself; the one atonement for sin was made, once for all, on Calvary. It is not for thee to make a righteousness for thyself; the righteousness that Christ Jesus wrought out for thee is perfect, and thou mayest not add thereto any supposed righteousness of thine own. If thou

art an honest seeker after Christ, for thee there is already prepared, by those dear hands that once were pierced for thee, the salvation that shall lift thee up from the depths of sin to the heights of glory. As Bunyan said,—Does not your mouth water as you hear this? Do you not say, "Is all this really prepared for me? Then, why do I not have it?" Ah! why not, why not indeed? In my Master's name, I do assure you that "all things are ready" for all who will seek Him, for every soul that will trust Him. If ye seek Him not, if ye will not believe, there is no mercy for you, but if you seek heartily and trustfully, ye shall assuredly find it, for it was prepared for you long ago by Him who has gone to heaven to prepare glory, having already prepared grace for you.

"Yea, the sparrow hath found an house"; that also means that, when she had discovered it, *she appropriated it.* There was the little place, so snug and cosy, just on the warm side of the tabernacle, where the South wind would blow, and she would be shielded from the cold, and in went the little bird, She had found it, and she took care to make it her own by personal appropriation. Now, we may find Christ, in a sense, so as to know much about Him, to read about Him, to hear about Him, and even to understand much about Him, yet not truly to find Him. The root of the matter is to get Christ for yourself; in this respect, you must be selfish, and you can thus be selfish without being sinful. You must personally lay hold of Christ if you would be saved. One, who desired to teach a little girl this lesson, tried to do it when the child was waiting upon him while he was ill. "Please pour out my medicine, Jane," said the sick man; and when it was poured out, he said to her, "Now, Jane, take that medicine for me." "O sir!" she said, "I would willingly do it, if it were the right thing to do, but the medicine would not do you any good if I took it." "Just so," said he, "and as I must personally take the medicine before it can do me good, my child, you must personally believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or else another person's faith will do you no good." The idea of anything like sponsorship in religion, one person vowing and promising certain things for another, is utterly without any foundation in the Word of God. Religion is wholly and only a personal thing; you must repent for yourself, believe for yourself, and lay hold on Christ for yourself. It would have been no benefit to that little bird if all other sparrows had found houses for themselves if she, herself, had been driven about, shelterless, in the storm. Oh, no! she must have a house for herself, "and the swallow a nest for herself," where she might lay her young.

You and I, dear friends, will be wise if we do as this sparrow did; for she found a house for herself because she looked for it, she found it because it was there all ready for her, and she found it by appropriating it so that it became her very own. Thus may we appropriate the Lord Jesus Christ, by an act of faith, and so make Him our very own!

I have, at various times, learned some lessons concerning living by faith. A friend frequently drives me through the streets of London; and, one day, when all the cabs and waggons seemed to leave us no room to move, I said to him, more than once, "I am afraid we shall have an accident. When I had said that to him, perhaps for the third time, he put the reins into my hand, and said, "There, if you cannot trust me, drive yourself." Suppose God should say that to us when we fear that we are getting into difficulties, "If you cannot trust me, arrange for yourselves"; what a position we should be in then! If he left the reins in our hands for a single hour, we should be like the one who sought to drive the chariot of the sun, and set the world a-blaze. When we leave all in the hands of God,—and we must leave all there whether we are willing or not,—then we can sing that sweet little song which Luther said that the sparrows always sing,—

> "Mortal, cease from care and sorrow,
> God provideth for the morrow."

May we all be able to sing that little song, and to sing it to ourselves too!

We will further prolong this simile by noticing *what the sparrow found.*

"Yea, the sparrow hath found an *house.*" The word is a very simple one, but there is much meaning in it; and when we find, in the Lord Jesus Christ, a house for our souls, *we find safety in Him,* even as the sparrow found safety in her "house." When the stormy wind blew all around her, the sparrow felt safe in her house hard by the altar in God's ancient tabernacle; and when the storm of conscience beats upon us, we feel safe in our hiding-place in the altar where Jesus suffered for us; and when the last dreadful storm of divine judgment shall come, we shall be safe beneath the shelter of the atonement that He offered upon Calvary. He that believeth in Jesus is safe for ever. When the earth and all its works are burned up, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, no hurt shall come to the man to whom Jesus is "a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest."

Next to safety, *we find in Christ rest.* The soul that is out of Christ knows not what true rest is, but "we which have believed do enter into rest."

> "'Tis done! the great transaction's done;
> I am my Lord's, and He is mine."

My salvation is finished, my sins are pardoned, my security is established by the promise and oath of God Himself, ratified by the blood of the everlasting covenant. If this is your happy condition, you can enjoy the blissful sleep of the beloved of the Lord, "and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' Just as the little sparrow felt perfectly at rest when she had entered her "house" in the tabernacle, so do we, come what may, enjoy complete absolute, unbroken rest when we have truly believed in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because He trusteth in thee!"

Further, a house is *a place of abode;* the sparrow lived in her house in the tabernacle, and he, who finds the Lord Jesus Christ, finds in Him a spiritual abode, he lives in Christ. He has heard his Master's blessed command, "Abide in Me," and he desires to dwell there, hard by the pierced heart of Jesus. My brothers and sisters in Christ, you have not a mere temporary lodging-place, out of which you may some day be driven back into the cold world where you used to live. That would be a poor prospect for us; but we need not anticipate such a sad future for we can say, with Moses, "Lord, Thou hast been

our dwelling-place in all generations"; and He always will be, blessed be His holy name!

Once more, a house is, or ought to be, *a place of delight.* When a man reaches his home, he is at his ease, and can unbend himself. If he is not happy at home, where can he be happy? The little sparrow, when it reaches its home, is perfectly content. Its day's work is over, its day's wants are supplied, and it chirps its evening song of joy. So, when we make our abode in Christ, our soul is filled with delight. We have a bliss that is not only full to the brim, but it even overflows. Truly happy are those who are Christ's servants, thrice happy are they who are looking alone to His cross for their salvation.

But the point upon which David seemed to lay the greatest emphasis was that *the sparrow's house was near to God's earthly dwelling-place;* and oh, when we abide in Christ, how near we are to God! You remember how Christ prayed to His Father concerning His disciples, "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee . . . I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." No nearness imaginable can be greater than Christ's nearness to His Father; yet, as we are in Christ, we are, in His person, as near even as He is!

I can only spare a minute or so for the secondary meaning which may be found in our text. *In a certain sense, Christians, like the sparrow, find a house in the assemblies of the saints.*

When the sparrow went to her house in the tabernacle, she never needed to be driven there, but she went there of her own accord; and I trust that, when we come up to our solemn assemblies, we need nothing to compel us to come, but that our own delightful remembrances of fellowship with God, in seasons past, make us long for the renewal of such seasons again and again. I hate to see people going to any place of worship as if they were being marched off to jail; but I rejoice to see them come up to the house of God with alacrity and holy joy, and with fleet footsteps as if they were delighted to think that the time had come when they could once more unite with their brethren in worship before the throne of the Most High God. If you, like the sparrow, have found a house in God's house, you will go there with joy; and when you are there, you will be happy to be there; and when the service is over, you will wish that it had to begin again, and you will long for the time when you will reach that city of God,—

> "Where congregations ne'er break up,
> And Sabbaths have no end."

There are many poor people here who scarcely ever have any peace except when they are sitting in this house of prayer, and who find here the richest enjoyments they ever know. I know some of God's afflicted children, who have but little sacred mirth except when the holy hymn goes up in glorious peals to heaven, and they can join in it,—

> "Then they forget their pains a while,
> And in the pleasure lose the smart."

Cultivate more and more your love for the assemblies of the saints. We have no reverence for bricks and mortar, stones and wood, glass and iron; we do not believe in the sanctity of any one place above others; but we have a reverence for the living temple of God, built up of living men and living women whose hearts are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and we can say of their assemblies,—

> "I have been there, and still will go,
> 'Tis like a little heaven below;—"

and we can also say,—

> "There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
> There God my Saviour reigns."

The sparrow hath found a house, and we too have found a house, where God's people meet, and of that house we sing,—

> "Here do I find a settled rest,
> While others go and come,
> No more a stranger or a guest,
> But like a child at home."

II. After a man is himself saved, his first anxiety, if he be a father, will be concerning his children. The next clause of the text will be helpful to such parents: "The swallow (hath found) a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God." Every Christian should think that what is good for himself is good for his children, and he who does not labour and pray for the salvation of his own offspring has good reason to doubt whether he knows the grace of God himself. Believing parents cry, with Thomas Hastings,—

> "God of mercy, hear our prayer
> For the children Thou hast given;
> Let them all Thy blessings share,
> Grace on earth, and bliss in heaven."

Children should early be brought to the house of God; to keep to the figure of the text, THE ASSEMBLIES OF THE SAINTS SHOULD BE A NEST FOR OUR LITTLE ONES.

First, *because they are safe there.* At any rate, you need not fear that they will be taking hurt when they are where God is being worshipped in spirit and in truth. In the Sabbath-school, under the loving tuition of godly people, they will be safe. We never feel any need to ask whether they will be in a place of danger when we take them with us where Christ is preached, and his gospel is simply, earnestly, and faithfully proclaimed. Bring, then, your children with you to the house of God, for it is a place where you may expect that your little ones, as well as yourselves, will be blessed.

The "swallow" is expressed, in the Hebrew, by a word which signifies liberty. It is the bird of freedom; it is not to be caged. Even a whole continent does not give room enough for its rapid, untiring flight over hill and dale, mountain and plain, so it crosses the ocean and flies to other lands far away. The swallow is the bird of liberty, yet David writes of one that found her nest, where she might lay her young, at God's altar; and if you want your children to be truly free, train them in the fear of God, and the love of His truth. The spirit of liberty will always be maintained in this land as long as we have the open Bible, the family altar, and the training up of our children in the way that they should go; but take these things away, and Popery will again enchain our country, and bring back the curse from which our fathers set free our land even at the cost of their own lives.

Further, *the nest is a place of delight to the little birds*, and so ought the house of God to be to children; and so it would be if preachers would always seek to make their language simple, and would illustrate what they have to say, so that the children can comprehend it. It is a bad sign concerning any man's ministry when the children do not understand him. I always look upon it as being one of the highest compliments I ever receive when I see some little boy's or girl's bright eyes, that are all too apt to wander hither and thither, fixed upon me, while they seem to be drinking in what I have to say. There is a great lack, in the preachers of the present day, in this respect, and we need to have the Master's words to Peter, "Feed My lambs," as well as the command, "Feed My sheep," more and more impressed upon our hearts. May you, beloved, find a place of prayer for your children where it shall be their delight to go with you, and to join intelligently in the worship of God.

When you take them there,—as I have already hinted to you, *they are in the way that the blessing is often* given. I do not say that they will all be saved through coming to God's house; but if they are there with you, He who called you by His grace may also call them; and that ever-blessed Spirit who led you to find the Saviour may also lead them to Him. Bring them to Bethesda, "the house of mercy," and pray to Christ to say to them, as He said to the impotent man, "Wilt thou be made whole? . . . Rise, . . . and walk." At any rate, do not let your children miss the blessing through neglecting to use the means which the Lord has blessed to you, and to many others, both old and young.

Your children, if you take them with you to God's house, will be like the swallows in this respect, *they will be pretty sure to return to the nest even if they do leave it for a while.* Though the swallows may fly, o'er the deep blue sea, to the lands that are far away, yet, when the next season comes, they find their way back again to the old nest and home. So, though some of our sons and daughters may grow up, and leave the house of God for a while, they cannot altogether forget it. The recollection of their father's prayers and of their mother's tears will follow them wheresoe'er they roam. Refrain your eyes from weeping, dear mothers; your sons and daughters shall come back again. Possibly, when you sleep beneath the clods of the valley, they will recollect what they heard when, as children, you took them with you to the house of God. Words that have been forgotten for fifty years may yet ring in their souls, and lead to their eternal salvation. At any rate, as the swallows found a nest for their young at God's altar, mind that you, Christian parents, make the house of God your children's house. Associate them, as far as you can, with all that is going on there, so that they shall feel at home when they go with you to the place where you worship the Lord, and serve Him.

But, after all, it is not the main thing merely to bring our children to the house of God; oh, *that we could bring them to Christ!* That is where we long to lay our young, for there only shall they be truly safe, and happy, and blessed. Christian parents, can you rest content as long as your children are unconverted? I am ashamed of you if you can. Do you say that you hope they will be converted in future years? I hope so too, but are you not concerned that they are out of Christ now? Perhaps you remind me of what I said just now, that your instruction may be blessed to their salvation long after you have been called home. Yes, I recollect that I said that, and I do not wish to withdraw what I said; yet I would like to ask whether you are willing to run the fearful risk of your children dying unsaved. The object of parents, and preachers, and teachers should be that children should be saved while they are children; that, while they are yet young, their names should be enrolled in the army of the church militant.

How can we lay our children before Christ, as the swallow laid her young before God's altar? I answer, first, *by prayer.* The Lord will hear our prayers for our children as He heard our fathers' prayers for us. *Example* will also help toward the end we have in view,—godly example at home. And *personal precept* will also help. We must talk to our children, one by one, alone, about their souls. I am afraid that some of you parents do not do that; but if you do not see your children grow up to do what is right, you will have to blame yourselves because you never personally pleaded with them to flee from the wrath to come. I know that the words of my father with me alone, when he prayed for me, and bade me pray for myself,—not to use any form of prayer, but to pray just as I felt, and to ask from God what I felt that I really wanted,—left an impression upon my mind that will never be erased. I have heard of an idiot, who was one day scouring a brass plate to get the name out; but, the more he scoured, the more clearly it shone; and when the devil tries to erase the impressions, made upon my mind and heart, by my mother's tears and my father's prayers, he is as much like an idiot as he possibly could be; for, let him scour as he may, those impressions will never be removed, but will continue to shine yet more brightly.

Do, dear Christian parents, resolve that, if your children perish, it shall not be through any fault of yours. But why should they perish? Why should I suppose that such a thing is possible? "The promise is *unto you, and to your children*, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Did not Paul and Silas say to the jailor at Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *thou shalt be saved, and thy house?*" Do not be content with being saved yourselves; say, "No, my Master, I cannot be put off with half Thy promise; it is 'and thy house,' and I would fain have it all, and see my children, and if I live long enough, their children, too, all encompassed in the arms of Thy love, and all of them saved." Brethren and sisters, if you are like the sparrow, and have found a house, now be like the swallow, and find not only a nest for yourself, but a place where you may lay your young, even God's altar upon which Christ offered His great atoning sacrifice.

I wonder what other birds are represented here. Alas! alas! I fear that I am addressing some who will not heed what I have been saying. They are not like the sparrow and the swallow. Perhaps they are like the eagle, that was far too ambitious to think of building her nest anywhere near God's altar,—too fond of soaring and struggling, too fond of high and lofty things. But there will come a time when the pride of man shall be laid low. Beware, beware, thou who art like the eagle! Possibly there is one here who is like the vulture, far too foul to think of building in God's house,—fond of everything that is unclean, wicked amusements and sinful pleasures, which are

sadly miscalled "pleasures." Ah! the time will come when sin will be as bitter to thee as now it is sweet; aye, and far more so, for it "will eat as doth a canker." When thou comest to the dregs of the cup of sinful pleasure, thou shalt find that there is hell in them, and that for ever! Or, mayhap, there is one here who is like the cormorant, who will not build on God's house because he is far too greedy after the world, seeking to gather gold, and to amass property. Ah, sir! hast thou never heard of the rich fool whose soul was required of him the very night on which he boasted of his wealth? Play not thou the fool thus, but be willing to leave all those things, and come and seek enduring riches. If you do not care for your own souls, it must seem to you an idle task for me to talk to you about your children; yet I will venture to say to any unconverted man here, that it will increase his misery intolerably to see his children lost through his own example. If you must perish, man, if you are resolved to perish, why need you drag your child down with you? If you must drink, why need that boy of yours be taught the base habit into which you have fallen? If you will swear, do not let your child hear you. I would not have you swear at all; but if you will do so, why should your child learn from you to curse and blaspheme God? O sirs! you will find it dreadul enough to perish yourselves; but to bring down one, two, three,—I know not how many children you have,—to bring them down, one after the other, to that same place of awful and eternal misery,—what a terrible increase to your own wretchedness! You could not look at your dear child's face, and then do him harm. I know that you would not touch him so as to break a bone, or do his body any injury. No, you pat his curly head, and say, "God bless you!" Yes, but why do you then do injury to his soul by your evil example? Why do you take your boy where you know he will learn no good and much harm? How dare you take him to places where the amusement is defiled and defiling, lascivious, unclean? No, if you really mean it when you say, "God bless my boy!" then live so that you will bless him by your example. May you be saved yourself, and then may you be a true parent to your children for immortality as well as for time! May these words abide with you; and God bless them, so that we and our children may meet in heaven, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PEACE: HOW GAINED, HOW BROKEN

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints: but let them not turn again to folly."—Psalm lxxxv. 8.

"I WILL hear what God the Lord will speak." There were voices and voices. There were voices of the past concerning God's wondrous mercy to His people: "Thou hast been favourable unto Thy land; Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob." But mingled with these were the sad voices of the present. He heard the wailing and the pleading of those who said, "Wilt Thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt Thou draw out Thine anger to all generations?" From this mingling of singing and sighing, the Psalmist turned away, and cried, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak; I will get me into the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High; I will hear that voice from between the cherubim which speaketh peace to the soul." Beloved, herein is wisdom. Resort to the sanctuary of God. When you cannot find harmony in the voices of the street, or the voices of the church, turn to the melody of that one voice which "will speak peace unto His people."

Again, the Psalmist had been praying. At the mercy-seat he had spread out this petition, "Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Show us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation." When he had spoken, he desired an answer. He watched and waited till the Lord God should give him a reply. A friend, kindly wishing to spare me, puts at the end of his letter, "No answer expected." This is too often a foot-note to men's prayers. David did not pray in that fashion: he did expect an answer from the mouth of the Lord. He said within himself, "I have spoken: but now I will speak no more, but hear what God the Lord will speak." Always follow up prayer with holy expectancy. Prayers which expect no answer are guilty of taking the name of God in vain; they are a misuse of the holy ordinance of supplication; and they are a question put upon the divine existence, inasmuch as they reduce the Godhead to an idol, like to those images of the heathen which have ears, but they hear not, neither speak they through their throats. Prayers without faith are an insult to the attributes of God, and do dishonour to His sacred name. If thou prayest aright, in the name of Jesus, expect the Lord to hear thee, even as thou wouldst hear thy child, if he asked bread of thee.

In addition to this, it should be the daily resolve of every Christian man—"I will hear what God the Lord will speak." Not only when I am dazed and confused with other voices, nor only when I have expressed my heart in prayer, but at all times and seasons, I will hear what God the Lord shall speak. There are many doctrines and controversies; but "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." His voice, by His prophets and apostles, shall be the umpire of every dispute with me. I will also turn to the Word of God for the rule of my daily life, as well as for the instruction of my mind in doctrine. I will have regard to the precepts as well as to the promises. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." When I would know my duty, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak"; and, hearing His word of command, I will need neither whip nor spur, but will make haste in the way of His commands. I will listen to *His* Word, whatever I may do with the precepts of men. Has He spoken? Did the primeval darkness hear it? Shall not the light which He has given me be attentive to it? Even the dead shall hear that voice, and

they that hear shall live. Shall not I, who have been quickened by His Spirit, joyfully say, "I will never forget Thy precepts: for with them Thou hast quickened me"?

Our Saviour speaks of some who enter into life halt and maimed, and having one eye; but He does not speak of anybody entering into life without ears. We must hear the voice of God, for it is written, "Hear, and your soul shall live." Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. By ear-gate the Prince Emmanuel enters the town of Mansoul. Men are saved, not by what they touch, or see, or taste, or smell; but by what they hear. Oh, that we all heard the voice of Christ with solemn attention! Our Lord saith, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Be this our resolve: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." Like young Samuel, let each one say, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth."

There is one special reason given by the Psalmist why the people of God should be most willing and eager to hear what God the Lord shall speak, and that is because, "He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints." You, beloved, will hear nothing from the Lord but that which will calm your fears, and cheer your hearts. The Lord speaks no thunders against you. His tones are tenderness, His words are mercy, His spirit is love, His message is peace. I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace, and nothing else but peace, unto His own people. That is the subject for us to consider this morning. The Lord Jehovah gives peace to His holy ones.

First, *what we know the Lord will speak;* and, secondly, *what we fear may hinder our enjoying the blessing which He speaks to us:* "Let them not turn again to folly"—a notable word of warning, to which we shall do well to give heed.

I. First, let us consider WHAT WE KNOW THE LORD WILL SPEAK. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak; for He will speak peace."

The first point is, *He speaks peace to a certain company*—"to His people, and to His saints." Let us, then, ask ourselves, Has the Lord ever spoken peace to us, or will He do so? He will certainly do so if we have an ear to hear His voice; for God will not speak sweet words to those who turn to Him a deaf ear. He that will not hear the gospel of peace, shall never know the peace of the gospel. If you will not hear the Holy Spirit when He warns you of your sin, neither shall you hear Him revealing peace through pardon. If you will not hear the Lord when He proposes to you reconciliation through the sacrifice of His dear Son, if you will not hear Him when He bids you repent and believe, and be washed in the blood of the Lamb, then He will never speak peace to your soul. There is no peace out of Christ, who is our peace. There is one Ambassador, and one Mediator, and only one. There is one atonement by blood, and only one. There is one covenant of peace, and there can never be another. Reconciliation comes to men by Jesus Christ, but by no other gate; and if you will not hear the Lord when He speaks concerning His dear Son, who is the propitiation for sins, He will never speak peace to your heart. Oh, for the ear which is opened to hear the Lord, for this is the sure mark of grace! Does not Jesus say, "My sheep hear My voice"?

Those to whom the Lord speaks peace are His people, and they acknowledge Him to be their God. Many men have no God. They would not like to be called atheists, but it practically comes to that. God is not in their thoughts, their plans, their actions, their business, their life. But there is peace to that man to whom God is the greatest fact of his existence. Happy is he who has God first, and last, and midst in all that he does. Look him through and through, and you will perceive that as the colour tinges the stained glass, so does faith in God colour all his life. God is with him in his loneliness, and among the multitude: God is above him to govern him, beneath him to uphold him, within him to quicken him. The man has a God to worship, a God to trust, a God to delight in. If God is everything to you, you are among His people, and He will speak peace unto you. That peace is, however, always connected with holiness, for it is added, "and to His saints." His people and His saints are the same persons. Those who have a God know Him to be a holy God, and therefore they strive to be holy themselves. He that hath no saintship about him will have no peace about him. If thou livest a blundering, careless, godless life, thou wilt have much tossing to and fro, and many questionings of heart. "There is no peace," saith my God, "unto the wicked"; but to His people, His saintly ones, His sanctified ones, the people who follow after righteousness—to these the Lord Himself will secure peace by His own word of mouth.

Do I hear anyone saying, "Alas! I could not venture to be classed with saints"? Listen one minute: these people, though they are now God's people, and though they are now made saintly by His grace, were once given over to folly. How do I know this? Because the text says, "Let them not turn again to folly"; which shows that once they did follow after folly. Once they followed sin with all their hearts; they knew not God, neither served Him; but they have been turned away from folly, sin, and shame: a change, a conversion has taken place in them, by the grace of God. Therefore, dear hearer, let not thy past foolishness dismay thee, if thou wouldst now come to God. Fool as thou mayest have been, the Lord is turning thee from folly; and if He brings thee to be numbered among His people and His holy ones, He will speak peace to thee.

I think I hear one say, "I have turned away from folly, but I feel that there is in my heart a tendency to return to it!" I know it. I, too, have felt the old Adam pulling at my sleeve, to draw me back to the old way, if possible. So it was with these people, or else the Lord would not have needed to say, "Let them not turn again to folly." They were His people, they were His saints, too: and He spoke to them; but the old nature lurked within, and made the heart in danger of turning again to folly. If thou findest the old leaven working within thee, fermenting unto evil, and making thee feel sick at heart to think that thou shouldst be so base, then bow low at thy Saviour's feet, and cry to Him in the language of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Yet remember, even if it be so with thee, yet nevertheless thou mayest be numbered with the Lord's people, of whom He has said that He will speak peace unto them. But if you have no horror of sin; if you have no conflict with evil; if you have no longing for righteousness, and no ear for the voice of the Lord, then God will not speak peace to you; but one of these days He will

speak thunderbolts, and accent His words with flames of fire, and this shall be the tenor of His speech: "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." May you never hear that voice of wrath; but may peace be spoken into your soul!

But now, dear friends, I notice here that the peace which is to be desired is peace which God speaks, and *all other peace is evil.* The question is sometimes put—"We see bad men enjoy peace, and we see good men who have but little peace." That is one of the mysteries of life; but it is not a very difficult one as to its first part. Why do bad men enjoy a kind of peace? I answer: sometimes their peace arises from sheer carelessness. They will not think, reflect, or consider. They do not intend to look about them, or before them; for "they count it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away." They go through the world like blind men. They are on the verge of a precipice, and they do not know their danger, or wish to know it. They will go over the edge of the cliff, and be broken to pieces; but they have hardened their neck, and if you warn them they will hate you for it. These are your men that fill high the bowl, and chase the flying hours with glowing feet. They live right merrily, like the men of the old world, they marry and are given in marriage, they drink and are drunken, till the flood comes, and there is no escape.

Many are quiet in conscience because of worldliness. They are too much occupied to give fair attention to the affairs of their souls. They are taken up with business; at it from morning to night, shutters up and shutters down; they can find time for nothing but counting their money, or shifting their stock. Adam was lost in the garden of Eden; but these men are lost in their shops, lost in their warehouses, lost in their ships, lost in their farms, lost in the market. They give no thought to the world to come, because this world engrosses them. From this kind of peace may we be delivered!

Some have a brawny conscience—I mean a conscience hard, callous, horny; you cannot make it feel. A healthy conscience is tender as a raw wound, which fears a touch; but some men's consciences are covered with a thick skin, and are devoid of feeling. Certain sinners have a conscience seared as with a hot iron, and this brings with it that horrible peace which is the preface of eternal damnation.

Around us are persons who have a peace which Satan preserves. "When a strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are in peace." When Satan is in full possession of a man, then no disturbing thoughts come in, and the sinful heart is well content. "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men"; they may even die at peace, for the Psalmist complains, "there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm." Satan has filled them with "a strong delusion to believe a lie," and so in peace they perish; they go willingly to destruction, like sheep to the slaughter.

And some have a peace of sullenness; an awful peace of despair, in which the man steels himself against that which he calls his fate. A man says, "I know I am to be lost; I have sinned myself beyond all hope of mercy; and why should I trouble myself further?" Like a condemned criminal who hears the hammers fitting up the scaffold, and gives himself up to silent despair, he feels, "I am doomed: it is all over with me." O my friend, it is not so; this is a lie of Satan's own invention. Whilst thou livest, there is hope. Whilst thou art yet in the land where Christ is preached, thou mayest come to Him and live. But deadness, sullenness, and obstinacy are thy worst enemies. Waters of enmity to God often run silently because they are so deep. The man has a settled enmity against God, and this makes him set his teeth, and defy the Almighty in grim determination to perish. God save you from this! May you be driven out of every peace except that peace which comes from God! To that I now come.

God alone can speak true peace to the soul. When once a soul begins to feel its sinfulness, and to tremble at the wrath to come, none but God can speak peace to it. Ministers cannot. I have often failed when I have desired to bring comfort to troubled hearts. Books cannot do it, not even the most wise and gracious of them. The Bible itself cannot do it, apart from the Spirit of God. The ordinances of God's house, whether they be baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or prayer, or preaching—none of these can bring peace to a heart apart from the still small voice of the Lord. I pray that none of you may rest in anything short of a divine assurance of salvation. See how the waves are tossing themselves on high! Hark to the howling of the wind! Rise, Peter, and bid the waves be quiet! Awake, John, and pour oil upon the waves! Ah, sirs! the apostles will themselves sink, unless a greater than they shall interpose. Only He who lay asleep near the tiller could say, "Peace, be still!" May He say that to everyone here who is troubled about his sin! The voice of the blood of Jesus speaks "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." We read that on the storm-tossed lake "there was a great calm." How great is the quiet of a soul which has seen and felt the power of the atoning sacrifice!

I have told you that only God can speak this peace; let me remind you that *He can give you that peace by speaking it.* One word from the Lord is the quietus of all trouble. No deed is needed, only a word. Peace has *not* now to be made: the making of peace was finished more than eighteen hundred years ago on yonder cross. The Lord Jesus, who was our peace, went up to the tree bearing our iniquities, and thus removing the dread cause of the great warfare between God and man. There He ended the quarrel of the covenant. Hearken to these words, "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him." He made peace by the blood of His cross. Through His death, being justified by faith, we have peace with God. "It is finished." Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Now is the way paved for man to come back to God by reconciliation through sacrifice. There is no more blood to be shed, nor sacrifice to be offered: peace is fully made, and it only remains for the Lord God to speak it to the conscience and heart by the Holy Ghost. Yet think not that for God to speak is a little thing. His voice is omnipotence in motion. He spake the universe out of nothing: He spake light out of darkness. Where the word of our King is, there is power. He speaks, and it is done. If He speaks peace, who can cause trouble? In Jesus Christ there is divine peace for the guilty soul. "Come unto Me," saith He, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." From a tempest of distress

to perfect peace, a word from the God of peace can lift us in an instant.

Sooner or later the Lord will speak peace to His own. How blessed are the *shalls* and *wills* of the Lord God!—"He will speak peace unto His people." Doubt it not. He will. He will. Some of you have lost your peace for a while; yet, if you are believers, "He will speak peace unto His people." You have come to Christ, and are trusting Him, but you do not enjoy such peace as you desire. Yet "He will speak peace unto His people." There may be a time of battling and of struggling, the noise of war may disturb the camp for months: but in the end "He will speak peace unto His people." I have seen some of the Lord's true people terribly harassed year after year. One for a very long time was in the dark—wrecked on a barbarous coast, and neither sun nor moon appearing. I do not excuse him for some of his despondency; there was a fault, undoubtedly, and there may also have been weakness of the brain; but he was a true child of God, and at length he came out into the light, and wrote a book which has cheered many. If peace comes not before, yet "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." The Lord will not put His child to bed in the dark: He will light his candle ere he sleeps the sleep of death. Sickness of body, and weakness of mind, or some other cause, may be a terrible kill-joy; but in the end "The Lord will speak peace unto His people." He cannot. finally leave a soul that trusts in Him. No believer shall die of despair. You may sink very low: but underneath are the everlasting arms, and these will bring you up again. Many women of a sorrowful spirit have a hard time of it, but yet the Lord has set a day in which He will give beauty for ashes. O captive daughter, thy chains last not for ever! Hold you on to your hope: the night is very dark, but the morning will surely come; for as God is light, so shall His children be.

Beloved, when the Lord does speak peace to His people, *what a peace it is!* It is sound and safe. You may have as much of it as you will, and suffer no harm. The peace of God is never presumptuous. It is a holy peace; and the more you have of it, the more you will strive to be like your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. It is a peace which rules the heart and mind, and not merely the face and the tongue. It is a peace that will rise superior to circumstances. You may be very poor; but you shall find an inward wealth of contentment. You may be lonely; but communion with God will bring you company. You may be very sick in body; but peace of soul enables a man to bear pain without complaining. There may even be a measure of depression of spirit about you, and yet an inward peace, "which will enable you to reason with yourself, and say, why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" If God gives you peace, the breathes peace into of earth or hell can cannot take it away. If God They that have [illegible] your soul, the roughest winds that it is the cannot blow that peace from you. the light of Gover enjoyed this peace will tell you as the courtiewn of heaven. They that walk in Paradise Ress countenance, at this moment, are which no t of a king, and for them there is a above; ngue can fully tell. Perfect peace brings a joy of to us. ier, Son, and Holy Ghost are all reconciled e is no war within: conscience is cleansed, and the heart relieved. There is no fear even of the arch-enemy below; he may grind his teeth at us, but he cannot destroy us. Even the world of nature is at peace with us. "For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee." "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." A deep peace, a high peace, a broad peace, an endless peace is ours. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." "Therefore being justified by faith, we have," in the most emphatic and unlimited sense, "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Beloved friends, do not be satisfied without the constant possession of unbroken peace. You may have it; you ought to have it. It will make you greater than princes, and richer than misers. This peace will shoe your feet for ways of obedience or suffering. "May the peace of God keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!"

II. Now we must come down from our elevation, to talk about a more humbling theme, WHAT WE FEAR MAY MAR THIS BLESSING OF PEACE. "He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints: *but let them not turn again to folly.*"

The grounds of a believer's peace are always the same, but a believer's enjoyment of that peace varies very greatly. I always have a right to the divine inheritance, but I do not always enjoy the fruits of that inheritance. Peace may be broken with the Christian, through great trouble, if his faith is not very strong. It need not be so; for some of those who have had the greatest fight of affliction have had the sweetest peace in Christ Jesus. Peace may be broken through some forms of disease, which prey upon the mind as well as the body; and when the mind grows weak and depressed from what are rather physical causes than spiritual ones, the infirmity of the flesh is apt to crush spiritual peace. Yet it is not always so; for sometimes, when heart and flesh have failed, yet God has been the strength of our heart, as He is our portion for ever. Inward conflict, too, may disturb our enjoyment of peace. When a man is struggling hard against a sin, when some old habit has to be hanged up before the Lord, when corruption grows exceedingly strong and vigorous, as at seasons it may do, the believer may not enjoy peace as he would wish. And yet I have known warring times when the fight within has not diminished my peace. "How so?" you may say. I have found peace in the very fact that I was fighting! I have seen clearly that if I were not a child of God, I should not struggle against sin. The very fact that I contend against sin, as against my deadliest foe, proves that I am not under the dominion of sin; and that fact brings to my soul a measure of peace. Satan, too—oh, it is hard to have peace under his attacks! He has a way of beating his hell-drum at a rate which will let no believer rest. He can inject the most profane thoughts; he can flutter us and worry us, by making us think that we are the authors of the thoughts which he fathers upon us—which are his, and not ours. It is a very glorious thing then, to be able to say, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy; though I fall, yet shall I rise again."

When the Lord hides His face, as He may do as

the result of grave offence that we have given Him, ah! then we cannot have peace. Peace runs out to a very low ebb when we are under withdrawals; and then we cry, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His feet!" We can never rest till we again behold the smilings of His face, and take our place among the children.

But, after all, the chief reason why a Christian loses his peace is because he "turns again to folly." What kind of folly? Folly is sin and error, and everything contrary to divine wisdom. I will briefly show you a few of the different shapes of this folly.

There is the folly of *hasty judgment*. Have you never judged without knowing and considering all the surroundings of the case? Have you not come to a wrong conclusion, when you have ventured to judge the dealings of God with you? You have said, "This cannot be wise, this cannot be right; at any rate, this cannot be a fruit of love"; but you have found out afterwards that you were quite mistaken, that your severest trial was sent in very faithfulness. Your rash judgment was most evidently folly; and if you turn again to such folly in your next season of sorrow, you will certainly lose your peace. What! will you measure the infinite wisdom of God by the foot-rule of your short-sighted policy? Are eternal purposes to be judged of according to the tickings of the clock? There can be no peace when we assume the judgment-throne, and dare accuse our Sovereign of unkindness or mistake.

> "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
> But trust Him for His grace."

Consider things in the long run when you would estimate the ways of God. Behold, He dwells in eternity, and His measures are only to be seen in the light of the endless future. Oh, that we could either judge the Lord's ways upon eternal principles, or leave off judging altogether! My soul, be thou as a little child before the Lord, and thou wilt find peace!

Another kind of folly is of like order: it is *repining, and quarrelling with the Most High*. Some are never pleased with God; how can He be pleased with them? There can be no use in contending with our Maker; for what are we as compared with Him? Let the grass contend with the scythe, or the tow fight with the flame; but let not man contend with God. Besides, who are you? "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" It is true you may be, like Job, terribly smitten, and brought very low, and you cannot understand the why and the wherefore of it; but I pray you bow your head in sweet submission, for your heavenly Father must be doing the best possible thing for you. Kick not against the pricks. When the ox, newly yoked to the plough, kicks against the goad, what is the result? It drives the goad into its own flank. It would not have been so hurt had it not defied the driver. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." No man, by quarrelling with God, can gain any advantage, for the right is on God's side, and eternal principles establish His government. When the barque wars with the rock, we know which will suffer. Yield thee, O my brother, yield thee to the Lord of love! Thine hope can only climb on bended knee; thy peace can only return with bowed head; for to proud rebellion there is no peace, since it is folly of the grossest kind.

Another kind of folly to which men often turn is that of *doubt and distrust*. What peace you have had has come by faith; and when faith departs, peace goes also. To doubt the Lord is folly; even the least degree of it is folly of the worst order. When you said, "God is true, and I will trust Him," then your peace was like a river. One who lay dying was in such joy that his friends said to him, "You used to be much tempted; how is it that you are so happy?" He replied, "This is the reason: it is written, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee.'" For the very reason that he trusts God, the Lord will keep him in perfect peace. Be satisfied with God, and you shall be satisfied in God. Go not back to your old doubts and fears, for they are as a thicket of thorns. It seems to me that some of you were born doubting, and have hardly left off ever since. Some professors never seem to be happy unless they are miserable. I hardly know whether to call some of you doubters or believers. Yet, I thank God that I hope you are really believers; but you are terrible old doubters still. I am persuaded you will get to heaven, but you will not have much of heaven on the road unless you shake off this pernicious habit of distrust, Who ever gained anything by doubting the Lord, questioning His promises, or distrusting His providence? He abideth faithful: He will never deny Himself. Believe in Him, and so shall you be established. He will speak peace unto His people; but let them not turn again unto this inexcusable folly of doubting the word of Him who cannot lie.

Some turn to the old folly of *looking for life upon legal principles*. You remember how Paul seemed astonished at this perversity. He exclaimed, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?" He demanded of them, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" When you try to draw your comfort from what you are, and what you do, you are foolish. Self is at best a dry well. To seek consolation from your own consecration or sanctification is risky work. You must not turn your sanctification into an antichrist by putting it in the place of Christ. "Be ye holy," saith He, "for I am holy"; but He never bade you trust in your holiness. However sanctified you may become, even if you could attain to perfection, it would be wise to say with Job, "Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul." Your wisdom is to stand upon the finished work of Christ. If you get off from that ground, you have placed yourself upon the ice; and if it does not melt from under you, you will yourself slip down upon it. Mix anything of man with the work of the Lord, and you have turned again to folly. It brought you into great bondage years ago, and it will do so again, if you return to it. Hope in Christ, and in nothing else but Christ. When your expectation is in the Lord alone, then will your peace be like a river.

Some lose their peace by turning again to the folly of *intellectual speculation*. Some of our friends, who once walked in the light, as God is in the light, and were as happy as all the birds of the air, have now lost their joy, because they have read a pernicious book, which started for them a whole host of difficulties, of which they never dreamed before. Would you like me to answer those difficulties? Suppose I took the trouble to do so, and succeeded, what would happen? You would read another book to-morrow, and come to me with another set of

doubts; and if we were to slay all these, you would simply invite another band of invaders to land on the shores of your mind. Therefore I decline to begin the endless task. At Mentone, the trouble of some of our friends is to catch the mosquitoes, which worry them. But there is little or no use in it; for if you catch a dozen of these little pests, twenty-four will come to the funeral. It is just the same with these intellectual difficulties; you may, by overcoming some of them, make room for more of a worse kind. No fact, however certain, is beyond a critic's questioning. I have done with the whole band of quibblers. People say, "Have you seen the new book? It is terribly unsettling." It will not unsettle me: first, because I know what I know; and secondly, because I do not care one atom what the unbeliever has to say. I care, indeed, so little that I am not curious even to know what his craze may happen to be. "I know whom I have believed." I am going no further than that which the Holy Spirit has taught me through the infallible Word. What is more, I am not going to waste my time by reading what every doubter may please to write. I have had enough of these poisonous drugs, and will have no more. Does any one say, "We ought to read everything"? Nay, nay, if I go out to dinner, and there should happen to come to table a joint that is far gone, I let it alone. When the knife goes into it, the perfume betrays it, and I do not pass up my plate. Others may carve slices from the carrion of unbelief; but having long eaten sweet gospel food, I cannot bring my soul to feed on that which is unholy, and only fit for dogs. That which denies Scripture, and dishonours the blood of the Lord Jesus, is fitter for burning than reading. If you have once been staggered by modern thought, do not turn again to that folly. Be not like silly people, who seem to fall down in the mud for the sake of being brushed. Why desire to be befogged and bewildered for the sake of getting set in the right way after long straying? Stick to the Scriptures. When you have read so much of your Bibles that there is nothing more in them, then you may devote your time and study to some other book; but for the present keep to the book whose author is the All-wise Jehovah. Between the covers of this book you shall find all wisdom, and I pray you turn not again to the folly which opposes the infallible, and censures the perfect. God grant us grace to maintain our peace by never turning again to the folly of human wisdom!

But the worst form of folly is *sin*. Scripture continually calls sinners fools; and so they are. What a touching pleading there is about this use of language! "God will speak peace unto His people; but let them not turn again to folly"; as much as to say, "to turn aside will not only grieve Me, but it will harm *you*. Sin is not only fault, but folly. It will be to your own injury as well as to My displeasure." Dear child of God, are you out in the storm just now? Have you no rest? Let me whisper in your ear. Is there not a cause? Somebody on board your vessel has brought this storm upon you. Where is he? He is not among the regular sailors that work the ship; he is neither captain nor mate; but he is a stranger. Down under the hatches is a man named Jonah; is he the cause of the tempest? "No," you say, "he is a good fellow, for he paid his fare." This makes me feel all the more suspicious. He is the cause of the mischief. You will never get peace until the Jonah of sin is overboard. Cast him into the sea, and it will be calm unto you. Many a child of God harbours a traitor, and hardly knows that he is doing so; and the Lord is at war with him because of the harboured rebel. When Joab pursued Sheba, the son of Bichri, he came to the city of Abel, where Sheba had taken shelter. A wise woman came to him out of the city, and pleaded for the people. Joab explained to her that he warred not with the city, but with the rebel; and he added, "Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city." Then they cut off the head of Sheba, and cast it out to Joab, and he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. God is besieging you with trials and distresses, turning His batteries against your walls; and there is no chance of any peace until the traitorous sin shall be given up to vengeance. I do not know what particular sin it may be, but the head of it must be thrown over the wall; and then the warriors of the Lord will go their way. Bring forth the Achan, and the accursed thing, and let all Israel stone him with stones. Search and see! Arrest the hidden foe! "Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee?" God help us to institute a solemn search this morning, and may we discover the intruder, and destroy him!

Beloved, I pray that no one of us may go back to folly. If we have ever tasted the peace of God, and communion with God, can we leave it for earthly joys? Can we quit the banquets of infinite love for the coarse pleasures of sin? God forbid! Remember all the sorrow which sin has cost you already. Take not this viper a second time to your bosom. We were drowned in tears, and sunken in distress when we found ourselves guilty of sin. Further and further from it may we fly; but never, never may we turn back! Remember what it cost your Lord to make you free from the consequences of former folly; never return to it. He must needs die to save us from our folly; shall we count His death as nothing? Bethink you what tugs the Spirit of God has had with us to bring us so far on our journey towards heaven; are we now willing to turn our backs on God and holiness? Consider also what lieth just beyond. Look a little way before you. Think of the street of gold, the river which never dries, the trees which bear eternal fruit, the harps of ceaseless melody. Beloved, we cannot turn again to folly! O God, do not permit us to do so! Grant us Thy peace, that by it we may be kept, both in heart and mind, loyal to Thee! Peace spoken to the soul by the Holy Spirit is the sure preventive of turning again to folly. Be sure that, if it passeth all understanding, it also conquereth all folly. With minds at perfect peace with God, we set our face like a flint, and press on towards the haven where peace will never end. Glory be to God, who will bring us safely there! Amen.

CONCERNING PRAYER

"Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me."—Psalm lxxxvi. 6, 7.

WHEN I was reading this eighty-sixth Psalm, I reminded you that the title of it is "A prayer of David." It is rightly named "*A prayer*," for it is very especially filled with supplication. There are four other psalms each called by the name *Tephillah*, or "prayer," but this deserves to be distinguished from the rest and known as "the prayer *of David*," even as the ninetieth Psalm is known as "the prayer of Moses." It savours of David. The man of sincerity, of ardour, of trials, of faults, and of great heart, pleads, sobs, and trusts through all the verses of this psalm.

Note one thing about this remarkable prayer of David—it is almost entirely devoid of poetry. Men use grand, studied, rapturous, and poetical expressions in their praises; and they do well. Let God be praised with the noblest thoughts, as well as the most charming music. But when a man comes to prayer, and that prayer is out of the depths of sorrow, he has no time or thought for poetry. He goes straight at the matter in hand, and pleads with God in downright plainness of speech. You shall notice that in happy prayers, in times of joy, men use similes, and metaphors, and tropes, and symbols, and the like; but when it comes to wrestling with God in times of agony, there is no beauty of speech: parable and poesy are laid aside. The man's language is in sackcloth and ashes; or, better still, it stands stripped for wrestling, every superfluous word being laid aside. Then the cry is heard, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." That is not poetry, but it is a great deal better. Throughout this psalm David is a plain-dealer, speaking with God in downright earnest. He has got his grip of the covenant angel, and he will not let Him go. Men cannot study where to put their feet prettily when they are wrestling: they have to do the best they can to hold their ground, and fling their antagonist. In such a prayer-psalm as this, there is no studying of language: it is the pouring out of the heart as the heart boils over, the utterance of the desires as they bubble up from the soul's deeps, with an entire carelessness as to the fashion of the expression.

This ought to be a hint to you when you pray. Do not study how to arrange your words when you come before the Lord. Leave the expression to the occasion: it shall be given you in the selfsame hour what you shall speak. When your heart is like a boiling geyser, let it steam aloft in pillars of prayer. The overflowing of the soul is the best praying in the world. Prayers that are indistinct, inharmonious, broken, made up of sighs and cries, and damped with tears—these are the prayers which win with heaven. Prayers that you cannot pray, pleadings too big for utterance, prayers that stagger the words, and break their backs, and crush them down—these are the very best prayers that God ever hears.

So, you say, dear friends, that you cannot pray; you are so troubled that you cannot speak. Well, then, copy the beggars in the street. They must not beg, for that is contrary to law. But a man sits down, and writes on a state, "I am starving," and he looks as white as a sheet. What a picture of misery! He is not begging; not he; but the money comes dropping into the old hat. So, when you cannot pray, I believe that your silent display of utter inability is the best sort of praying. The blessing comes when we sit down before the Lord, and in sheer desperation expose our spiritual need.

I am not going to dwell longer upon that matter, but will simply show you what was the nature of David's prayer. There are two things which David must have when he prays—two great things after which he strains with his whole heart. The first is *personal intercourse with God*. Read that sixth verse: "Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications." And, in the second place, he must have *personal answers from God*. He is not content to pray without prayer having some practical result. So, the seventh verse is, "In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me."

I. First, then, David in his prayer sought, beyond all things, to have PERSONAL INTERCOURSE WITH GOD. To my mind that is just the distinction between prayer before conversion, and prayer after it. I often bring that out when I am seeing enquirers who have been religiously brought up. This is the sort of dialogue we hold: "You used to pray, did you?" "Yes, sir; I could not have gone to sleep if I had not said my prayers." "Was there any difference between that kind of praying and what you now practise?" The reply usually is, "Well, sir, I do not now call the first praying at all. I used to say some good words that I had been taught, but I did not say them *to anybody;* now I speak to God, and I have the feeling that He is hearing what I say, and that He is present with me in my room." It is the realization of that second Person as really present, the consciousness of the divine presence, which makes prayer real. What can be the good of going through a form of prayer? Can there be any charm in a set of sentences? If you are not speaking to God, what are you doing? I should say that a prayer would do as much good repeated backwards as forwards, if it is not spoken to God. We have heard of instances of grown up persons keeping on saying the prayer which their mother taught them, and asking that God would bless their father and mother, after they had been dead twenty years. All sorts of absurdities, I do not doubt, have come from the long-continued and thoughtless repetition of mere words. I am not now speaking against the use of a form of prayer, if you feel that you can pray with it; but the point is, that you must be speaking *to God*, and you must have personal intercourse with the invisible One, or else there is nothing whatever in your prayer, whether it be composed on the spot, or repeated from memory.

Note well, that David, while he thus sought to have dealings with God, to come to close grips with the Lord in the act of prayer, was not presumptuously bold. *He perceives the condescension of such fellowship*

on God's part. This may be seen in the psalm. If you have the psalm open before you, kindly begin with the first line: "Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me." As if he said, "Thou art so high that, unless Thou shalt stoop, and stoop very low, Thou canst not commune with me. But, Lord, do thus stoop. Bow down Thine ear. From Thy lofty throne, higher than an angel's wing can reach, stoop Thou down and listen to me—poor, feeble me." This is what we must have in order to true prayer. Our prayer must climb to that great ear which hears the symphonies of the perfected, and the hallelujahs of cherubim and seraphim. Is there not something very wonderful about this, that we, who are both insignificant and unworthy, should be able to speak to Him who made the stars, and upholds all things by the word of His power? Yet this is the essence of prayer: to rise, in human feebleness to talk with divine omnipotence; in nothingness to deal with all-sufficiency. You cannot venture upon this without the Mediator, Christ; but with the Mediator, what a wonderful fellowship a worm of the dust is permitted to enjoy with the infinite God! What condescension there is in a sinner communing with the thrice-holy Jehovah! Seek after this intercourse; nothing can excel it.

As you further read in this psalm, you will notice that David, in order to obtain this high privilege, *pleads his need of it.* He cries, "I am poor and needy": as much as to say, "Lord, do come to me, do let me have personal intercourse with Thee, for nothing else will serve my turn. I am so poor that Thou alone canst enrich me; I am so feeble, that Thou alone canst sustain me. Thou hast made me: Lord, forsake not the work of Thine own hands! I, Thy child, am full of wants, which Thou only canst supply. Oh, deal with me in great compassion!" Virtually his plea is,

> "Do not turn away Thy face,
> Mine's an urgent, pressing case."

Now, is not this very encouraging, that your claim upon God should lie in your need? You cannot say to God, "Lord, look at me, and commune with me, for I am somebody"; but you may say, "Lord, commune with me, for I am nobody." You may not cry, "Lord, help me, for I can do much"; but you may cry, "Lord help me, for I can do nothing." Your need is your most prevalent plea with God. When you are desiring to pray such a prayer as consists in intercourse with God, it is great condescension on His part to draw near to you; but He will condescend to your needs, and come near, because your misery needs His presence. God will not condescend to your pride, but He will bow His ear to your grief. If you set up a claim to merit, He will turn His back upon you; but if you come to Him with a claim of necessity, which is merely a beggar's claim when he asks for alms—an appeal to the charity of God's sovereign love, then He will turn about and hear your prayer. Come, my heart, art thou not encouraged to come near to God, seeing He hath respect to thy low estate, and pitieth thy sorrows?

Read on, and you will find that David, in order to come into intercourse with God, next *pleads his personal consecration*: "Preserve my soul; for I am holy." By this I understand him to mean, that he belongs to God; that he is consecrated and dedicated to the divine service. Should not the priest handle the golden bowl? Should not the priest enter into the holy place? And should not God therefore come and deal with the man who is dedicated to His use, and set apart to His service? My dear brothers and sisters, can you say to-night that you live for God? Do you recognize that you are not your own, but bought with a price? Well, there dwells an argument in that fact—a reason why the Lord God should come and take hold of you, and link Himself with you. You are the vessels of His sanctuary, you are the instruments of His divine service, you are consecrated to His honour, and you may expect Him therefore to touch you with His hand, to employ you in His work, and to identify Himself with you in your circumstances and necessities.

Moreover, David, anxious to use every argument, *pleads his trust:* "Save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee." This is a conquering plea: "Lord, my sole reliance is on Thee; come to me, then, and justify the confidence which Thou Thyself hast inspired." "Without faith it is impossible to please God"; but when God has given us faith, then we may be quite sure that we do please Him; and if we please Him, then, like Enoch, who pleased Him, we shall walk with Him. You may expect, in prayer, to find God drawing near to you, if in very deed you are holding to Him as the one ground of your confidence. Brethren, are you sure that you do trust in God? You answer, "Yes." Ah! then let me say to you, that you shall have a reward, and that reward will probably be that you will be taught to trust Him more. That you may rise to a larger faith you will probably suffer greater troubles than you have hitherto known. The reward of service is more service. A good soldier, who has fought through many battles, and won many victories, shall be sent out to the wars next time his master's forces want a captain. You, having already trusted, shall have your faith further tried, in order that you may glorify God, and so arrive at a greater faith. Do you not see that faith largely lies in the realization that God is, and that God is near? And if you so realize God when you bow the knee in prayer, you may expect to have sweet intercourse with Him. Many years ago I trusted God about many things, and I found Him true; but of late I have had to take a step in advance, and trust God wholly and alone, in the teeth of all appearances. I have been called almost literally to stand alone in contending against error; and in this I have distinctly taken a nearer place in prayer with the God whom I serve in my spirit. It is very well to rest on God when you have other props, but it is best of all to rest on Him when every prop is knocked away. To hang on the bare arm of God is glorious dependence; and he that has once done it, cannot think of ever going back to trust in men again. "No," says he, "I tried you once, and you failed me. I had you with me, and I trusted God in you; but now that you have turned from me, I will trust God alone without you, even though you now come back to the man you deserted." Dependence upon the Lord creates a glorious independence of man. Verily, it is true, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm"; but verily, verily, it is true, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Part of that blessedness will be found in the communion which such a man enjoys with God whenever he approaches him in prayer.

Still, following the same line, notice that David

pleads for God's presence because he is God's servant. He says here, "Save Thy servant." A servant has liberty to enquire as to his master's will, and he is justified in asking to see his Lord. If he is employed upon his master's business, he says, "I want orders. I wish to tell my master my difficulties, and to seek from him a supply for those necessities which his service will bring upon me." You feel that he has a good and sufficient plea when he urges this request. Even so, if you can honestly feel that you are spending your strength in the Lord's service, you, also, may lawfully expect that, when you draw near to Him in prayer, your Master will speak to you as His servant, and He that has sent you will commune with you.

David urges yet another reason why just now he should see God, namely, that *he is always in prayer*: "I cry unto Thee daily." The Lord will hear your prayer, my dear hearer, to-night, if you never prayed before: I am quite sure of it. But I am still more sure that, if you have been long in the habit of prayer, it is not possible that the Father of mercies should cease to hear you. Oh, the sweet delights of constancy in prayer! The habit of prayer is charming, but the spirit of prayer is heavenly. Be always praying. Is that possible? Some have realized it, till the whole of the engagements of the day have been ablaze with prayer. God bring us each one into that condition! Then we need not barely hope that He will have intercourse with us, for we shall be already enjoying His presence and His fellowship. Blessed are we when prayer surrounds us like an atmosphere. Then we are living in the presence of God; we are continually conversing with Him. May such be our lot! May we climb to the top of the mount of communion, and may we never come down from it!

David also tells the Lord that, when he could not attain to the nearness he desired, *yet he struggled after it, and strained after it.* Is not this the meaning of the expression, "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant, for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul"? As much as if he said, "Lord, when I cannot climb the hill of fellowship, I labour to do so. If I cannot enter into Thy presence, I groan until I do so." We ought either to be rejoicing in the Lord, or pining after Him! Ask God to make you miserable, unless His conscious presence makes you happy. Unless His love is shed abroad in your heart, to be the beginning of heaven, may you mourn His absence as a very hell to your soul! Often I pray—

> "Oh, make my heart rejoice, or ache;
> Resolve each doubt for me;
> Lord, if it be not broken, break;
> And heal it if it be."

We want one of the two—either to commune with God, or else to sigh and cry till we do so. We must hunger and thirst after righteousness if we are not filled. To be in a state of content without fellowship with God would be a terrible condition indeed.

Now, when a man's daily cries and inward strivings are after God, he may certainly expect that God in prayer will have intercourse with him. But again, I say, does it not seem extraordinary that you and I, insignificant persons, who can have no claim upon the great Maker of the universe, should yet be permitted to come to His courts—aye, even to come to Himself through Christ Jesus, and speak with Him as a man speaketh with his friend? Do not think that Abraham, when he stood before the Lord, and pleaded with Him, as one man does with another, was singularly favoured above the rest of the elect family. It was a high favour, I cannot tell you how great; but such honour have all the saints. There are occasions with all His people when the Lord brings them very near, and speaks with them, and they with Him, when His presence is to them as real as the all-pervading air, and they are as much rejoiced in it as in the presence of father, or wife, or child, or friend.

Still David, conscious of the great privilege which he sought, was not content without pleading the master argument of all: *he pleads the great goodness of the Lord.* Read it in verse five: "For Thou, Lord, art good." As much as to say—If Thou wert not good Thou wouldst never listen to me. I am, as it were, a noxious insect which a man might far sooner crush than speak with; and yet Thou art so good, my God, that instead of setting Thy foot on me, Thou dost lift me up and talk with me. Who thinks of an angel talking with an emmet? That would be nothing; here is Jehovah speaking with a creature which is crushed before the moth. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant." He lets an unworthy creature tell out its heart to Him, and He bows His ear, and listens as earnestly as if there were no other voice in heaven to command His thought. He gives his whole attention to the feeble cry of an unworthy one. Such an amazing fact could not happen unless it were written, "For Thou, Lord, art good."

Ah! but besides that, there is sin in us. I can understand the great God forgetting our littleness, and bowing down to it; but for the holy God not to be held off by our sinfulness, this is a greater wonder still. But then the verse says He is "ready to forgive." Ah, yes! when some of us think of what we were, we must be drowned in amazement that ever we should be permitted to commune with God. Yonder is a man who could once swear at an awful rate, and now God listens to his voice in prayer. Another was a Sabbath-breaker, a neglecter of the Word of God, a despiser of every holy and pure thing, and yet he is now permitted to come into intimate friendship with the Most High. It is very marvellous, is it not?

Remember, none ever washed Christ's feet except a woman that was a sinner. Our Lord selects those that have been the greatest sinners to come into the nearest communion with Himself. It may be He has raised up some sister here, who was once a tempter of others, to become a mighty intercessor in prayer for the salvation of others. It may be that some brother here, who once—ah! but he is ashamed to remember what he was—has now become mighty in supplication; and, like Elijah, can open or shut the windows of heaven. Oh, the strangeness of Almighty grace! Let God's name be magnified for ever and ever.

Thus I have enlarged on the first thought that, in prayer, it is vital to us really to speak with God. Before I leave it, I want to pass a question round the place. Do you, my dear hearers, all pray so as to speak with God? If not, what does it mean? If you merely repeat good words, what is the use of it? You might as well stand on a hill and talk to the moon, as kneel down and hurry through the Lord's Prayer, and then think that you have prayed. I tell you, you might better do the first than the second, for you would not insult God in that case; whereas you do insult Him in every one of those holy words which you use without thought, heart, and faith. Think how you would like your own child every morning to

come to you, and repeat a certain set of words without meaning anything thereby. You would say, "There, child, there, I have heard that often enough. Come to me no more with your empty noise." You would not care for vain repetitions. But when your boy or girl says, "Father, I need such a thing, please give it me," you hearken to the child's words. It may be that you have not enough of this world's goods to be very anxious that your children should come with large petitions; but if you were sufficiently rich, you would say, "That is right, dear child. Is there anything else you want? Tell me what it is. I will right gladly give you all things that are needful for you." You would wish your child's request to be an intelligent one, and then you would gladly attend to it. If your prayer does not come from your heart it will not go to God's heart; and if it does not bring you near to God, so that you are speaking to Him, you have simply wasted your breath. You have done worse than nothing, for in all likelihood you have daubed your conscience over with the notion that you have prayed, and so you have even done yourself serious harm by a flattering deceit. Oh, that God would save you from being so foolish!

II. And now I come to the second point, and I pray God to give me strength to speak upon it, and give you grace to hear it. Not at any great length, but with much earnestness, I have to remind you that David, in his prayer, desired PERSONAL ANSWERS FROM GOD. When we pray, we expect God to hear us, even as David says, "In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me."

I must not speak for all Christians in this matter; but I may speak for myself and for many dear brethren in the faith, and I must boldly say that we expect the Lord to hear our prayers; nay, we are sure that He does so. We hear our fellow-Christians say, when we tell them of instances in which God has heard our prayers, "How very extraordinary!" And we look at them and say, "Extraordinary!" Has it become an extraordinary thing for God to be true to His own promise? I like better the remark of the good old lady, who, when her prayer was answered, was asked, "Does it not surprise you?" She said, "No, it does not surprise me; it is just like Him." If any one of you had a promise from a friend that, upon your sending in a note, he would give you such and such a thing; if you sent the request, and he fulfilled his promise, would you say, "I am greatly surprised at his action"? No, no: you believe that your friend means what he says, and you look for him to keep his word. O child of God, deal with God on those terms. The wonder was, that He should make the promise at all; but when He has made the promise, it is not wonderful that He should keep it. He expects you to ask, and He waits to give.

A promise is like a cheque. If I have a cheque, what do I do with it? Suppose I carried it about in my pocket, and said, "I do not see the use of this bit of paper, I cannot buy anything with it," a person would say, "Have you been to the bank with it?" "No, I did not think of that." "But it is payable to your order. Have you written your name on the back of it?" "No, I have not done that." "And yet you are blaming the person who gave you the cheque? The whole blame lies with yourself. Put your name at the back of the cheque, go with it to the bank, and you will get what is promised to you." A prayer should be the presentation of God's promise endorsed by your personal faith. I hear of people praying for an hour together. I am very pleased that they can; but it is seldom that I can do so, and I see no need for it. It is like a person going into a bank with a cheque, and stopping an hour. The clerks would wonder. The common-sense way is to go to the counter and show your cheque, and take your money, and go about your business. There is a style of prayer which is of this fine practical character. You so believe in God that you present the promise, obtain the blessing, and go about your Master's business. Sometimes a flood of words only means excusing unbelief. The prayers of the Bible are nearly all short ones: they are short and strong. The exceptions are found in places of peculiar difficulty. like that of Jacob, when he cried,

> "With Thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day."

As a general rule, faith presents its prayer, gets its answer, and goes on its way rejoicing.

We expect our God to answer our prayer all the more surely when we are in trouble. David so expected: "In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me." Trouble is sent to make us pray. When we pray, the prayer becomes the solace of our trouble; and when the prayer is heard, it becomes the salvation out of our trouble. Many of you would be out of trouble quickly if you prayed. "Sir, I have been doing my best." And what is your best? A better thing than your best is to wait upon the Lord. Often and often trial has to rap our fingers to make us let go our harmful confidences, and turn to the Lord. With our vain-confidence we are like a madman with a razor: the more we grasp it, the more it cuts us. Drop the deadly self-trust; trust in God, and look to Him, and your deliverance will speedily come to you. If you should have no answer at any other time, you will assuredly be heard in the time of trouble if you trust in the Lord.

Now, if we expect God to answer us, we do so on very good grounds. There are certain natural reasons. I was turning over in my mind the question, "Why do I pray? Why have I any reason to believe that God hears me?" And I thought to myself, "Well, on natural grounds I have a right to believe that God will hear prayer, or *otherwise why is prayer commanded?*" The Scripture is full of prayer. It is an institution of the old covenant, as well as of the new, and yet it is a piece of folly if God does not hear it.

"Oh," says somebody, "but it does you good to pray, even though there may be no such a thing as God's hearing prayer." It might do an idiot good to pray when he knew there was no hearing of prayer on God's part; but not being an idiot myself, I could not perform such a stupid exercise. I would as soon sit on a five-barred gate, and whistle to the hills, as offer prayer if I did not hope to be heard. If there is no God that hears prayer, I shall not pray, nor will any other rational being. Show prayer to be unheard of God, and you have shown it to be a folly. Show prayer to be a folly, and who will pursue it? Does God invite us to pray? Does He command us to pray? Are there many injunctions of this kind—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint"; "Pray without ceasing"; and so on? Then prayer must be heard of God. How would it be with you if you said to a number of poor people, "Come round to my gate to-morrow, and I will relieve your distresses?" Would you not intend to relieve their

distresses when you said so? I cannot imagine that you would be so diabolical as to keep on saying, "Come to my house. Whenever you are hungry, come to my table. Whenever you need clothes, come to my door, and ask"; all the while saying to yourself, "But I do not intend to give you anything. You may come, and ring the bell as long as you like; it will be an exercise for you, but I shall take no notice of your appeals." It would be a most shocking and disgraceful mockery of misery. God will not serve us in that fashion. The very institution of prayer gives us the assurance that God intends to hear and to answer.

Observe, again, that *prayer has been universal among all the saints.* There have been saints of different moulds and temperaments, but they have all prayed. Some of them have been, like Heman and Asaph, masters of song, and they have prayed; others could not sing, but they have all prayed. To-day you may meet with all sorts of Christians, holding many kinds of doctrines, but they all pray; and what is most curious, they all pray alike, too. You can scarcely detect a difference when they pray.

"The saints in prayer appear as one,
In word, and deed, and mind."

A man may preach doctrine contrary to the grace of God; but get him on his knees, and he prays to God for grace, as heartily as John Calvin himself. We are one at the mercy-seat. Whatever doctrinal views we may hold, when we plead with the living God, in the power of the Holy Ghost, we are poured into one mould. How is this? If, all the ages through, saints have prayed, have they all been fools? Have they all exercised themselves in a way that was utterly useless and absurd? Do not believe it!

Note again, that *the more godly and holy a man is, the more he prays.* You never heard yet that a man began to backslide, or that a sober man became a drunkard, through praying too much. Did you ever hear of a person becoming unkind to his wife, ungenerous to the poor, negligent of public worship, or guilty of grievous sin, through being too much in prayer? No; the case is the reverse. As the man loves God more, and becomes more like Christ, he takes greater delight in prayer. That cannot be an idle and useless exercise which the best of men have followed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If there be a possibility of error, we err in the best of company: for yonder comes the Lord Jesus Himself from His lonely haunt, with the burrs of the heather from the mountain-side sticking to His garments. He has spent all night in agonizing prayer. He will not open His mouth to preach to the multitude till first of all He has received a new anointing from His Father's hand in secret fellowship with heaven. Our Master and His best disciples have abounded in prayer.

Well, dear friends, these are natural reasons; and there are a great many more, if you will think them out.

But, if you turn to Scriptural reasons, why was there a mercy-seat if there is nothing in prayer? Why does the throne of grace still remain as a permanent institution, of which Paul says, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace," unless there is a reality in it? Tell me, why is Christ the way to the mercy-seat? Why is He Himself the great Intercessor and Mediator, if there is nothing in prayer? The Holy Ghost helpeth our infirmities in prayer; surely there must be something effectual where He lends His aid. What! is He, after all, helping us to do a thing which produces no result?—helping us to present petitions which will never reach the ear of God? Tell that to the philosophers; we are not so credulous.

For, once more, we know that God hears prayer, because *we have met with multitudes of His people who can tell of answers to prayer.* What is more, we are ourselves among that number. Looking back on my diary, I find it studded with answers to prayer. Often when I have talked with friends of an evening, telling them a few cases in which God has heard my cries in time of need, they have said, "Have you written these down?" "Well, no, I cannot say that I have." "Oh," says one, "pray do not let such facts be lost." I have to reply that many cases of answered prayer are quite beyond the belief of average people. I know them to be true, but I do not expect others to believe my tale. When William Huntington wrote his *Bank of Faith*, some people called it a "Bank of Nonsense." I could write twenty *Banks of Faith*, and every word should be as sure as an honest man could write; but the only result would be, that people would say, "Oh, well, you know, that is the result of the good man's fanaticism." The moment that the moderns do not like to believe a thing, they call it fanatical. If we were put into a witness-box to-morrow, our testimony would have weight with the court; but yet, the moment we talk about God's hearing prayer, oh, then we are romancing, and our witness is not to be received. But, brothers and sisters, we bear a true witness, whether men receive it or not. I solemnly declare that no fact is better proved by my experience than this, that the Lord hears the prayers of His believing people. You, each one, will know for himself, or herself, whether there is a God that hears prayer. Does He answer your petitions? Brethren, you are sure that He does, and at the asking of the question you bow your heads and say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." My dear brother, William Olney, sits here among us: have we not prayed him twice back from the gates of the grave? He lives as an instance of answered prayer. There is not a stone or a beam about this great Tabernacle but has been an answer to our prayers. In days when, as a congregation, we were few and feeble, we ventured on the serious enterprise of building this great house, and we prayed it up stone by stone, to the praise and glory of God. If we who worship beneath this dome did not believe in prayer, the stones out of the wall would cry out against us.

But I hear a voice saying, "There are so many difficulties about prayer being heard." Are there? The farther I go in this life, the more difficulties I am informed of, though I should not have discovered them myself. I am assured that there are great difficulties about eating, breathing, and sleeping. As to the very air, I do not know what it is not full of: it teems with the seeds of disease, and the wonder is that we live at all. But we do live, do we not? and we shall eat our suppers to-night despite the difficulties in connection with food. As to the difficulties connected with prayer, they are altogether philosophical difficulties, and by no means practical ones. If you are philosophers, you may weary your heads about them; but if you are simple, practical people, you may pray, and receive the blessing.

"Aye, but the power of prayer with God supposes that God may change." Well, our doing anything

supposes *that*, but it is a mere supposition. Your even walking home to-night might raise a difficulty as to the decrees of God; but it is a non-existent difficulty. After you have entertained it as long as you like, you will find that you have entertained a shadow. Suppose that you leave off supposing, and just do as God tells you, and see whether it does not work. When you find that it does practically work, let other people enjoy the difficulties. I do not eat meat; but if I did, I should always feel quite satisfied to let my dogs have the bones: the meat would satisfy me. If there are any difficulties about prayer, the dogs may have them—I mean the philosophers; but as for us, simple Christian people, we are satisfied with the meat of the precious fact that prayer brings every blessing from above. We pray, and God hears us, and that is enough for us. Our God does not change His will, and yet He wills a change in answer to prayer.

I have done when I have made this further remark. I cannot expect any man to believe that he can commune with God, or that God will in very deed hear his prayer, and grant him his desire, unless he has been led personally to try it. But if, by the Spirit of God, he has been led to seek after God, and to draw near to God, I shall have no need of further arguments with him. That man has now entered upon a new life, in which he will be capable of understanding new things. Until he does enter upon that life, he is spiritually deaf, and blind; and what can he know about spiritual realities? Our Lord has said to us, "Ye must be born again." When we are born again, then the life within turns toward the life of God, and has fellowship with God, and God answers to it, and the desire of the godly one is granted. Oh! the honour of communion with God! Happy beings who enjoy it! How unspeakable the privilege of pouring out your hearts before God! Delight yourselves therein before you fall asleep this night. Oh, the holy quietude which it brings! You have not an ounce of care to carry, because all your burden is, in prayer and supplication, laid on Him that careth for you! Oh, the love that dwells in the heart of the man who draws near to God in prayer! You cannot love God at a distance. You must draw nearer, and nearer, or love will not rest. As when one comes into the sunshine, he feels the warmth, so when we come nearer to God, we have more joy in Him. Keep near to God; abound in prayer; let your supplications be instant and constant; and you will be sure that the Father Himself hears your cries!

Oh, that some here who never prayed would begin at once! Trust in Jesus, the Intercessor, and let that trust show itself by pleading the merit of His blood in earnest prayer. Oh, that you would now begin that holy life of prayer which shall lead up to the eternal life of praise at the right hand of God. Amen.

THE LAST CENSUS

"The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there.—Psalm lxxxvii. 6.

SEVERAL times, according to the record of Scripture, there was a census taken of the people of God. When Jacob went down into Egypt all his offspring were numbered, and they were three score and ten souls. How small, then, the visible Church of Christ! It could be contained within a single tent; it had sprung of but a solitary man. All those, then, who feared Jehovah, so far as it is known to us, were of the race of Jacob. There was another census taken when the people came up out of Egypt, and if you read in the earlier chapters of the Book of Numbers you will be astonished at the wonderful multiplication which had taken place in the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. Truly, the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied. There were six hundred thousand footmen, all prepared for battle, besides women and children, and aged men who were exempt from the toils of warfare. There was another census taken after the people had been thirty-eight years in the wilderness. Through their sin they had not been multiplied. So many had fallen in the wilderness, that notwithstanding the natural increase, the population stood at very nearly the same rate, or—taking the armed men as the standard—about two thousand less than it was when they first entered into the howling wilderness. You have further on in history another instance of the taking of the census, or rather of an attempt to do it, when David commanded Joab, the captain of the host, to go through all the tribes, and number the people from Dan even to Beersheba. The people were God's people. When He numbered them well and good; but none but the Sovereign Power has a right to take the census of the people. David, forgetting that he was only God's viceroy, that he stood not as king in Israel, except as under the constitution which God had established, presumes to invade the priestly prerogative and commit to Joab the Levitical office of numbering the people, and that without offering the shekels of sanctuary or giving the tribute of redemption. So flagrant was the breach of the laws of Israel, that even Joab was quick to remonstrate. But ere he could effect the task, the Word of God had come out against him, and three days of pestilence, or three years of famine, or a period of flight before their enemies, who should defeat them in war, were offered to him as dread alternatives for the punishment of his sin. So did God seem to say, "Jehovah shall write up the people, but David shall not." God shall count His redeemed, and number His elect, but man shall not venture to touch the mysterious roll. None but the Lamb shall take that book and open every seal. That Lamb's book of life is not to be read except by the eyes of Him who bought the people with His blood; nor are the people to pass under any hand to be counted except under the hand of Him that telleth them, even the great Shepherd Himself. My brethren according to the text, there is one day to be a great census taken of the Church of God. It is concerning that one census, final and decisive, that I shall have to speak this morning. May God grant that of all

of us it may be said, when the Lord writeth up the people, "This man was born there."

Concerning this writing up of the census I shall take four or five points. First, we shall notice *what this writing will involve* "when the Lord writeth up the people"; secondly, *whose names will not be found written in the census;* thirdly, *whose names will be there;* fourthly, *who will write up the people;* and then, lastly, *why will it be done at all?*

I. When this dispensation shall come to its close, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven, when all His people shall be gathered to Him to share His splendours and to delight themselves in His triumph, then we believe the Lord shall write up His people. WHAT WILL THIS WRITING BE?

There will be written in this census nothing but *personal matters.* If you note my text, it says, "This *man* was born there." They are not taken in the plural—*these men.* They are not taken as a corporate body—this nation. this church, this family—but one by one each man's name shall be found either written there or else left out. Personal matters alone will come into the great census paper of eternity. There is no truth which we need more frequently to hold up before the eyes of our people than the truth that nothing but personal godliness will ever avail. If you could trace your pedigree through a line of saints up to the apostles; nay, up to Mary herself, the mother of the Saviour, yet, unless you did yourself believe in Christ, and had yourself been the subject of the personal change, which is called regeneration, you should in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. No connections, however, admirable; no relations, however desirable; no proxies, however excellent, shall ever avail for any living man. We must ourselves stand before God, each man for himself, to be acquitted or to be condemned, to hear "Come thou blessed," or "Depart, thou cursed one." There may be, and there always must be, when we take men in the mass (and God often in His providence deals with men in the mass), there may be innocent persons who suffer in the common calamity. There are likewise wicked men who rejoice in common mercies. But at the last evil shall be unto the evil; and the good shall be unto the good. The wheat shall be unmixed with chaff; the wine shall no more be mingled with the water, the gold shall not become dimmed through alloy. God's people, each of them personally accepted, and the wicked, each of them personally condemned, shall meet their final doom. See to it sirs, each one of you, that you personally have an interest in the blood of the Lamb.

Again, you will perceive that this great census deals not merely with personal matters, but with *vital* matters which concern a man's birth. Here you have it that this man was *born* there. 'Tis true the things we have thought and those we have done, shall be mentioned at the last, but not for their own sakes. They shall be mentioned only as means of proving that we were born again, or else as evidence that regeneration had never taken place in us. The vital question which the Lord's great day shall touch will be this:—"Was that man ever called from darkness into marvellous light? Was that heart ever turned from stone to flesh? Were those eyes ever opened to the celestial light? Were those ears ever ready to listen to the divine command? Was there a vital, radical change insomuch that old things had passed away and all things had become new? For if not, in the golden roll of the redeemed our names can have no place. When the muster-roll is called, our names will not be mentioned, and we shall stand shivering with dismay because our names are left out when God calleth—"gather my saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

Remark, once more, the matters with which the census shall have to do will be *decisive.* Perhaps, my hearer, your name could not be written to-day among the regenerate, but there is hope yet, and we trust by God's grace ere you go hence, you may have a portion among the sanctified. If we could take to-day the number of God's people, at present converted, I thank God that before another hour it would be imperfect, for there would have been others added to the visibly called of God. But the last census shall be decisive. To its number none shall be added; from its multitude none subtracted. Once let that be taken, and the angel shall cry in heaven, "He that is holy, let him be holy still"; and his voice shall reverberate to hell, but other words shall he sound there: "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still." That shall be decisive, the last polling of the people, the last counting of the jewels and casting away of the counterfeits, the last bringing in of the sheep and banishment of the goats. This makes it all-important that you and I should know to-day whether, "when the Lord writeth up the people, it shall be said that this man was born there." Oh that we were wise to look into futurities! We are so batlike, we see but so small a distance. We only see time and its trickeries, its paint, its gilt. Oh that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would remember our latter end! So that come the census day when it may, we may each have our name written beneath our Lord the Lamb in some humble place among the chosen of the Lord our God. This census, then, will invoke—personal, vital, decisive matters.

II. Let us now ask—WHOSE NAMES WILL NOT BE FOUND WRITTEN WHEN THE LORD COUNTETH UP HIS PEOPLE?

Now this is a question which no man can answer to the full. But with God's Word before us, supposing that the characters I mention shall be at the last day what they are now, we can tell you with a decision that is infallible, whose names will not be found there.

And first, for these are the most likely people to be deceived, the name of the *hypocritical church member* will not be found there. You have entered the church for the sake of gain or respectability. You have made a profession which is a lie. You have assumed a garb which is but the sheep's skin while you yourself remain a wolf. You have a name to live, but are dead. You have whitewashed the sepulchre, but a sepulchre it is still. O sir! it is one thing to have deceived the elder or the deacon; it is one thing to have misled and to have cajoled the minister; it is one thing to have won the respect and the esteem of the church, but it is another thing to escape undetected from the fiery glance which can read the secret things of the belly, and before which even hell and death are naked and unveiled. Do not, I pray thee, hope that thy masquerading, thy spiritual pretences shall be of any avail before Him. He shall rend thy garments in pieces, and thou shalt stand naked to be the target for all His arrows; thou shalt be banished to the place where the hissing, the rebuke, and the reproach of all the ungodly shall descend for ever and ever. I tell thee thy name may be in the

church-book without a blot, and no man may have suspected thee, but except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Church members, try yourselves, the oldest and the best of you; aye, and do thou try thyself, O preacher, lest after having preached to others, thou also shouldest be a castaway. Oh, let us never take our religion from other men's opinions, not even for the opinion of the best of men! I would not be satisfied even with the assurance of an apostle, if it came from his own judgment, we must have the assurance of the Holy Spirit, the witness within us that we are born of God.

Again, among the names that will *not* be found there, we may mention the man who is a *mere hearer*. How many there are among you to-day whom we could but describe as hearers only! The ear is tickled, the mind is interested, the gaze is fixed upon the preacher. 'Tis well. God be thanked that so many are willing to listen to the Word of God. But to be a hearer and not a believer will involve no salvation. To have had the seed sown, but for the seed never to have taken root will never give a harvest. To have had the light shining upon sightless eyeballs will have been of no avail for giving of sight. To have sat in these pews, though some of you may sit for twenty years, unless the Word be received into the heart through the grace of God, will minister rather to your damnation than to your salvation. Mark this, my hearers, if we are not "a savour of life unto life," we must be "a savour of death unto death"; and in either case, we are unto God a sweet smelling savour as well in those that perish as in those that are saved. I know what a great many people think If they are regular church-goers, if they are always in their place twice on the Sunday, that is as much as can be expected of them. I tell you, sirs, that you may make your church-going into a sin if you go to hear a gospel which you reject. If you rest in your church-goings or your chapel-goings, you have rested in a lie, you have built upon the sand, and in the last great day if you shall cry, "We have eaten, we have drunk with Thee, and Thou hast taught in our streets"; He shall say, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity."

There is a man yonder too, whose name is not written and will not be found written there, unless some great change shall take place—I mean yonder young man, who is saying, "I will repent, I will seek a Saviour; I would be washed in His blood." Young man! you have said that twenty times before. You said it when you left your mother's roof, and she rejoiced in the resolution. You said it when last the fever came into the establishment and you lay sick. You said it, sir, when last time conscience pricked you, because you had retired to rest at night and had omitted the prayer in which you had been so early trained; and you say it to-day. But "unstable as water thou dost not excel." Thy promise made in thine own strength is but a broken reed; thy penitence is as the morning cloud and as the early dew. Thou art paving thy road to hell with thy good intentions. Up, sluggard! up! Pull up those paving-stones and hurl them at the old fiend who longs to keep thee at this dreary work of making a smooth path to thy destruction! O, dear friends, perhaps one of the worst of Satan's snares is the promissory-note. Under a sermon, when the sinner has been awakened, the devil gets him to say, "Well, I will think of these things by-and-by." As you heard the other night, indifferent people are the most hopeless of all, because even when aroused, procrastination lulls them to sleep again. If Felix had hastily said to Paul, "Paul, I hate and despise thee; thou art an imposter"; there had been some little hope that in his quiet mood reason might reverse the words which he had uttered; but when he said in bland tones, tones which deceived himself though not the apostle, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee"; then might you have read upon the brow of Felix with the spiritual eye these words—"This is one who knows the truth, but follows not its dictates. His damnation is as sure as it is just." I had infinitely rather hear, as I have sometimes heard, and as we constantly do, words of abuse against the minister, and language of hatred against the gospel, than I would hear some of you who speak fair but mean foul, who protest but belie, whose resolutions are like bad money or forged cheques, which he that taketh loseth thereby, and he that believeth is deceived. Your name, sir, unless there be something more than this, will never be found written there.

Scarcely necessary is it, I think, to say that those men who are *living in vice and open sin, and who die as they live*, will never find their names written there. No drunkard shall ever reel across the golden streets. No oath of the blasphemer shall ever shock the ear of angel. No light frothy or lascivious song shall ever taint the ear of perfection. Eden is not the place for thieves. Paradise is not the spot for harlots. Men and women who die with such blots upon their character, and such sins upon their souls shall find at heaven's gate the angels say, "There shall in no wise enter here anything that defileth."

And you, too, ye *moralists*, against whose character no accusation can be brought; if you never received the new heart, you will be as surely shut out as the immoral. The honest tradesman, who was only dishonest to his God shall find dishonesty there to be damnable. The upright man, who had no crooked ways except towards Christ and His holy gospel, shall find those crooked ways destroy his soul. The man who said he loved his neighbour but forgot his God, shall find that, "the wicked shall be cast into hell with all the nations that forget God." O, my dear hearers, except ye have faith in Christ, except ye have the Spirit of God in you, except ye repent and be converted, there is a bar sterner than iron and more endurable than steel, which will shut you out of the place of happiness, and in the number of the saints your names shall never be found.

III. We shall now turn to a more pleasing work—WHOSE NAME WILL BE FOUND THERE?

When you made up the census paper last Monday morning, there may have been a thief in the house in the night. I suppose you did not put his name down. There may have been some person who, that night, knocked at the door, and was for some short time under your roof, but who went out from you because he was not of you, for if he had been of you, doubtless he would have continued with you. I know that you did not put his name there. You recorded there the names of the inhabitants of the house, but of none beside. Now, then, it shall be so at the last great census taking. Whose name shall be there? We reply, there shall be the name of every soul that ever believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, whosoever fled to the cross for refuge, whosover turned his tearful eye to Calvary as his hope, whosoever stretched out his

finger to touch the hem of the sacred garment, shall find his name there as well as the mightiest of the prophets or the chief of the apostles. Brethren, we will take those who think themselves most likely to be left out, and we remark that there will be found there the name of the poorest. When this last census was taken, the paper was sent as much to the hovel of the poor in St. Giles', as to the palace of the rich in St. James'. None were left out. The Act of Parliament was not passed to take a census of the rich; it was not needed that there should only be those written who paid a certain amount of tax; but as they were all subjects, the name of the beggar was recorded in the register as well as the name and title of the peer. So shall it be at the last. If thou hast believed in Christ, though thou didst never glitter on the pages of heraldry, though rags were thy dress and penury thy portion, yet in as fair a place as those who have worn a coronet and have yet feared God, shalt thou find thy name. Oh! let us never imagine that because a man wears fustian, or is clothed in corduroy, he has the slightest less reason to hope that he shall be saved. Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are chosen, but God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, to be heirs of the kingdom, so that if there be an advantage either way, it is where some would dream it should least be given. But, then, as the poorest, so the weakest saint shall be found there. You did not omit the name of your daughter because with some spinal complaint she has been so long afflicted that she can scarcely sit upright. You put her name there as well as that of your stalwart son, who could boldly wield arms if it were needed to defend this country from the invader. And, I take it, when you wrote out the list, the infant child had a place as well as the full-grown man. You felt that the census would not be complete, and your family-list would not be well made out, even if that infant whose voice was but a cry, and whose life was but a pain, should miss his place. All were recorded there. And so, at the last, Benjamin shall be written as well as Judah, Mephibosheth as well as David; he that is lame in the feet as well as the giant in strength. Father Earnest and Mr. Great-Heart shall have their place, but Mr. Fearing and Miss Much-Afraid shall not miss their portion. Every one of those who believed in Christ, though their faith was but as a grain of mustard seed, and their spiritual life was but as the smoking flax, shall find their names written there. I would that I could speak out this truth so that the cast down and the all-but destroyed could lay hold upon it. Art thou miserable to-day? Thy misery doth not erase thy name. Hast thou sinned, but dost thou cry, "Father, have mercy upon me?" Thy sin hath not blotted the writing. Engraved as in eternal brass, there stands thy name; the powers of darkness shall never prevail to erase the everlasting characters. Are you to-day so conscious of your unworthiness that you dare not look up? Are you thinking, "If I said 'Abba Father' it would be presumption; if I claimed the privilege of a child, it would be arrogance?" Yet if Christ be thine, if thou canst stretch out thy hand now and say,

> "My soul would lay her hand
> On that dear head of Thine,
> While like a penitent I stand,
> And there confess my sin."

you need not be afraid but that among the blood-bought you shall share your lot.

"Ah! my soul, wilt *thou* be there?" Pass the question now through this vast throng, and let each soul put itself into the balances with this as the test-weight:—"What thinkest thou of Christ? Is He thine only help? Dost thou find cleansing in His blood, healing in His wounds, life in His death, heaven in His pains?" If so, thou shalt be found when the Lord writeth up the people, and of thee it shall be said, "That man was born of her."

IV. I shall now turn your attention to the next point of the subject briefly. WHO IS TO MAKE OUT THE CENSUS PAPER?

"The Lord shall count when *He* writeth up the people." But why shall the Lord make out the census? The first reason is—*Who else should do it*? Suppose our enemies had the making out of the roll! "O, Lord, deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies, for false witnesses are risen up against me and such as breathe out cruelty." I think there is none among us who would be willing to have his eternal fate decided by an evil and gainsaying world. If we could put the pen into the hand of the wicked, they would write down the offscourings, but omit the jewels. They would surely record the base and the reprobate, while the chosen and precious would have no lot or portion. Imagine for a moment, my dear friends, that the pen could be given to the old Pope of Rome, and that he had the writing up of the people. Now, my lord Pope, with your triple crown upon your head, write them out. I am sure he would omit yours and mine, because we are not obedient to the pontifical see; and even if we were under authority and command, I am sure he would make a great splutter in trying to write the name, "Martin Luther"; and he would throw down his pen and utterly refuse to obey, if he had to write the glorious name of John Calvin. Well, thanks be to God, the pen is not in the hand of that arch-deceiver, nor in that of any of our enemies, but the Lord shall make out the census Himself. Suppose now we put the pen into the hand of Bigotry—Bigotry, who lives not quite so far off as Italy—but takes up her residence in our own land, and hard by our own abode. I think I see her with her face bitter as wormwood, and with her eyes full of darkness, and she, having written all the names down, reads—"There be few that shall be saved; they be so few that a child can count them." She makes a dash against the name of this man, for he did not hold all the five points of a certain system. She runs her pen right through another man's because he dared to preach to sinners: and she takes a double dip for another, who had once ventured to say that faith was the duty of man, and unbelief was a high and damning crime. Oh, how few would ever go to heaven, if Bigotry had the making out of the census paper!

I might thus run through the list of all the enemies of Christ's Church, and show you that it would not be safe to trust any of them, from the devil downward to the Pope upward, with the making up of the list of those who shall enter into the king's palace. But, suppose our friends had the task. "Yes," saith one, "let my mother have the pen." Aye, if this were left with our dear friends, they would not be long before some of them would write in bold text hand, the name of their most reprobate son, or most hardened daughter. Affection in this world overmasters the understanding; and doubtless there would be many in heaven who would defile its purity, if affection had the keeping of the gates, and if understanding

had no place. Yes, but young man, your mother cannot save you. She can pray and plead, but if your iniquity be written as with an iron pen, and graven on the horns of the altar, her tears cannot—acid even though they be—eat out the dire inscription from the brass. You must be washed in blood, or else a baptism of tears will not avail. You must have the Spirit of Christ, for your mother's spirit cannot bear you on its wings to heaven. Indeed, dear friends, if the making out of the census paper were left even to ourselves, it were left to the wrong persons, for I take it, that the great end of all God's dispensations is His glory, and if our entrance to heaven were left to ourselves, there are many who would go there with a lie on their lips, and with blasphemy in their hearts They would go to glory fresh from their sins ; rising from beds of lust to beds of bliss ; they would go red with murder, black with crime, dripping with the oozings of their vice, and heaven would become a Sodom, and Paradise an Aceldema ; the throne of God would be no better than the throne of Moloch, and the place of perfection would not be preferable to hell itself. God, and God only—God the only wise—shall have the writing up of the people, for there is no one to be found but God who could do it.

There is a second reason which I think will strike the spiritual mind with force. " The Lord shall count when *He* writeth up the people." Instructions were given at the late census, that the paper should be made out by " *the head of the family.*" Now, I suppose, though it is not always the fact, that the husband is the head of the household, and that the father stands in the position of the head of the family. Well, then, the Church must not make up the census paper, for she is the spouse. But He who is Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, He by whose name the whole family in heaven and earth are named, He shall " write up the people." It were, indeed, impious for you or me ; it would bring down upon our heads a penalty as heavy as that which fell on David, if *we* thought we could write up the people. We have said, perhaps, " There are only such-and-such people that shall be saved," and we have turned about and said of another, " Lord, what shall this man do ? " And like John, loving spirit though he was, we have been ready to call fire from heaven upon some, and to say to others, " Master, forbid, them, because they follow not with us." But, brethren, I hope we have done with all that now. We believe the Lord knoweth them that are His ; they are a multitude that no man can number, and no man should ever attempt the task. They are more than bigotry would include ; they are fewer than a latitudinarian charity would affirm. But be they more or be they less, they are known only to the eternal mind, and this is a secret into which we must not pry. The angelic footstep treads not here. Let us not be rash and foolish, to pry where angels stand back, and do not desire to look.

I would give another reason why God, and God alone, should make up this paper ; had I not already anticipated myself. I meant to have said because he is the *only wise God.* You know it is said in Scripture that God is wise, but then it is added He is " Only Wise." There is not another wise being upon the face of the earth. There is not another wise being, even in heaven itself. God is only wise. Even the heathen knew this. You will remember when some fishermen had found a spoil, the old Greek legend says, "Not knowing how to divide it they repaired to the Delphic oracle, which said, ' Let the wisest have it '." They sent it to Thales, the Miletian ; they sent it to Solon ; it went the round of the wise men of Greece ; but they all refused it. They said 'no,' confessed they were not the wisest ; till at last one of them advised to send it to the altar of the gods, for the gods were the wisest of all. What the heathen thus pictured in poetic fiction we know to be true. We shall not question this man or that, this denomination or that: It is not for us to use our fingers to count the brands plucked from the burning, but to use our hands to pluck them from the fire, and we will pass the roll to the only wise God, and He shall at the last decide whether they be His or no.

V. I now come to my last point. May the Spirit of God bless it to us, and seal it on our hearts. WHY WILL THE CENSUS BE TAKEN AT ALL ?

Why should God write up the people ? We answer, not that God may receive fresh information. He knoweth all things. Not that there is any fear of God's purposed number being incomplete. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and this is one of the stones on which the security of the Church is built. Why then ? Of course we are dealing now with a noble picture, and you must view it as a picture, though within its bowels it bears a mighty fact. The Lord counts up His people, in the first place, *to show His value of them.* You remember that passage, " They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up My jewels," as though the jewels had to be put each into their proper place, and then the divine eye should run along them all and say, " Yes, they are made up. Those in the casket tally in number with those in the inventory. They are made up. Neither ruby, nor emerald, nor pearl is lacking. They are all there." God makes up His jewels ; it is impossible for the human mind to conceive how dear is the poorest believer to the heart of His Father —dearer than the widow's only child to her soul—dearer than the new-made bridegroom to his bride—dearer than life to those who stand in peril—dearer than honour to those who could give life rather than sacrifice their integrity. We love, but we love not as God loves. Love with us may be an abiding passion, but with God it is an all-penetrating principle. Of us it may be said, that we are loving ; but of God, that He is love itself. And well does the idea of counting up the loved ones set forth the esteem and value which He sets upon them, and the intensity and deep-seatedness of that affection which He bears towards their persons. The Lord will make up His jewels ; He will recount His sheep ; He will remember the children of His family, to see if they be there who were written in the register of old.

Another thought strikes us. The last census shall be taken *to show to Satan his entire defeat.* They are all there, fiend of hell ; they are all there. What didst thou say, " I will pursue, I will overtake ; I will divide the spoil ; my lust shall be satisfied upon them." What sayest thou now, fiend of hell ? There is not one of them lacking ? Thou greedy lion of the pit, hast thou rent one sheep ? Has so much as a lamb been dragged to thine infernal den ? Ye legion hosts, who with cunning, sharpened by malice, sought to tear from the arms of Christ those whom He had sworn to save, say, has the Surety done His work or no ? Have ye defeated Him ? Ye have nailed Him to the tree ; have ye broken His bones, and robbed Him of His members ? Ye took away His life ; could ye keep it ? Do they not live because He lives ? Ye struggled through eighteen hundred years and

more; ye grappled with these poor men and women who wrestled hard with you; did you overcome one of them? You were worsted when you fought with Job in the slippery standing of a dunghill; ye were defeated when ye fought with David on the pinnacle of the palace top and brought him down; ye won not the victory when ye seemed to win it over Peter in the hall of Pilate. Ye were defeated not once or twice, but many thousand times in the heirs of life, who fought with various success in time, but with sure success as time merged into eternity. O! all ye hosts, look there and be ashamed, and let the songs of the white-robed be howlings to you; let the shoutings of the complete host of the redeemed sink into your ears like death-knells and re-begin your hell, for you are defeated, you are cast down; the pride of your looks is lowered, and Jehovah alone is exalted in that day.

Yet once more, methinks the counting up of the redeemed will be performed for another reason, to let all men see that *the great riddle which has distracted human intellect was no riddle but a fact*—and facts are not riddles. What is the great mystery? It is that God decrees, that man acts; yet that God's decrees and man's acts tally with one another. Of old, before the sockets of the eternal hills were carved out of the enduring granite, before the peaks lifted themselves white with snow to glitter in the sun, ere stars had visited the mountain summit and looked down upon a world that had fallen into sin; aye! when this world was not, when it was uncreate, sleeping in the womb of the divine thought as yet unborn, when suns and stars and this brave universe itself had not begun to be formed, then in His book His chosen were all written, and the members of Christ fixed and ordained. That book was closed and sealed; it has not been opened. Now what effect can a book, a clasped sealed book, have upon the deeds of men? "None," say you. "None," say I. The decree of God as such hath no effect on any man. There it is; there it standeth. But see! the world is all confusion. Never were the waves of the sea more wanton in their play. Man sins, rebels, revolts, revolts again; the checks of mercy hold him not, he breaks the bit, he scorns the yoke, and yet despite the hardness and the freedom of man to rebel against his God, I see at last through grace omnipotent a multitude come streaming slowly in year after year through the golden gates, and at last I hear the gate closed. I see it barred; and how strange shall it seem as that great sealed book is now unclasped, it is found that all who were written there have come, nay, come as they were written, come at the hour ordained, come in the place predestined, come by the means foreknown, come as God would have them come, and thus free agency did not defeat predestination, and man's will did not thwart the eternal will. God is glorified and man free. Man—the man as he proudly calls himself—has obeyed God as truly as though he knew what was in God's book, and had studied to make the decree of God the very rule and method of his life. Glorious shall it be when thus that book shall prove the mystic energy which went out from between the folded leaves—the mysterious Spirit that emanated from the eternal throne—that unseen, unmanifested, sometimes unrecognized mysterious power, which bowed the will and led it in silken chains, which opened up the understanding and led it from darkness into light, and melted the heart and moved the Spirit, and won the entire man to the obedience of the truth as it was in Jesus.

I will say no more except this. Shall I be there? Will you be there? I cannot put the question better than in the words of that solemn hymn—

"When Thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come
To fetch Thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?
Shall such a worthless worm as I,
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at Thy right hand?

"I love to meet among them now,
Before Thy gracious feet to bow,
Though vilest of them all!
But can I bear the piercing thought—
What if my name should be left out,
When Thou for them shalt call?

"Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace;
Be Thou, dear Lord, my hiding-place,
In this the accepted day:
Thy pard'ning voice, Oh let me hear,
To still my unbelieving fear;
Nor let me fall, I pray.

"Let me among Thy saints be found
Whene'er the archangel's trump shall sound,
To see Thy smiling face;
Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing,
While heaven's resounding mansions ring
With shouts of sovereign grace."

May that be your prayer and mine. May God hear it, and hear it He will, if to that prayer we add the obedience of faith. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house." Sinner, believe. God help thee to believe this morning for His name's sake.

FOR THE TROUBLED

" Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves."—Psalm lxxxviii. 7.

IT is the business of a shepherd not only to look after the happy ones among the sheep, but to seek after the sick of the flock, and to lay himself out right earnestly for their comfort and succour. I feel, therefore, that I do rightly when I this morning make it my special business to speak to such as are in trouble. Those of you who are happy and rejoicing in God, full of faith and assurance, can very well spare a discourse for your weaker brethren; you can be even glad and thankful to go without your portion, that those who are depressed in spirit may receive a double measure of the wine of consolation. Moreover, I am not sure that even the most joyous Christian is any the worse for remembering the days of darkness which are stealing on apace, " for they are many." Just as the memories of our dying friends come o'er us like a cloud, and " damp our brainless ardours," so will the recollection that there are tribulations and afflictions in the world sober our rejoicing, and prevent its degenerating into an idolatry of the things of time and sense. It is better for many reasons to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; the quassia cup has virtues in it which the wine cup never knew; wet thy lips with it, young man, it will work thee no ill. It may be, O thou who art to-day brimming with happiness, that a little store of sacred cautions and consolations may prove no sore to thee, but may by-and-by stand thee in good stead. This morning's discourse upon sorrow may suggest a few thoughts to thee which, being treasured up, shall ripen like summer fruit, and mellow by the time thy winter shall come round.

But to our work. It is clear to all those who read the narratives of Scripture, or are acquainted with good men, that the best of God's servants may be brought into the very lowest estate. There is no promise of present prosperity appointed to true religion, so as to exclude adversity from believers' lives. As men, the people of God share the common lot of men, and what is that but trouble? Yea, there are some sorrows which are peculiar to Christians, some extra griefs of which they partake because they are believers, though these are something more than balanced by those peculiar and bitter troubles which belong to the ungodly, and are engendered by their transgressions, from which the Christian is delivered. From the passage which is open before us, we learn that sons of God may be brought so low as to write and sing psalms which are sorrowful throughout, and have no fitting accompaniment but sighs and groans. They do not often do so; their songs are generally like those of David, which if they begin in the dust mount into the clear heavens before long; but sometimes, I say, saints are forced to sing such dolorous ditties that from beginning to end there is not one note of joy. Yet even in their dreariest winter night, the saints have an aurora in their sky, and in this eighty-eighth Psalm, the dreariest of all psalms, there is a faint gleam in the first verse, like a star-ray falling upon its threshold—" O Jehovah, God of my salvation." Heman retained his hold upon his God. It is not all darkness in a heart which can cry, " My God "; and the child of God, however low he may sink, still keeps hold upon his God. " Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is the resolution of his soul. Jehovah smites me, but He is my God. He frowns upon me, but He is my God. He tramples me into the very dust, and lays me in the lowest pit, as among the dead, yet still He is my God, and such will I call Him till I die: even when He leaves me I will cry, " My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Moreover, the believer in his worst time still continues to pray, and prays, perhaps, the more vigorously because of his sorrows. God's rod flogs His child not from Him, but to Him. Our griefs are waves which wash us to the rock. This psalm is full of prayer, it is as much sweetened with supplication as it is salted with sorrow. It weeps like Niobe, but it is on bended knees, and from uplifted eyes. Now, while a man can pray he is never far from light; he is at the window, though, perhaps, as yet the curtains are not drawn aside. The man who can pray has the clue in his hand by which to escape from the labyrinth of affliction. Like the trees in winter, we may say of the praying man, when his heart is greatly troubled, " his substance is in him, though he has lost his leaves." Prayer is the soul's breath, and if it breathes it lives, and, living, it will gather strength again. A man must have true and eternal life within him while he can continue still to pray, and while there is such life there is assured hope. Still, the best child of God may be the greatest sufferer, and his sufferings may appear to be crushing, killing, and overwhelming; they may also be so very protracted as to attend him all his days, and their bitterness may be intense; all of which and much more this mournful psalm teaches us.

Let us, in pursuit of our subject, first give *an exposition of the text*; and then *a brief exposition of the benefits of trouble.*

I. I will endeavour, in a few observations, to EXPOUND THE TEXT.

In the first place, its strong language suggests the remark that *tried saints are very prone to overrate their afflictions.* I believe we all err in that direction, and are far too apt to say, " I am the man that hath seen affliction." The inspired man of God, who wrote our text, was touched with this common infirmity, for he overstates his case. Read his words, " Thy wrath lieth hard upon me." I have no doubt Heman meant wrath in its worst sense. He believed that God was really angry with him, and wrathful with him, even as He is with the ungodly; but that was not true. As we shall have to show by-and-by, there is a very grave difference between the anger of God with His children and the anger of God with His enemies, and we do not think Heman sufficiently discerned that difference, even as we are afraid that many of God's children even now forget it, and therefore fear that the Lord is punishing them according to strict justice, and smiting them as though He were their executioner. Ah, if poor bewildered believers could but see it, they would learn that the very thing which they call wrath is

only love, in its own wise manner, seeking their highest good. Besides, the Psalmist saith, "Thy wrath *lieth hard upon me.*" Ah, if Heman had known what it was to have God's wrath lie hard on him, he would have withdrawn that word, for all the wrath that any man ever feels in this life is but as a laying on of God's little finger. It is in the world to come that the wrath of God lies heavy on men. Then when God putteth forth His hand and presses with omnipotence upon soul and body to destroy them for ever in hell, the ruined nature feels in its never-ending destruction what the power of God's anger really is. Here the really sore pressure of wrath is not known, and especially not known by a child of God. It is too strong a speech if we weigh it in the scales of sober truth. It out-runs the fact, even though it were the most sorrowful living man that uttered it. Then Heman adds, "Thou hast afflicted me with *all* Thy waves"; as though he were a wreck with the sea breaking over him, and the whole ocean, and all the oceans, were running full against him as the only object of their fury. His barque has been driven on shore and all the breakers are rolling over him; one after another they leap upon him like wild beasts, hungry as wolves, eager as lions to devour him: it seemed to him that no wave turned aside, no billow spent its force elsewhere, but all the long line of breakers roared upon him, as the sole object of their wrath. But it was not so. *All* God's waves have broken over no man, save only the Son of man. There are still some troubles which we have been spared, some woes to us unknown. Have we suffered all the diseases which flesh is heir to? Are there not modes of pain from which our bodies have escaped? Are there not also some mental pangs which have not wrung our spirit? And what if we seem to have traversed the entire circle of bodily and mental misery, yet in our homes, households, or friendships, we have surely some comfort left, and therefore from some rough billow we are screened. All God's waves had not gone over thee, O Heman, the woes of Job and Jeremiah were not thine. Among the living none can literally know what *all* God's waves would be. They know, who are condemned to feel the blasts of His indignation, they know in the land of darkness and of everlasting hurricane; they know what all God's waves and billows are; but we know not. The metaphor is good and admirable, and correct enough poetically, but as a statement of fact it is strained. We are all apt to aggravate our grief: I say this here as a general fact, which you who are happy can bear to be told, but I would not vex the sick man with it while he is enduring the weight of his affliction. If he can calmly accept the suggestion of his own accord, it may do him good, but it would be cruel to throw it at him. True as it is, I should not like to whisper it in any sufferer's ear, because it would not console but grieve him. I have often marvelled at the strange comfort persons offer you when they say, "Ah, there are others who suffer more than you do." Am I a demon, then? Am I expected to rejoice at the news of other people's miseries? Far otherwise, I am pained to think there should be sharper smarts than mine, my sympathy increases my own woe. I can conceive of a fiend in torment finding solace in the belief that others are tortured with a yet fiercer flame, but surely such diabolical comfort should not be offered to Christian men. It shows our deep depravity of heart, that we can decoct comfort out of the miseries of others; and yet I am afraid we rightly judge human nature when we offer it water from that putrid well. There is, however, a form of comfort akin to it, but of far more legitimate origin, a consolation honourable and divine. There was ONE upon whom God's wrath pressed very sorely, ONE who was in truth afflicted with all God's waves, and that One is our brother, a man like ourselves, the dearest lover of our souls; and because He has known and suffered all this, He can enter into sympathy with us this morning whatever tribulation may beat upon us. His passion is all over now, but not His compassion. He has borne the indignation of God, and turned it all away from us; the waves have lost their fury, and spent their force on Him, and now He sitteth above the floods, yea, He sitteth King for ever and ever. As we think of Him, the Crucified, our souls may not only derive consolation from His sympathy and powerful succour, but we may learn to look upon our trials with a calmer eye, and judge them more according to the true standard. In the presence of Christ's cross our own crosses are less colossal. Our thorns in the flesh are as nothing when laid side by side with the nails and spear.

But, secondly, let us remark that *saints do well to trace all their trials to their God.* Heman did so in the text: "*Thy* wrath lieth hard upon me, *Thou* hast afflicted me with all *Thy* waves." He traces all his adversity to the Lord his God. It is God's wrath, they are God's waves that afflict him, and God makes them afflict him. Child of God, never forget this; all that thou art suffering of any sort, or kind, comes to thee from the divine hand. Truly, thou sayest, "my affliction arises from wicked men," yet remember that there is a predestination which, without soiling the fingers of the Infinitely Holy, nevertheless rules the motions of evil men as well as of holy angels. It were a dreary thing for us if there were no appointments of God's providence which concerned the ungodly; then the great mass of mankind would be entirely left to chance, and the godly might be crushed by them without hope. The Lord, without interfering with the freedom of their wills, rules and overrules, so that the ungodly are as a rod in His hand, with which He wisely scourges His children. Perhaps you will say that your trials have arisen not from the sins of others, but from your own sin. Even then I would have you penitently trace them still to God. What though the trouble spring out of the sin, yet it is God that hath appointed the sorrow to follow the transgression, to act as a remedial agency for your spirit. Look not at the second cause, or, looking at it with deep regret, turn your eye chiefly to your heavenly Father, and "hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it." The Lord sends upon us the evil as well as the good of this mortal life; His is the sun that cheers and the frost that chills; His the deep calm and His the fierce tornado. To dwell on second causes is frequently frivolous, a sort of solemn trifling. Men say of each affliction, "It might have been prevented *if* so-and-so had occurred." Perhaps if another physician had been called in, the dear child's life had still been spared; possibly if I had moved in such a direction in business I might not have been a loser. Who is to judge of what might have been? In endless conjectures we are lost, and, cruel to ourselves, we gather material for unnecessary griefs. Matters happened not so; then why conjecture what would have been had things been different? It is folly. You did your best, and

it did not answer; why rebel? To fix the eye upon the second cause will irritate the mind. We grow indignant with the more immediate agent of our grief, and so fail to submit ourselves to God. If you strike a dog he will snap at the staff which hurts him, as if *it* were to blame. How doggish we sometimes are, when God is smiting us we are snarling at His rod. Brother, forgive the man who injured thee,—his was the sin, forgive it, as thou hopest to be forgiven; but thine is the chastisement, and it comes from God, therefore endure it and ask grace to profit by it. The more we get away from intermediate agents the better, for when we reach to God grace will make submission easy. When we know "it is the Lord," we readily cry, "let Him do what seemeth Him good." As long as I trace my pain to accident, my bereavement to mistake, my loss to another's wrong, my discomfort to an enemy, and so on, I am of the earth earthy, and shall break my teeth with gravel stones; but when I rise to my God and see His hand at work, I grow calm, I have not a word of repining, "I open not my mouth because Thou didst it." David preferred to fall into the hands of God, and every believer knows that he feels safest and happiest when he recognizes that he is even yet in the divine hands. Cavilling with man is poor work, but pleading with God brings help and comfort. "Cast thy burden on the Lord" is a precept which it will be easy to practise when you see that the burden came originally from God.

But now, thirdly, *afflicted children of God do well to have a keen eye to the wrath that mingles with their troubles.* "Thy *wrath* lieth hard upon me." There is Heman's first point. He does not mention the waves of affliction till he has first spoken of the wrath. We should labour to discover what the Lord means by smiting us; what He purposes by the chastisement, and how far we can answer that purpose. We must use a keen eye clearly *to distinguish* things. There is an anger and an anger, a wrath and a wrath. God is never angry with His children in one sense, but He is in another. As men, we have all of us disobeyed the laws of God, and God stands in relationship to all of us as a judge. As a judge, He must execute upon us the penalties of His law, and He must, from the necessity of His nature, be angry with us for having broken that law. That concerns all the human race. But the moment a man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ his offences are his offences no longer; they are laid upon Christ Jesus, the substitute, and the anger goes with the sin. The anger of God towards the sins of believers has spent itself upon Christ. Christ has been punished in their stead; the punishment due to their sin has been borne by Jesus Christ. God forbid that the Judge of all the earth should ever be unjust; it were not just for God to punish a believer for a sin which has been already laid upon Jesus Christ. Hence the believer is altogether free from all liability to suffer the judicial anger of God, and all risk of receiving a punitive sentence from the Most High. The man is absolved—shall he be judged again? The man has paid the debt—shall he be brought a second time before the judge, as though he were still a debtor? Christ has stood for him in his place and stead, and therefore he boldly asks, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Now, then, the Christian man takes up another position; he is adopted into the family of God: he has become God's child. He is under the law of God's house. There is in every house an economy, a law by which the children and servants are ruled. If the child of God breaks the law of the house the Father will visit his offence with fatherly stripes—a very different kind of visitation from that of a judge. There are felons in prison to-day who in a short time will feel the lash on their bare backs: that is one thing; but yonder disobedient child is to receive a whipping from his father's hand: that is quite another thing. Wide as the poles asunder are the anger of a judge and the anger of a father. The father loves the child while he is angry, and is mainly angry for that very reason; if it were not his child he would probably take no notice of its fault, but because it is his own boy who has spoken an untruth or committed an act of disobedience he feels he must chastise him, because he loves him. This needs no further explanation. There is a righteous anger in God's heart towards guilty impenitent men; He feels none of that towards His people. He is their Father, and if they transgress He will visit them with stripes, not as a legal punishment, since Christ has borne all that, but as a gentle paternal chastisement, that they may see their folly and repent of it; and that, awakened by His tender hand, they may turn unto their Father and amend their ways. Now, child of God, if you are suffering to-day in any way whatever, whether from the ills of poverty or bodily sickness, or depression of spirits, recollect there is not a drop of the judicial anger of God in it all. You are not being punished for your sins as a judge punishes a culprit;—never believe such false doctrine, it is clean contrary to the truth as it is in Jesus. Gospel doctrine tells us that our sins were numbered on the Great Scapegoat's head of old, and carried away once for all, never to be charged against us again.

But we must use the eye of our judgment in looking at our present affliction to *see and confess* how richly, as children, we deserve the rod. Go back to the time since you were converted, dear brother and sister, and consider;—do you wonder that God has chastened you? Speaking for myself, I wonder that I have ever escaped the rod at any time. If I had been compelled to say "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," I should not have marvelled, for my shortcomings are many. How ungrateful have we been, how unloving, and how unlovable, how false to our holiest vows, how unfaithful to our most sacred consecrations. Is there a single ordinance over which we have not sinned? Did we ever rise from our knees without having offended while at prayer? Did we ever get through a hymn without some wandering of mind or coldness of heart? Did we ever read a chapter which we might not have wept over, because we did not receive the truth in the love of it into our soul as we ought to have done? O good Father, if we smart, richly do we deserve that we should yet smart again.

When you have confessed your ill-desert, let me exhort you to use those same eyes zealously to *search out the particular sin* which has caused the present chastisement. "Oh," says one, "I do not think I should ever find it out." You might. Perhaps it lies at the very door. I do not wonder that some

Christians suffer: I should wonder if they did not. I have seen them, for instance, neglect family prayer and other household duties; and their sons have grown up to dishonour them. If they cry out, "What an affliction," we would not like to *say*, "Ah, but you might have expected it; you were the cause of it"; but such a saying would be true. When children have left the parental roof, and gone into sin, we have not been surprised when the father has been harsh, sour, and crabbed in temper. We did not expect to gather figs of thorns, or grapes of thistles. We have seen men whose whole thought was "Get money, get money," and yet they have professed to be Christians. Such persons have been fretful and unhappy, but we have not been astonished. Would you have the Lord deal liberally with such surly curmudgeons? No, if they walk frowardly with Him, He will show Himself froward to them. Brother, the roots of your troubles may run under your doorstep where your sin lies. Search and look.

But sometimes the cause of the chastisement lies further off. Every surgeon will tell you that there are diseases which become troublesome in the prime of life, or in old age, which may have been occasioned in youth by some wrongdoing, or by accident, and the evil may have lain latent all those years. So may the sins of our youth bring upon us the sorrows of our riper years, and faults and omissions of twenty years ago may scourge us to-day. I know it is so. If the fault may be of so great an age, it should lead us to more thorough search, and more frequent prayer. Bunyan tells us that Christian met with Apollyon, and had such a dark journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, because of slips he made when going down the hill into the Valley of Humiliation. It may be so with us. Perhaps when you were young you were very untender towards persons of a sorrowful spirit; you are such yourself now—your harshness is visited upon you. It may be that, when in better circumstances, you were wont to look down upon the poor and despise the needy; your pride is chastened now. Many a minister has helped to injure another by believing a bad report against him, and by-and-by he has himself been the victim of slander. "With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." We have seen men who could ride the high horse among their fellow-creatures, and speak very loftily, and when they have been brought very, very low, we have understood the riddle. God will visit His children's transgressions. He will frequently let common sinners go on throughout life unrebuked; but not so His children. If you were going home to-day, and saw a number of boys throwing stones and breaking windows, you might not interfere with them, but if you saw your own lad among them, I will be bound you would fetch him out, and make him repent of it. If God sees sinners going on in their evil ways, He may not punish them *now*—He will deal out justice to them in another state; but if it be one of His own elect, He will be sure to make him rue the day. Perhaps the reason of your trouble may not be a sin committed, but a duty neglected. Search and look, and see wherein you have been guilty of omission. Is there a sacred ordinance which you have neglected, or a doctrine you have refused to believe?

Perhaps the chastisement may be sent by reason of a sin as yet undeveloped, some latent proneness to evil. The grief may be meant to unearth the sin, that you may hunt it down. Have you any idea of what a devil you are by nature? None of us know what we are capable of if left by grace. We think we have a sweet temper, an amiable disposition! We shall see!! We fall into provoking company, and are so teased and insulted, and so cleverly touched in our raw places, that we become mad with wrath, and our fine amiable temper vanishes in smoke, not without leaving blacks behind. Is it not a dreadful thing to be so stirred up? Yes, it is; but if our hearts were pure, no sort of stirring would pollute them. Stir pure water as long as you like and no mud will rise. The evil is bad when seen, but it was quite as bad when not seen. It may be a great gain to a man to know what sin is in him, for then he will humble himself before his God, and begin to combat his propensities. If he had never seen the filth he would never have swept the house; if he had never felt the pain the disease would have lurked within, but now that he feels the pain he will fly to the remedy. Sometimes, therefore, trial may be sent that we may discern the sin which dwelleth in us, and may seek its destruction. What shall we do this morning, if we are under the smitings of God's hand, but humble ourselves before Him, and go as guilty ones desiring to confess most thoroughly the particular sin which may have driven Him to chastise us, appealing to the precious blood of Jesus for pardon and to the Holy Spirit for power to overcome our sin.

When you have so done let me give one word of caution before I leave this point. Do not let us expect when we are in the trouble to perceive any immediate benefit resulting from it. I have tried myself when under sharp pain to see whether I have grown a bit more resigned or more earnest in prayer, or more rapt in fellowship with God, and I confess I have never been able to see the slightest trace of improvement at such times, for pain distracts and scatters the thoughts. Remember that word, "Nevertheless, *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The gardener takes his knife and prunes the fruit trees to make them bring forth more fruit; His little child comes trudging at his heels and cries, "Father, I do not see that the fruit comes on the trees after you have cut them." No, dear child, it is not likely you would, but come round in a few months when the season of fruit has come, and then shall you see the golden apples which thank the knife. Graces which are meant to endure require time for their production, and are not thrust forth and ripened in a night. Were they so soon ripe they might be as speedily rotten.

II. Now, as time is failing me, I will take up the second part of my discourse, and handle it with great brevity. I want to give a very short EXPOSITION OF THE BENEFITS OF TROUBLE. This is a great subject. Many a volume has been written upon it, and it might suffice to repeat the catalogue of the benefits of trial, but I will not so detain you.

Severe trouble in a true believer has the effect of loosening the roots of his soul earthward and tightening the anchor-hold of his heart heavenward. How can he love the world which has become so drear to him? Why should he seek after grapes so bitter to his taste? Should he not now ask for the wings of a dove that he may fly away to his own dear country, and be at rest for ever? Every mariner on the sea of life knows that when the soft zephyrs blow men tempt the open sea with outspread sails, but

when the black tempest comes howling from its den they hurry with all speed to the haven. Afflictions clip our wings with regard to earthly things, so that we cannot fly away from our dear Master's hand, but sit there and sing to Him; but the same afflictions make our wings grow with regard to heavenly things, we are feathered like eagles, we catch the soaring spirit, a thorn is in our nest, and we spread our pinions towards the sun.

Affliction frequently opens truths to us, and opens us to the truth,—I know not which of these two is the more difficult. Experience unlocks truths which else were closed against us; many passages of Scripture will never be made clear by the commentator; they must be expounded by experience. Many a text is written in a secret ink which must be held to the fire of adversity to make it visible. I have heard that you see stars in a well when none are visible above ground, and I am sure you can discern many a starry truth when you are down in the deeps of trouble which would not be visible to you elsewhere. Besides, I said it opened us to the truth as well as the truth to us. We are superficial in our beliefs: we are often drenched with truth, and yet it runs off from us like water from a marble slab; but affliction, as it were, ploughs us and subsoils us, and opens up our hearts, so that into our innermost nature the truth penetrates and soaks like rain into ploughed land. Blessed is that man who receives the truth of God into his inmost self; he shall never lose it, but it shall be the life of his spirit.

Affliction, when sanctified by the Holy Spirit, brings much glory to God out of Christians, through their experience of the Lord's faithfulness to them. I delight to hear an aged Christian giving his own personal testimony of the Lord's goodness. Vividly upon my mind flashes an event of some twenty-five years ago; it is before me as if it had occurred yesterday, when I saw a venerable man of eighty, grey and blind with age, and heard him in simple accents, simple as the language of a child, tell how the Lord had led him, and had dealt well with him, so that no good thing had failed of all that God had promised. He spoke as though he were a prophet, his years lending force to his words. But suppose he had never known a trial, what testimony could he have borne? Had he been lapped in luxury and never endured suffering, he might have stood there dumb and have been as useful as if he had spoken. We must be tried or we cannot magnify the faithful God, who will not leave His people.

Again, affliction gives us through grace the inestimable privilege of conformity to the Lord Jesus. We pray to be like Christ, but how can we be if we are not men of sorrows at all, and never become the acquaintance of grief? Like Christ, and yet never traverse through the vale of tears! Like Christ, and yet have all that heart could wish, and never bear the contradiction of sinners against thyself, and never say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" O sir, thou knowest not what thou dost ask. Hast thou said, "Let me sit on Thy right hand in Thy kingdom"? It cannot be granted to thee unless thou wilt also drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. A share of His sorrow must precede a share of His glory. Oh, if we are ever to be like Christ, to dwell with Him eternally, we may be well content to pass through much tribulation in order to attain to it.

Once more, our sufferings are of great service to us when God blesses them, for they help us to be useful to others. It must be a terrible thing for a man never to have suffered physical pain. You say, "I should like to be the man." Ah, unless you had extraordinary grace, you would grow hard and cold, you would get to be a sort of cast-iron man, breaking other people with your touch. No; let my heart be tender, even be soft, if it must be softened by pain, for I would fain know how to bind up my fellow's wound. Let mine eye have a tear ready for my brother's sorrows even if in order to that I should have to shed ten thousand for mine own. An escape from suffering would be an escape from the power to sympathize, and that were to be deprecated beyond all things. Luther was right when he said affliction was the best book in the minister's library. How can the man of God sympathize with the afflicted ones if he knows nothing at all about their troubles? I remember a hard, miserly churl, who said that the minister ought to be very poor, that he might have sympathy with the poor. I told him I thought he ought to have a turn at being very rich too, so that he might have sympathy with the very rich; and I suggested to him that perhaps, upon the whole, it would be handiest to keep him somewhere in the middle, that he might the more easily range over the experiences of all classes. If the man of God who is to minister to others could be always robust, it were perhaps a loss; if he could be always sickly, it might be equally so; but for the pastor to be able to range through all the places where the Lord suffers His sheep to go, is doubtless to the advantage of his flock. And what it is to ministers, that it will be to each one of you, according to his calling, for the consolation of the people of God.

Be thankful then, dear brethren, be thankful for trouble; and above all be thankful because it will soon be over, and we shall be in the land where these things will be spoken of with great joy. As soldiers show their scars and talk of battles when they come at last to spend their old age in the country at home, so shall we, in the dear land to which we are hastening, speak of the goodness and faithfulness of God which brought us through all the trials of the way. I would not like to stand in that white-robed host and hear it said, "These are they that come out of great tribulation, all except that one." Would you like to be there to see yourself pointed at as the one saint who never knew a sorrow? Oh, no, for you would be an alien in the midst of the sacred brotherhood. We will be content to share the battle, for we shall soon wear the crown and wave the palm.

I know while I am preaching some of you have said, "Ah, these people of God have a hard time of it." So have you. The ungodly do not escape from sorrow by their sin. I never heard of a man escaping from poverty through being a spendthrift, I never heard of a man who escaped from headache or heartache by drunkenness; or from bodily pain by licentiousness. I have heard the opposite; and if there be griefs to the holy there are others for you. Only mark this, ungodly ones, mark this. For you these things work no good. You pervert them to mischief; but for the saints they work eternal benefit. For you your sorrows are punishments; for you they are the first drops of the red hail that shall fall upon you for ever. They are not so to the child of God. You are punished for your trans-

gressions, and he is not. And let us tell you, too, that if this day you happen to be in peace, and prosperity, and plenty, and happiness,—yet there is not one child of God here, in the very deeps of trouble, that would change places with you under any consideration whatever. He would sooner be God's dog, and be kicked under the table, than be the devil's darling and sit at meat with him. "Let God do as He pleases," we say, "for a while here; we believe our worst state to be better than your best." Do you think we love God for what we get out of Him, and for nothing else? Is that your notion of a Christian's love to God? We read in Jeremiah of certain who said they would not leave off worshipping the Queen of Heaven. "For when," said they, "we worshipped the Queen of Heaven, we had bread in plenty, but now we starve." This is how the ungodly talk, and that is what the devil thought was Job's case. Says he: "Does Job fear God for naught? Hast Thou not set a hedge about him, and all that he has?" The devil does not understand real love and affection; but the child of God can tell the devil to his face that he loves God if He covers him with sores and sets him on the dunghill, and by God's good help he means to cling to God through troubles ten-fold heavier than those he has had to bear, should they come upon him. Is He not a blessed God? Aye, let the beds of our sickness ring with it: He is a blessed God. In the night watches, when we are weary, and our brain is hot and fevered, and our soul is distracted, we yet confess that He is a blessed God. Every ward of the hospital where believers are found should echo with that note. A blessed God? "Aye, that He is," say the poor and needy here this morning, and so say all God's poor throughout all the land. A blessed God? "Aye," say His dying people, "as He slays us we will bless His name. He loves us, and we love Him; and, though all His waves go over us, and His wrath lieth sore upon us, we would not change with kings on their thrones if they are without the love of God."

O sinner, if God smites a child of His so heavily, He will smite you one day; and if those He loves are made to smart, what will He do with those who rebel against Him and hate Him? "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." The Lord bless you, and bring you into the bonds of His covenant, for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE MIGHTY ARM

"Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand."—Psalm lxxxix. 13.

WHEN the soul is perfectly reconciled to God, and comes to delight in Him, it rejoices in all His attributes. At the first, perhaps, it dwells almost exclusively upon His love and His mercy, but it afterwards proceeds to find joy in the sterner attributes, and especially delights itself in His holiness and in His power. It is a mark of the growth of Christian knowledge when we begin to distinguish the attributes and to rejoice in God in each one of them. It betokens meditation and thought when we are able thus to discern the things of God and to give to the Lord a psalm of praise for each one of His glories; and it also indicates a growingly intimate communion with the great Father when we begin to perceive his adorable character, and to rejoice so much in all that He is, that we can take the attributes in detail, and bless, and praise, and magnify Him on account of each one of them. Under the Jewish law there were forms of the sacrifices which were of the simplest kind, such as the offering of turtle doves or young pigeons, which were simply cleft asunder and burned upon the altar; but there were other and more elaborate rules for the sacrifices which were taken from the flock and the herd; these were rightly divided, and the parts laid in their places —the head, the fat, the inwards, and the legs, and so on, as if to show that although some believers only know the atoning sacrifice as a whole and after a superficial manner, there are others still further instructed, who look deeper into divine mystery, and see the various forms which the great truth assumes. It is a saving thing to know the Lord at all with the heart; but I would, beloved, that ye knew all the varied rays of His pure light, that ye beheld the many glories of His crown, and could rejoice in each distinct excellence of His infinite perfection.

The subject of this morning is the power of God as the subject of adoration. Here, dear brethren, we have large scope for thought, for the power of God is manifested in connection with all His other attributes; it is the cause of all His works, and the basis and working force by which His kingdom is maintained and Himself revealed. How clearly is His power beheld in *creation*: there indeed, O Lord, "Thou hast a mighty arm." We injure ourselves and dishonour our Creator when we pass over His works as if they were beneath the notice of spiritual minds. It is perverse on our part to forget the exhortation, "What God has cleansed, call not thou common." The Psalmist sang concerning the creating might of God in verses eleven and twelve of the psalm before us—"The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, Thou hast founded them. The north and the south Thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Thy name." David did not divide between revelation and nature; he loved the word and meditated therein day and night, but at the same time he triumphed in the works of God's hands. In the hundred and fourth Psalm he found music in rocks and rills, in fowls and fir trees, and rejoiced that the glory of the Lord shall endure for ever, the Lord shall rejoice in His works. In the eighth Psalm he considered the heavens, and burst forth with the exclamation, "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!" With the same feeling I led you

to sing this morning that child's hymn in which the power of God is reverenced—

> "I sing the almighty power of God,
> Which made the mountains rise,
> Which spreads the flowing seas abroad,
> And built the lofty skies."

The Lord made Job and his friends remember His power as seen in creation; indeed, it was by revealing that one attribute that Job's friends were silenced, and the patriarch himself was led to cry, "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer Thee?" We ought not to overlook that which had so salutary an influence upon others. It is a pity when people become so spiritual that they have no eye whatever for the Lord's power in rivers and mountains, in seas and storms; for God has made them all, and as in His glass He is darkly to be seen in them. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." I can understand the feeling of some who say, "I prefer spiritual preaching, and I delight most to read the spiritual parts of the Word of God rather than the historical records, and to think of His grace rather than of His wisdom in nature"; but there is a fault about such a preference excellent as it is in one way. It is as though you had a friend who was a great artist, and a master in statuary, able to make the marble almost live and speak with his magic chisel. You are accustomed to call upon this eminent sculptor, and it gives you great pleasure to talk with him, and to associate with his children, but you have never gone into his studio, for his masterpieces do not interest you. Now, this is poor fellowship, and if ever you get to be in perfect sympathy with your friend, you will be interested in that which interests him, and charmed with the various proofs of your friend's powers in design and execution. You will study his works for his sake, and love him all the more because of those wonders of beauty and joy which his hand produces. If the Lord thinks fit to display the hand of His power in the visible universe, it would ill become any one of His children to close his eyes thereto. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." "All Thy works praise Thee, O God; but Thy saints shall bless Thee."

So, too, the power of God is to be seen in *providence*; in the overruling hand which controls common events. Our sweet singer writes in verse nine, "Thou rulest the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise Thou stillest them." God's power is seen in the great phenomena of nature, and even in the lesser matters of every-day life. His hand guides the fall of every sere leaf, and adorns each blade of grass with its own drop of dew; but chiefly His way is in the whirlwind, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. The mighty hand of the Lord is to be seen in the events of human history; His power is manifest in courts and armies, in the rise and fall of empires, in the growth of nations, or in their overthrow. Behold how He broke Egypt in pieces as one that was slain, and scattered His enemies with His strong arm. His people did not refuse to sing of His great power when He smote great kings and slew famous kings, because His mercy to His people endureth for ever. It ought to be a subject of great joy to all righteous souls that the world is not left to itself, or to tyrants: the might is with the right after all, for power belongeth unto God. There is a Governor and Ruler who is Lord of all, and all power is in His hand. Have you not often wished more power to the arm of the man who attacks insolence and cruelty? Be glad, then, that all power is in the hand of the Judge of all the earth, who must and will do right. He will not leave bloodshed unavenged, nor suffer wanton cruelty and horrible brutality to go unpunished; and if the great ones of the earth pass by with indifference, or wink the eye in wicked policy, there is an eye that sees, and a hand that will mete out vengeance stern and sure. In patience possess your souls, O ye people of God, for "God reigneth over the heathen, He sitteth upon the throne of His holiness." The needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the oppressed for ever trodden down, for verily the Lord reigneth, and His power shall defend the cause of right.

It is another subject for which we have reason also to adore God, that His power is seen in *the ultimate judgment of the wicked*, a terrible subject upon which I will not enlarge, but one which should prostrate us in the dust before His awful majesty. There are two flaming jewels of Jehovah's crown which will be terribly seen in hell; His wrath and His power. "What if God, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" Righteous indignation and omnipotence will be glorified together in that last tremendous act of judgment in which He will separate the righteous from the wicked, and apportion to the unbelievers their due. "Who knoweth the power of Thine anger?" What must be the strength of an angry God! Who shall stand against Him when once He stirreth up his indignation, when He shall break the nations with a rod of iron, and shiver them like potters' vessels? Beware, saith He, "ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Who shall stand against this great and terrible God in the day of His wrath? Who shall endure in that day when mercy's day is over, and justice alone sits on her burning throne.

Neither of these, however, is the subject of this morning, though we should not have completed the topic without alluding to them. The subject is the power displayed in connection with the mercy of God, for so Ethan begins this noble covenant psalm: "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations." Power in alliance with grace is our one theme.

First, we shall consider the mighty power of God in His grace, as *revealed in our experience*; secondly, divine power, as *displayed in Christ Jesus*; and, thirdly, we shall endeavour to reflect upon the same power, and consider how it should be *practically recognized*. We must be short on each point, for our time is scanty.

I. First, the mighty arm of God displayed in the way of grace, as MANIFESTED IN OUR EXPERIENCE.

First, beloved, remember the *divine long-suffering*. What a mighty arm of grace it must have been which held back the anger of God while we were in a state of rebellion and impenitence. For God to rule the angry sea seems nothing to me compared with the power which He exercises upon Himself when He endures the provocations of ungodly men, the hardness of their hearts, their rejection of Christ, and oftentimes their blasphemous speeches and their unclean deeds. O sinner, when thou art sinning with a high hand and with an outstretched arm, is it not a wonder of wonders that God does not cut thee

down, and end thy insolence? He saith, "Ah, I will ease Me of Mine adversaries": is it not a marvel that He has not eased Himself of you, and taken you away with a stroke? You know how it is with some men, a word and a blow; but it has not been so with God. There have been many words of love and many deeds of kindness. He has waited long, and is waiting now, stretching out His hands all the day to a disobedient and gainsaying people. What power is this which restrains its own power, the power of God over His own omnipotence, so that He does not let His anger flame forth at once and devour the ungodly, nor suffer the sword of execution to smite down the rebel in the midst of his provocations? Glory be unto Thy loving-kindness and Thy long-suffering, O God, for in them we see Thy mighty self-restraining power.

But, next, we saw the power of God so as to recognize it when *the Lord subdued us* by His mighty grace. What omnipotence is displayed in the conquest of every rebellious sinner! By nature the sinner stands out very stoutly against God, and will not obey His voice. Often he is bulwarked round with *prejudices;* and you and I, who seek to convert him, are quite unable to reach him. Prejudice is an earthwork into which you may fire with the heaviest cannon, but without avail, for the balls are buried in the earth, and no result follows. When men will not see, no light can help them, for they wilfully close their eyes. When they will not hear, the charms of the gospel avail not, for they have resolutely closed their ears. It is a wonder of wonders when at last God conquers prejudice, and the man finds himself where he would have sworn he never could be, melted down and penitent at Jesus' feet. If a prophet had told him it would ever be so, he would have said, "Thou art mad, this cannot be: I abhor the very name of it." Thou hast a mighty arm, O God, when prejudiced Saul of Tarsus falls down at Thy feet, and rises to become Thine apostle.

Men are surrounded often with a granite wall of *obstinacy:* they will not yield to the power of divine love. Preach as you may, they are not to be moved, but remain like an impregnable fortress, frowning from its own inaccessible rock, defying all assaults. You can find no way to get at them. You would be willing almost to die if you could capture their hearts for Christ, but they are neither to be taken by threatening nor by wooing. They are like leviathan whose scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. "Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish spears?" They appear to have no joints to their harness through which the arrow of conviction may penetrate: but Thou hast a mighty arm, O God, and Thine enemies are made to feel Thine arrows; those who were exceeding stout against Thee have, nevertheless, come crouching at Thy feet and have become Thy servants. Glory be to God, the northern iron and the steel become wax at His bidding.

We have seen some, also, who have been rooted in their *habits of sin*, altogether severed from their old sins. Wonder of wonders, the Ethiopian has changed his skin, and the leopard has lost his spots: for he who was accustomed to do evil has learned to do well. Behold a miracle of mighty grace. The sinner has grown old in sin: like an old oak he has become rooted to the earth by a thousand roots. To transplant him seemed impossible, it were far easier to cut him down. Yet the giant hand of grace has taken hold of that ancient tree and shaken it to and fro by conviction of sin, and at last it has by conversion been drawn from its place right up by the roots, so that the place which once knew it knew it no more. The rock and soil in which it had been imbedded for, perhaps, half a century were made to give way before the upheaving, uprooting force, and the man, divided from his former life, has been a proof of what the Lord can do. The Lord knows how to cleave the mountain and divide the sea, and therefore he can separate men from their darling lusts, and teach them to cut off right arms and pluck out right eyes rather than perish in sin. Truly, Lord, Thou hast a mighty arm.

Satan teaches men to defend themselves against grace by bulwarks of *pride*. They say, "Who is the Lord that we should obey His voice?" They lift up their horn on high, and speak with a stiff neck. They are self-righteous, they are sure that they have done no ill; the gospel is powerless upon them because they are so lofty in their looks and insolent in their thoughts. But Thou hast a mighty arm, O Lord, Thou layest proud sinners very low; Thou makest them hungry and thirsty, and then they cry unto Thee in their trouble. Thou hast a mighty arm amongst the proud, and Thou bringest down their heart with labour, they fall down and there is none to help. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats." Nebuchadnezzar, from saying, "Behold this great Babylon that I have builded," learned to confess that those who walk in pride the Lord is able to abase.

Equally mighty is the Lord to overcome *despair*, for this is another one of the fortresses in which sinners entrench themselves against divine grace. "There is no hope," say they, "therefore will we give up ourselves to our iniquities," and it is almost idle to attempt to convert those who are wilfully despairing. They resent the consolations of the Bible, and reject the promises of God; and yet the Lord can break the bars of iron and cut the gates of brass in pieces, and bring up the captives from the dungeons of despair, and set them on a rock, and put a new song into their mouths, and make them praise His name for evermore. From the iron cage the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, can set the captives free. All glory be unto His name, when God resolves to save the sinner He will have His will without violating the will of man. In a sweet, soft, gentle manner, in which the power lies in the gentleness, and the force lies in the tenderness, the Lord can conquer the most obstinate. He makes the lion to lie down with the lamb, so that a little child shall lead it. Thus the power of God is seen in the conquest of sinners.

That power is equally seen in *their transformation;* for is it not a marvel that God should be able to make old and corrupt rebels into new creatures in Christ Jesus? Every conversion is a display of omnipotence. To create the world was but half a wonder compared with the creation of a right spirit; for there was nothing to hinder when God spake and the world began; but when God speaks to ungodly men there is a resisting force, which impedes the work and even defies the great Worker. There is a darkness and a death, there is a force of evil and an inability towards good which must be overcome, yet the Lord maketh all things new, and causeth the new creation to arise in the hearts of His people. Verily He hath a mighty arm. Glory be to the Lord who only

doeth great wonders with a high hand and an outstretched arm.

Conversion is also called a resurrection. It will be a great feat of power when dead carcases shall live at the sound of the last trumpet, but it is an equal wonder when the dry bones of dead sinners come to life, when those who were scattered at the grave's mouth, the hopeless, graceless, Christless, nevertheless are made to live at the sounding of God's word by the power of His Spirit. O, you that have been new created and quickened into newness of life, adore His power to-day! Who but a God could have made you what you are? Consider what you were, and reflect upon the glorious position to which the Lord has brought you by the blood of the cross. Think what rebels you were, and how set on mischief your nature was; and now, subdued by sovereign grace, your spirit longs for His embrace, you follow after holiness and seek to have it perfected in the fear of God. What a revolution is this! What a turning of things upside down! To turn the wilderness into springs of water and the desert into a flowing stream is nothing compared with turning the dead, cold, dry heart of man into a mighty wellspring of love springing up into eternal life. Glory be to Thy power, oh Thou infinitely mighty Jehovah, Thou hast a mighty arm.

That same power is seen, dear friends, in *the various deliverances* which the Lord gives to His people at the outset, when their enemies come against them so fiercely. Behold, my brethren, how strong was the hand of God which delivered us from the bondage of our first doubts and fears, when conscience accused and the law condemned, when we thought ourselves only waiting for the death warrant and the execution. Behold the Lord has routed our despair, He has set us free from fear and brought us into the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free. We were slaves to sin, too, and oh how sin marshalled all its armies against us at the first, if haply it might cut off our earliest hopes. But mighty was that Christ of God who put all our sins to the rout, and drowned them in the Red Sea of His blood. "There brake He the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." Then Satan came forth with the most horrible temptations, and roared upon us like a lion, for he will not willingly lose his subjects. He sought to cast about us all his nets, that he might hold us captive, and prevent our flying to the divine refuge. But, behold, the prey has been taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive has been delivered, and we are this day rescued from the power of sin and Satan. Even the law itself hath now no power over us to condemn us, for Christ has satisfied it, and we are free. Mighty is Thine arm, O God! Thine own right hand, and Thy holy arm have gotten Thee the victory.

And since then, beloved, in *the continual upholding of the saints*, in their final perseverance which is guaranteed, how much of the power of God is seen. You have passed through many troubles, some of you, troubles most heavy and sore, but they have not prevailed against you nor overthrown you. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Fierce were the foes that gathered against us many a time, and had not the Lord been on our side they had swallowed us up quick; but Thou, O Lord, hast a mighty arm, and in Thy name have we found a refuge. They compassed us about like bees, yea, they compassed us about, but in the name of the Lord have we destroyed them. Out of what sins and temptations have we come forth victorious! With some of you your path has been through the wilderness, and through one continuous scene of warfare. Snares and traps have been thickly strewn all along your pathway; trials and discouragements have fallen like a storm of hail perpetually beating; and yet you are not overthrown. He keepeth the feet of His saints. The life of any one Christian is a world of wonders, but in some believers their experience consists of a series of great miracles. "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength." How has our soul escaped as a bird from the fowler's snare! The mighty adversaries have been overcome by Him who is mightier than they all! The divine strength has been manifested in our weakness. My brother, is it not a wonder that being such a poor worm as you are, yet you have never been crushed? Is it not a marvel that though your faith has been as a bruised reed it has not been broken, and though your piety has been like smoking flax it has never been quenched? Kept alive with death so near, preserved when enemies have been so fierce, will you not say indeed "Thou hast a mighty arm, strong is Thy right hand"?

Brethren, the end cometh, but it will all be right at last, for unless the Lord shall come, we have yet to meet *the last grim adversary*, but we are not afraid, because our brethren who have gone before us have set us an example of how to die triumphantly. How gloriously have they triumphed in their last hours. We have stood by their side, seen the brightness of their eye when all around was deathshade, and heard their exulting songs when all that looked upon them wept at the thought of their departure. Blanched their cheek? Far from it. They have been as jubilant in their dying hour as the warrior when he divides the spoil. As the bride rejoiceth in her bridal, they have looked forward to the coming of their great Lord and to their being blessed for ever in His embrace. We have been ready to cry out with them, "O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory!" Truly, Lord, when Thy poor, weak, suffering people die triumphantly, we see that Thou hast a mighty arm. When flesh and heart are failing, when friends cannot help, when every earthly comfort vanishes, for the heart still to rejoice and triumph—this is to see the arm of the Lord made bare, and this causes us to bless and magnify His holy name.

I would to God that I had more ability to set forth this majestic subject; but I have done my best, and I ask your meditations in the quiet of this afternoon to assist me, that you may really adore and bless the power which is so conspicuous in every vessel of mercy, so revealed in your own self if you be indeed a child of God. O Holy Spirit, make known to us the exceeding greatness of His mighty power, to usward who believe.

II. Secondly, let us behold the mighty arm of God as specially DISPLAYED IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST JESUS; and here will you kindly follow me in the psalm itself, for there will you see that the power of God is displayed in Jesus Christ, in *the choice* of Him, and the exaltation of Him, to be a Prince and a Saviour. See verse nineteen: "I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people." Christ is the incarnation of the power of divine grace, in Him dwells

the power of God to save the sons of men; and yet in what weakness it dwelt. He was a man despised and rejected, lowly and meek, poor, and without worldly honour. His was the weakness of shame and suffering, poverty and dishonour; but the power of God was upon Him, and is upon Him now. It is a grand thing to know that God by the weakness of man, taking it into connection with His own nature, has routed sin, Satan, death and hell. The battle in the wilderness was between Satan and a Man, tempted as we are; but oh, how gloriously that matchless Man overthrew the tempter and prevailed. The agony in the garden of Gethsemane was that of a Man: it was a Man, though God, who sweat great drops of blood, and uttered strong crying and tears, and won the victory by which evil is dethroned; and He that met the powers of evil on the cross, and stood alone and trod the wine-press till there remained not an uncrushed cluster, was a Man. It is by His power, even the power of the Man of Nazareth, that all the powers of evil have been for ever blasted and withered; so that, though they rebel, it is but a struggling gasp for life. As surely as God sits on His throne, the foot of the seed of the woman shall be upon the serpent's head, to crush it for ever; for mighty as were the hosts of evil, God hath exalted One chosen out of the people, and laid help upon Him, that He may eternally vanquish all the hosts of darkness. Strong is Thy right hand, O Saviour, for by weakness and suffering and death Thou hast overthrown all Thy people's foes.

His power was seen, next, in *our Lord's anointing.* "I have found David my servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him." You know how in His preaching there went out of His mouth a sharp two-edged sword with which He smote sin, because the Spirit of God was upon Him. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit bore witness in the entire body of Christ, making all His servants speak with tongues of fire the word of the gospel. The Spirit of God is with Christ on earth still in His Church, so that, feeble though the speech of His ministers may be, a secret power attends it, irresistibly subduing the forces of evil. Rejoice ye this day, beloved; for the anointing rests still in the Church of God, and the anointed Redeemer must be victorious in every place. Thanks be unto God which causeth His word to triumph in every place by the power of the eternal Spirit. We ought therefore to adore Jesus Christ as having the power of God, because the Holy Ghost is always with Him and with His word, and He is therefore mighty to save.

We must equally magnify the power of God because of *the continuance of the empire of Christ in the world.* As saith the Psalmist: "with whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen Him. The enemy shall not exact upon Him; nor the son of wickedness afflict Him, and I will beat down His foes before His face and plague them that hate Him." These eighteen hundred years every effort has been put forth to root up the Church of Christ. The devil and all his servants on earth have conspired to overthrow the growing kingdom of our Lord; but they have never succeeded. Think, my brethren, what the power of God must be which has kept the Church alive under fiery persecutions, rescued it from the fangs of the Inquisition, preserved it from the poison of heresy, and the pestilence of infidelity, and, what is worse, enabled it to survive the horrible dragon of Popery which has threatened altogether to carry away the Church with the floods which it pours out of its mouth. Yet the chosen seed live on and are multiplied in the land, even as it is promised in the thirty-sixth verse of the psalm before us: "His seed shall endure for ever, and His throne as the sun before Me." The establishment and continuation of the Church is an extraordinary proof of divine power.

So are all *the conquests* of Christ; some of which we have seen, and more of which are to come. "I will beat down His foes before His face, and plague them that hate Him," is the divine promise. "I will make Him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. I will set His hand also in the sea and His right hand in the rivers." Glory be to God, Christ is triumphant still. Still in the preaching of His truth He rides forth conquering and to conquer. The gospel has not lost its old force, but whenever it is preached in faith it wins the day. See what power it has in drawing together the multitudes and holding them in breathless attention: a man has nothing to do but to preach Christ simply, and with all his might, and the people will hear it. We want no endowment of the state, we seek no acts of parliament to help us. Give us a clear stage and no favour, an open Bible and an earnest tongue, and the people shall yet be aroused and the multitude shall bow before the people's King. Jesus Christ is still the mightiest name which can be pronounced by mortal tongue; its all-subduing power shall yet be felt in the remotest regions of the earth.

Beloved, I have not time to do more than say that the great power of God's grace is embodied in *Christ's mighty intercession.* See verse twenty-six: "He shall cry unto Me, Thou art My Father, My God, and the rock of My salvation." This makes Him mighty to save—"He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." I should like to have an hour to expatiate upon the gracious power of God as seen in the intercession of Christ. Omnipotence dwells in every plea that falls from those dear lips, as the eternal Son pleads His own merits with the everlasting Father. Beloved, the power of Christ is well known to many of you. Did it not call you from the dead? Has not it kept you from going down into the pit? Is there not such power in His name that it makes your heart to leap? If we speak of anything else, you listen to it and glide into sleep; but if you hear about *Him*, does it not stir the very deeps of your soul? Have you not often, when you felt faint and weary, sprung to your feet with exultation at the very thought of *Him?* Has not His presence made your sick bed soft, and what you thought your dying couch to be a throne whereon you sat and reigned as in the heavenly places?

> "Jesus, the very thought of Thee
> With transport fills my breast."

You know it is so. The power of Jesus' name, who can measure it? and what will be your sense of His power when you reach another world; when He shall have brought you into His rest, even you who were so unworthy; when He shall reveal in you all the majesty of His goodness; when heaven shall be yours, and all its boundless plains and golden streets,—and when, looking around, you shall find

all your Christian brethren there without exception, as many as loved the Lord below, all safely gathered into the fold at last? What a shout shall sound throughout heaven when the armies of the living God shall assemble and find not a soldier missing; when they shall read the muster-roll, and Little Faith shall be found there, and Ready-to-Halt shall be there without his crutches, and Miss Much-afraid shall be there, and Mistress Despondency shall be there, each able to answer to his or her own name and say, "Here am I." Satan has not devoured a single lamb of all the flock, nor slain a single man of all the host. All along the line Jesus has been victorious! When you shall see the whole host assembled, and remember the struggles through which each one of them came, the much tribulation through which they waded to their crowns, you will exclaim with rapture, "Thou hast a mighty arm, strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand." All glory be to Jehovah Jesus, our Almighty Saviour!

III. Now this brings me to my conclusion, and here we have to answer the question—HOW IS THIS POWER TO BE PRACTICALLY RECOGNIZED? If you will practically carry out what I say, a few words will suffice.

First, if the power of God be so great, *yield to it.* Man, do you hope to resist God? Hast thou an arm like God's, and canst thou thunder with a voice like His? Throw down those weapons, and cease to wage a hopeless war. Capitulate at once, surrender at discretion. Oh, if there be a man here who is the enemy of God, I beseech him to count the cost before he continue the war, and see whether he is able to brave it out with God. Shall wax fight with the fire, or tow contend with the flame? He would go through a host of such as thou art, O man, as fire burneth up the stubble, and or ever thou hast time to think of it, thou shalt be utterly destroyed. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little."

The next practical use is this—is God so strong? *then trust Him to save you.* Never say again that He cannot snatch you from perdition: never doubt His power to save, even in extremity. I have shown you that He has treasured up His gracious power in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, therefore look unto Jesus Christ and be ye saved. All power lies with Him, He can forgive all sin, and He can also subdue all iniquity, change the most depraved heart, and implant every grace in the soul. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

Next, if He be so strong, then *trust Him in everything.* O, you that are His people, never dare to distrust Him. Is His arm shortened? Cannot the Lord deliver you? Bring your burdens, your troubles, your wants, your griefs, pour them out like water before Him, let them flow forth at the foot of the Almighty, and they shall pass away and you shall sing, "The Lord is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation."

Is God so strong, then *shake off all fear of man.* Who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die? Man is but grass, withered in an hour, wherefore should you tremble at his frown? He is crushed before the moth; why then fear him? Let not the faces of proud men confound you. Trust in God and fear not, for the mighty God of Jacob is with us, and greater is He that is for us than all they that can be against us.

And now as to *thy service,* to which thou art called by the Lord. If He be so strong, do not think of thine own weakness any longer, except as being a platform for His strength. Hast thou only one talent? God's Holy Spirit is not limited in power. He can make thy one talent as fruitful as another man's ten. Art thou weak as water? Then rejoice this day, and glory in infirmity, because the power of God shall rest upon thee. Think not of what *thou* canst do—that is a very small affair, but consider what *He* can do by thee. He can strengthen the feeble against the strong. Behold, this day He saith unto thee, "Behold I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them."

Last of all, with regard to all *the future* which lies before you,—is God so strong? then commit it to His hands. You have a great trouble to face to-morrow, you are expecting a greater trouble still at the end of the week. Now, be not afraid, for the Lord liveth to deliver thee. What! Dost thou fear? Is thy Counsellor perished? Has thy Helper failed thee? How canst thou sink in the deep waters when underneath thee are the everlasting arms? The mighty God is thy refuge, how canst thou be in danger? Wherefore dost thou look into the future at all? Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. God is the God of to-morrow as well as the God of to-day. Cease from thy troubling, for it weakens thee, but cannot help thee; it dishonours thy God, thy Saviour, and thus it is evil. In patience and quietness wait for the fulfilment of His promise: rest in Him and be at peace. Stand thou still, and see the salvation of God. O Lord, glorify Thyself this morning in both saint and sinner, by manifesting the greatness of Thy power, for Thou hast a mighty arm, strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand.

THE "BEAU IDEAL" OF LIFE

"O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."—Psalm xc. 14.

MOSES saw, with deep regret, that the great host which came out of Egypt would have to die in the wilderness. Every day there were many funerals, for a vast multitude of men, and women, and children, had to be buried in the wilderness; and tears of sorrow and sympathy must continually have stood in the eyes of the great leader of the children of Israel. After speaking about their days being passed away in God's wrath, Moses offered a prayer which, under the circumstances, was most natural and most wise. It was in substance this: "Lord if we must die in this desert, if this whole generation (except Caleb and Joshua) must pass away in the wilderness, then, at any rate, give us the fulness of Thy favour now, that we may spend all our remaining days, whether they are to be few or many, in gladness and rejoicing." Now, seeing that we also are all passing away, and that, whether young or old, we too must be carried to the grave unless the Lord should first return, this seems to me to be a very wise prayer for us to put up: "Lord, satisfy us with Thy mercy now, that we may waste no more of our life in sinful dissatisfaction; but that, from this hour to the last moment of our life, we may be filled with Thy favour, and may rejoice and be glad all our days."

I. Just for a minute or two, I want, in the first place, to show you that Moses has here set before us THE "BEAU IDEAL" OF LIFE.

If one could have just such a life as he desired, could he desire anything better than to be satisfied early with God's favour? Would it not be a very delightful thing if the whole of one's life could be spent exactly as it ought to be, and could be spent in the enjoyment of the highest degree of happiness of which we are capable? "O satisfy us," is the prayer of the text: "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy." If the young man—instead of seeking after something which he will still continue to seek after if he is spared to reach the prime of life, and will still seek after even when he grows grey,—could get that which would content him at once, if he could get something which would immediately fill his soul, and make it run over with thankfulness and joy, would it not be a great blessing to him, especially if he could get it, as Moses says, "early,"—soon,—in the very beginning of his life's day? Many men, even good men, have wasted the early morning of their days; and some have had the painful experience of looking back, in the afternoon of life, upon the best part of their day, and even the noontide, all gone; and there has been for them only the evening, and sometimes only a very short evening, to spend in complete satisfaction and real joy. It is a pity that so many Christians' lives should, for all practical purposes, be only the fag-ends of lives,—that, so far as their influence upon others is concerned, they should be merely like the candle-ends that we put upon the save-alls; but the whole candle has never been consumed in giving light in the sanctuary of God. It is a thing to be desired beyond measure that, from the first to the last of life, God's blessing should rest upon us, and that we should enjoy peace and happiness without any intermingling of the distress which is caused by sin. This, as I have said, seems to me to be the *beau ideal* of life, and I think that all Christians at least will agree with me.

It is a poor way of building a house to have a flaw in the foundation; for, however carefully we may build the superstructure, we can never make a satisfactory building because of the flaw down below. It is poor weaving, on the part of the man at the loom, when he has a flaw at the beginning of his work; however carefully he may weave the latter portion of it, he will always know that he cannot get that old flaw out, that the piece of cloth will never be perfect. In contrast to this kind of building and weaving, it would be a blessed thing to have such grace and such wisdom given that the very first course of the foundation of the house of life should be well and truly laid, and that the whole building should be to the praise and glory of God; and it would be equally blessed that the very first throws of the shuttle of the web of life should be in accordance with the right rules for weaving, so that the whole piece of cloth might be pronounced perfect after its kind. I think this is the meaning of the prayer of the text: "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

II. Secondly, as we judge this satisfaction to be the *beau ideal* of life, let us consider HOW SOME PEOPLE HAVE SOUGHT TO ATTAIN TO IT.

I do not hesitate to say that the first part of the text is the cry of all men: "*O satisfy us*, satisfy us, satisfy us!" But there is a kind of horse-leech in every man's soul that is not easily satisfied. It is like death, and the grave, and the sea. Whatever may be cast into the maw of death, it is as hungry as it was before, and the sepulchre is never satisfied; and throw what you will into the sea, it is always ready to receive more. So it is with the hearts of men. "O satisfy us, satisfy us," they cry, as the heathen shout to their idol gods, and as the priests of Baal cried to their lifeless image. "O satisfy us," is the world's cry to-day, for man's hunger is insatiable, though he disdains the only food which would satisfy his cravings. "O satisfy us," is the cry which is heard in every quarter of the globe;—alas! not ascending to heaven, as it should, but going out to the things of time and sense. Still do men seek satisfaction in that which Solomon calls "vanity of vanities."

Wise young men pray, in the words of the text, "O satisfy us *early*." They want to get that which is to be the source of their joy, not when they can no longer enjoy it, but now, so they cry, "satisfy us early." They do not ask for God's mercy merely as a sort of pension for their old age, but they want to have it now. At any rate, I know that I did, for I wished to obtain whatever of gladness and joy could be had even in my youthful days. There is nothing wrong in desiring to be happy; there is nothing wrong in offering the prayer, "O satisfy us early," so long as that prayer is completed in the

way in which my text completes it: "O satisfy us early *with Thy mercy.*"

Many have tried to satisfy themselves by gaining money. This is a pursuit in which a man may lawfully engage if it be not the chief object of his life, as so many make it. They believed that they would be satisfied when they had acquired a certain amount, but they were not. I might confidently ask every man of wealth, now in this world, whether he was satisfied when he reached the amount which he had himself fixed as the limit of his desire. Did he not then feel that he must have more than that amount? Of course he did, so he set before him another sum; and he said that when he had accumulated that amount, he would be content. But was he? Is not the desire for wealth a thing which grows with that it feeds upon, so that, the more a man has, the more he still wants? There never did live, and there never could live, a man whose entire nature could be satisfied with his worldly possessions. You know that we call the man, who delights in hoarding up riches, a miser. Why do we call him by that name unless it is because he is truly miserable? The very name for the man who is engrossed with avarice signifies unhappiness; and when you want to describe somebody who is both aged and wretched, you say, "He is like an old miser." Yes, so it is. Men may amass as much wealth as they will, but if, with money, they have not acquired something better than the best metal that ever came from the mine or the mint, they will still go on crying, "O satisfy us! O satisfy us!" The Indians of South America believed that the Spaniards' god was made of gold, and well they might when they saw the strangers' devotion to their idol. They once poured molten gold down a Spaniard's throat, saying, "Thou hast thirsted for it, now thou shalt have enough of it." But if a man could eat gold, and drink gold, and sleep with gold, and walk with gold, and be robed in gold, yet, still, what is there in that metal which could satisfy the cravings of the highest part of man's nature,—that mysterious spiritual thing which is called the soul? No, there is no solid satisfaction for the soul in all the wealth in the world.

Others have despised this gross pursuit, and *they have said that satisfaction is to be found in fame.* We all of us like respect, esteem, honour; it is false for any man to say that he does not like praise, for he does; and if anyone is pleased at being told that he does not like flattery, he is then being more highly flattered than at any other time of his life, and he is enjoying the sensation! Some men, to gain honours and distinction in various ways, have made complete slaves of themselves. They have supposed that, if they could but get these honours,—perhaps the honour of a degree at the university, or the honour of a certain rank in the profession of the law, or even in the Church, they would be satisfied; but no man was ever yet satisfied with honours. They are but as a puff of wind, which can never fill an immortal soul. If you read the histories of those statesmen who have risen to the greatest heights of fame, you will, as a rule, find that the most famous man in the kingdom is generally the greatest slave. He has, from the very weight of his honours, the heavier burden of responsibility to bear. As "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," so, in its degree, uneasy lies the head that wears the laurel or the bay. There is no contentment to be found in fame, as those have proved who have won the most of it. There was a time when the flattery of two or three poor people in a village would have satisfied them; but, now, the plaudits of a whole nation seem as nothing to them; and when the whole world is ringing with their renown, they sit down in despondency, wring their hands in misery, and cry, with Solomon, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

Others have said, "*But surely there is something solid and satisfying in learning.*" Well, there is more to be said for this than for either of the other two things that I have mentioned; and, as far as I am concerned, I would sooner seek satisfaction in my library than in the marble halls of the wealthy or in the courts of kings. To study, to learn, to make discoveries, to furnish the brain, to enrich the mind,—there is something worth doing in all this; yet Solomon, who carried out this idea as far as it could be carried out in his day, recorded his very emphatic verdict concerning it, "Much study is a weariness of the flesh." "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is very apt to be your utterance also with regard to study, for you always have the dreary thought that, even if you could know more than all other men in the world, when your turn came to sleep in the grave, there would be no difference between you and the peasant of whom Wordsworth wrote,—

> "A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."

If the peasant rises no higher than that, however learned any of us may be, we have only risen a little above him for a time, and in the common dust we too shall sleep with him. If there were no eternal future, what would all the joys of earthly knowledge be worth to us?

Others seek satisfaction in pleasure. I may be addressing some young man who says, "I do not care for wealth; I shall never trouble myself to hoard it. On the contrary, I love to spend it. I do not want to use a rake; give me a shovel, and I will soon scatter all my father's substance." There are some men who are very proficient in scattering what others have with great diligence gathered. These people say concerning study, "Let us get out of these crowded rooms into the pure, fresh air; we mean to go in for pleasure, and to enjoy ourselves while we can." This looks, at first sight, as if it were a prudent thing to do; and, certainly, there is a deal more sense in enjoying ourselves in a rational fashion than there can be in pinching and starving ourselves in order to hoard up money for heirs who will ridicule, if they do not actually curse, those who have provided so bountifully for them. Remember what Solomon says about others who seek what they call pleasure: "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." There is no satisfaction there; the merriest man who ever lived, the man who drained the wine-cup of mirth even to its dregs, has dashed it to the ground in his fierce indignation, and cursed the day in which he tried to find satisfaction there. Look at those who have gone to the house of the strange woman, and see what comes of their sinful sojourning there; even if it be only for a little while. Does not dissipation bring disease and decay upon nature

sooner than need be? There is no satisfaction there, young man; so, if you want really to enjoy yourself, there is a nobler and a surer way of doing so. The way of so-called "pleasure" is a delusion and a snare, and the end thereof is sorrow, suffering, and woe. Alas, that so many should continue to walk in a way which has such a sad end!

When a man plays the fool, let him do it for something that is worth having. Some time ago, when we were looking for a place for Messrs. Moody and Sankey to preach and sing in, two of our brethren went to see whether a certain building could be hired, and while they were waiting there, a man came up to them, and presented his card,—"Mr. So-and-so, clown." He thought our brethren had gone to engage the place for some amusements. They told him that they had come to engage it for religious services; and one of them said to him, "What a pity it is that you should play the fool for money!" I think the clown made a very sensible remark in reply, for he said, "You had better go and talk to those who play the fool, and make nothing by it; for there is some sense in playing the fool for money." To play the fool, and make nothing by it, is a very mild description of the folly of which I have been speaking; but how many *play the fool, and lose money by it!* What is it that clothes so many people in rags? What is it that makes so many have red eyes, and trembling limbs, and even *delirium tremens?* What is that but playing the fool, and losing by it? And what will it be when such a man comes to die,—a man who has lived without God, and without Christ, and who will be without hope in his death? That will be playing the fool with a vengeance, and the truth will come home to him that the eternal ruin of his soul is the cost of his folly.

If you were to realise what this kind of "pleasure" means, you would have nothing to do with it. When Mount Vesuvius suddenly began pouring forth its lava upon Pompeii, most of the inhabitants were assembled in the amphitheatre; I have seen the ruins of the place where they were gathered. I do not know what spectacle was on at the time; but however interesting it may have been, there was not a man, or woman, or child, who did not run, as fast as ever they could, wherever they hoped they might find a place of refuge. A few persons remained in their habitations, or were unable to escape, and there they are to this day. Some of their bodies have been lately discovered in the very positions in which they were overtaken by the eruption. If men were wise, the merriest play that ever was acted upon the face of the earth, the richest golden gains that ever lay before a merchant, the choicest pleasures that ever tempted the human heart, would never induce them to tarry till they were lost for ever; but they would be up and away, and never rest till they had escaped from the wrath to come.

Some seem to have no real object in life. I think I hear someone say, "Well, I have cared for none of those things that you have mentioned." Where then, my friend, have you tried to find satisfaction? "O, I have not troubled my head about that; I just plod along from day to day, working hard to earn my daily bread; I do not know that I have any ambition, in this world, except to pay my way, have enough to eat and to drink, and raiment to put on, and bring up my children as well as I can." Rest assured, my friend, that I do not despise you for having such desires; at the same time, I do think that it is a pity for an immortal soul not to have some aim and object higher and brighter than that, for it is pretty nearly the object of a mill-horse that goes round and round in its daily course, and never aims at anything higher. Your object is very like that of a swallow, or a sparrow, which builds its nest, and lays its eggs and hatches them, and sees its young flying off on their own account. Your ambition might be suitable for a dog, or a horse, or a cat, but it is not worthy of you, a being of a higher order. When I look at you, and remember that you were made in he image of God, I think that, surely, there must be something worth living for, something nobler than this poor ambition of yours. I ask you honestly to say whether you have found satisfaction there, and I am fully persuaded that you have not.

There are some who argue that the gospel cannot bless them. I frequently hear this kind of talk from poor working people. One says, "Well, sir, if I were well-to-do, then I think I ought to be a Christian; but religion is not for the poor." That is in direct opposition to the declaration of Christ Himself, that "the poor have the gospel preached unto them"; and to the inspired question, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?" Yet many people will have it that the gospel is not for them because they are so poor.

I have also heard some say that they are so ignorant that they cannot be saved. One says, "I cannot read," and another says, "I can read, but I cannot understand what I do read in the Bible; and when I go to hear a sermon, I cannot make out what is meant by it." They make out that they are almost idiots with regard to spiritual matters; yet, on any other subject, they would stick up for themselves, and try to prove that they are almost philosophers. Yet their plea that ignorance prevents them from being saved is directly contrary to Scripture; for the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to the Corinthians, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence."

Then, again, others say that they are too busy to be saved; at least, that is the practical meaning of their excuse. One says, "Now, do not bother me about religion, for I really have not time to think about such things as that. See, I have to be up early in the morning, and to work hard till late at night." Another says, "My business cares are so numerous that I cannot get away from the counting-house to go to a prayer-meeting." Ah, dear friends, but how many people, who have not been able to find time to pray, have had to find time to die; and how very frequently do we see that the very people, who say that they have not had time to think about the things of God, have found plenty of time for indulgence in vice and sinful pleasures! That excuse, like the others I have mentioned, will not avail any of those who make it. There is time enough for the most hard-worked man to lift his eye to heaven, and to cry, "O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake, accept

me, for I come to Thee trusting in His atoning sacrifice!" With many, the excuse is only an excuse, for they do not want Christ, and they do not believe that there is anything for them in Christ, and therefore they make these vain excuses.

I have known some even say that they are too sinful to come to Christ,—other people may be saved, but they could never be;—they have gone too far into sin, and they are too much involved in sin, they are so old, and they have so many friends and connections on the side of evil. Perhaps they are in a business that is not honest, and they are so interlaced with bad men that they cannot get out of it,—so they say; and they will say anything so as to hide that which is really at the bottom of their hearts,—which is, that they do not want Jesus Christ to save them. They would rather that He should let them alone, to go quietly on their own way, even although that way will inevitably lead them to everlasting destruction.

III. Now, in closing my discourse, I want to tell you WHERE REAL SATISFACTION CAN BE FOUND. It comes in answer to the prayer of the text: "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

Let me try and teach you, as plainly as I can, the way to find solid satisfaction. Friend, thou art young, and life is before thee. Thou wouldst fain make it a whole life, altogether happy. Begin, then, by realising that there is need for thee to seek satisfaction from God. If thou wert a mere animal, thou couldst be easily satisfied. Sheep and oxen are perfectly satisfied if you turn them into a field where there is plenty of grass; they never stand and cry, "O satisfy us," but they eat as much as they want, and then they are perfectly content. But you, though placed in a world of wondrous beauty, and though, as a man, you are made capable of great happiness, have not obtained it, and *you may as well begin your search for it by the confession that you are a fallen creature.* You have lost the peerless jewel of innocence. Your first father, Adam, lost it as your representative; and you have also lost it on your own account. If you had not lost it, you would not need to pray to God, "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy," for you would be satisfied already. Adam was satisfied so long as he kept from sinning against God, and you also would be satisfied if there were no sin in you. Let this confession be made by each one of you, "Lord, I am unsatisfied because I am unholy; I have not attained to satisfaction because I have not attained to perfection."

Then, remember that, *if you are ever to get satisfaction, you will have to get it from God,* and it must come from Him as the gift of His mercy. The text says, "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy." God has so made us that we cannot get on without Him. It is both a blessing and a curse that it is so;—it is a blessing that we cannot be satisfied without God, for that necessity helps to draw us to Him; but it is a curse if we continue to try to be satisfied without God. As the planet needs the sun, so man needs his God. As the eye is nothing without light, so your spirit is nothing without God. You must have God; yet, up till now, some of you have not even thought of Him. Getting what you needed here below has occupied all your attention; but as for God, perhaps you have not thought of Him, or if you have thought of Him, you have only done so to wish that there were no God. The thought of God has been a troublesome subject to you; you wished you could dismiss it altogether from your mind. But, my friend, if you are ever to get satisfaction, this state of things must be altered. You must recognize that, as a creature, you must be at peace with your Creator. I do not ask you to take my word for this assertion, but I do urge you to search the Scriptures to see whether it is not so. There you will learn that, until the quarrel between you and God is ended, until you submit to God, and are at peace with Him, your soul cannot find rest any more than Noah's dove could find rest as she flew over the wild waste of waters, and discovered no place for the sole of her foot to rest upon. Do not forget that you cannot come back to God unless God shall display His mercy to you. If you appeal to divine justice, you will find that it must punish you, for, young as you are, you have broken God's holy law. You have committed sins which have provoked the Lord to anger and jealousy; and ere you can be reconciled to Him, and have His love shed abroad in your heart, these sins of yours must be forgiven. They can be forgiven, for God delighteth in mercy. They can be forgiven now, for He waiteth to be gracious. They can be forgiven without money and without price, for He freely pardons all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ His Son.

But suppose your past sins were all forgiven, you could not even then get satisfaction, because *there would still be in you a natural tendency to sin.* You can all of you sin without being taught to do it. There is no need to found an institution for the purpose of teaching the practice of vice, or to employ agents to excite men to commit crime, because the natural bias of the human heart is all in that direction. Now, as long as you love sin, and your heart has a bias towards evil, God and you cannot walk together. Thousands of years ago, He asked the question, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" It is needful, therefore, that there should be a complete change in your nature, for it can never be contented as it is. Whatever God might give it,—even if He were to give it heaven itself,—your nature would never be satisfied while it remained as it now is. Your nature is diseased, and must be healed, else it will be with you as it would be with a sick man if you piled up his room with gold, or heaped up learned volumes all round him, and bade him study them. They would not take away his pains; it is the disease itself that needs to be cured.

So is it with the malady of your spirit. You must be made right with God; or, as Christ Himself put it, *you must be born again.* Now, if you could be made a new creature, with a will perfectly conformed to God's will, with a heart that loved what God loved, and hated what God hated, with a spirit within you pure as God Himself is, with a mind which sought only after purity, and abhorred everything that was evil, and if, in addition to that, all your past sin could be forgiven, would not that be a grand and a blessed thing? There is many a man who has lived a life of crime and shame, who, when he sees a little curly-headed boy kneel down to say his prayers at his mother's knees, remembers when he did the same, and wishes that he could be put into a mill, and be ground young again. That is the kind of thing that would give you satisfaction, and that is just what Jesus Christ came to do for those who believe in Him, for He has come into the world to "save His people from their sins"; that is, not

merely to save them from being punished for sin, but to deliver them from the sin itself. He can give you, my brother, a new heart and a right spirit. He says, "Behold, I make all things new," and those who believe in Him are made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

"Oh!" says one, "I wish I were a new creature in Christ." Why should you not be? He that believeth in Jesus hath the witness of the Spirit within his heart, and this is a sure sign that he is a new creature in Christ Jesus, for the first result of regeneration is true saving faith; so, if you trust in Jesus, that is a positive proof that you are born again. Then see what will come of this great change. You will begin your new life with a new nature, a nature that loves God, and hates evil, a nature that longs for conformity with the will of God. You will begin your new career "accepted in the Beloved," with a life within you that can never die, and with a pardon granted to you that can never be reversed. You shall be so completely saved that you shall never return to the old follies and sins in which you formerly lived, because you will not be saved because somebody has persuaded you to live in a different fashion, but because you have been made a new creature altogether.

"What!" asks someone, "shall I be perfect when this change comes?" No, there is a nature in you which will still remain, and with which you will have to fight and wrestle; but the new life, which Christ will give you, will enable you to overcome it. "Well," says one, "I do not see how that is to bring me satisfaction." But it will; this is a great mystery, but it is a great truth. Possibly you are dissatisfied because you cannot bring the contents of your pocket up to the height of your wishes; but if you bring your wishes down to the level of the contents of your pocket, you will be satisfied with what you now have. You cannot get all that you want, but suppose that your wants are reduced to your actual needs, how will it be then? You cannot, at present, expect to have all that your heart desires; but suppose your heart is renewed by grace, so that you do not desire what God does not see fit to give you, will not that be the way for you to obtain satisfaction? If the mountain cannot come to Mahomet, Mahomet had better go to the mountain; and if we cannot change our outward circumstances, we had better be content with such things as we have. We have been born into a world where there is much sin and much sorrow, where no man can have all that he wishes; and it is a grand thing when our wishes get changed, our desires get altered, and we become altogether different from what we used to be. This is the path that leads to satisfaction. Some people seem to think that, if they had what I have, they would be perfectly content; but I am quite certain that, if they had it, they would be utterly dissatisfied with my portion. Yet I am perfectly satisfied with it;—not perfectly satisfied with myself, for that I never shall be while I am down here; but I am perfectly satisfied with what God does for me and with me. That satisfaction is what every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has a right to enjoy; and when he lives as a believer should live, he does enjoy it, and he can sing, with good Dr. Watts,—

> "I would not change my blest estate
> For all that earth calls good or great;
> And while my faith can keep her hold,
> I envy not the sinner's gold."

The garden of such a man as I am just now describing is a very little one, but he walks in his rich neighbour's park, and he thanks God that it does not belong to him, for he has not the trouble and expense of keeping it in order, yet he can enjoy it probably quite as much as its owner can. He goes to the top of a hill, and he knows that all he can see is in a certain king's dominions; but he is glad that he is not the king, for he does not want the trouble of ruling a kingdom. He thanks God for the beauties of nature, which are all his; he knows that the mountains and the valleys, the sea and the sky, are all his because they are his Father's, so he may enjoy them to the full. He thanks God that he does not want to put the sun into his pocket, nor to keep the moon in a cupboard all to himself; all things in the world are his as much as he needs them, but he rejoices to know that his fellow-creatures may also enjoy them as much as he does. He is brought, by the grace of God, into such a state of mind that the joy of others in his joy, and that the sorrow of others is his sorrow; and he would not wish to forego this enlargement and expansion of his mind. The grace of God has put him into such a condition of heart and soul that, on the land or on the sea, on a bed of sickness or walking about with the elasticity of health, he says, "It is all right, for my Father has ordained it all. He gives or He takes away, He kills or He makes alive; and as He does it, all is well, and I am perfectly satisfied with it; and as long as I live, I will bless His holy name." Now, that is the truly happy man, and this is the only way to be really happy. Trust in Jesus, rest wholly upon Him; and He will renew your spirit, and change your heart, and with that change of heart He will give you capacities for happiness which you never can have in any other way.

My dear young friends, I want to speak these last few words specially to you. If my older friends here are not yet converted, I pray that they may soon be saved, and I thank God that we have seen many such saved. No old man or old woman has any need or reason to despair; I have seen people of seventy and eighty years of age, and more than that, converted to Christ. He does not limit His grace to any age. If you were five thousand years old, I should be bound to preach the same gospel to you as if you were a little child;—whatever your age, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. But, at the same time, we cannot make you old people begin life again, we cannot take you back to the years of youth; possibly, you wish that we could; but as for you young people, we long for you to be early satisfied with God's mercy, that you may rejoice and be glad all your days. Are you fifteen, or sixteen years of age? There was a time, I daresay, when you thought your brother was wonderfully old because he had got into his teens; but you do not feel very old now, do you? But you think you will have reached a great age when you get to be forty; perhaps, then, you will think that it is the people of sixty, or seventy, or eighty, or ninety years of age, who are getting old, and not you; but let me assure you that now, *now*, NOW is your time.

I would not, God knoweth, deceive you about this matter for all the wealth there is in the world. I have known the Lord, blessed be His name, since I was fifteen years of age, and there has never been a moment, since then, in which I have regretted putting my trust in Him. A great many times I have mourned that I did not trust Him sooner, and that

I have not trusted Him better; but never once have I wished to go back to my former condition, and leave my dear Lord and Master. You know that we sometimes hear servants speak well of their master before other people's faces, when they think their master will hear of it; but when they get together, a lot of them round the fire, I do not know what they say about their master then. But when you gather round the fire, or when you meet with any of my particular friends, ask them whether they ever heard me say a word, in public or in private, against my Master. On the contrary, I love to tell everybody how kind and good He has been to me, and to my most intimate friends I delight to relate all that I know about Him. I can tell you one thing; if a man serves a master who treats him badly, he will not be likely to bring his boy to that place of business; but it is my greatest delight to see my two boys serving my dear Lord and Master. If He had been a bad Master to me, I should have said to them, "Now, boys, do not, either of you, make the mistake that I have made in serving the Lord Jesus Christ as I have done." Oh, no! they have never heard me talk like that. They know how I rejoiced when I found them believing in Jesus Christ, and afterwards beginning to do what they could in His service. Young people, your godly mothers and fathers would not be anxious to make you miserable; you have no idea that they want you to be wretched and sad, have you? No; but it is because they have found such supreme delight in the service of God that they want you to find your delight in it too. I have gone up and down this country, and travelled a good deal in other countries too; and I think I may say, without exaggeration, that I have talked with many thousands of Christians, and I have heard some strange things from some of them; but, up to this moment, I have never met with any Christians who have said to me, "We are all mistaken, after all; there is no solid satisfaction to be found in Jesus Christ." I have seen some of these Christian people at the time when men's hearts speak out, if ever they do; I have seen them die. I have visited the dear consumptive girl in her last hours; and I have been with the grey-headed saint, who has passed his fourscore years, when the time came for him to die. It has been my lot to stand by many death-beds, and I can honestly say that, if I wanted to enjoy the most intense pleasure that is possible on earth, I would seek out some dying saint, that I might witness his rapturous joy, and hear his gladsome and cheering testimony to his Lord and Saviour. A man usually speaks the truth when he comes face to face with death, and eternity is opening before him. Most men put off their masquerading then, and appear in their true colours; and it is then that Christians speak best concerning Christ; and, often, the loudest songs and the sweetest praise that they have ever given to Him, they lay at His feet then, just before they pass away from earth to go to be with Him for ever. Dear young friends, the way of the highest happiness is the way of absolute trust in Jesus, giving up yourself to the renewing of the Holy Ghost that you may become new creatures in Christ Jesus. May God, of His infinite mercy, grant that this great work of grace may be wrought in every unsaved soul in this assembly, ere you leave this building; and it will be if you simply rely upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will then take you by the hand, and make all things new to you. God grant it, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER

"Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."—Psalm xci. 3.

IF Moses wrote this psalm, he might represent the fowler as being in his case the king of Egypt, who sought to slay him, or the Amalekites, who pounced upon Israel in the plain, when they little expected it. If David penned it, he might have compared Saul to the fowler, for he himself says he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains. But we believe, if the verse be applicable to either of those cases, it was intended by the Psalmist not to have a private interpretation, but to be applicable to all time; and we believe it is spoken concerning that arch-enemy of souls, the great deceiver, Satan, of whom we just now sang—

> "Satan, the fowler, who betrays
> Unguarded souls a thousand ways."

"The prince of the power of this world, the spirit which still worketh in the children of disobedience," is like a fowler, always attempting to destroy us. It was once said by a talented writer, that the old devil was dead, and that there was a new devil now; by which he meant to say, that the devil of old times was a rather different devil from the deceiver of these times. We believe that it is the same evil spirit; but there is a difference in his mode of attack. The devil of five hundred years ago was a black and grimy thing, well pourtrayed in our old pictures of that evil spirit. He was a persecutor, who cast men into the furnace, and put them to death for serving Christ. The devil of this day is a well-spoken gentleman: he does not persecute—he rather attempts to persuade and beguile. He is not now the furious Romanist, so much as the insinuating unbeliever, attempting to overturn our religion, whilst at the same time he pretends he would but make it more rational, and so more triumphant. He would only link worldliness with religion; and so he would really make religion void, under the cover of developing the great power of the gospel, and bringing out secrets which our forefathers had never discovered. Satan is always a fowler. Whatever his tactics may be, his object is still the same—to catch men in his net. Men are here compared to silly, weak birds, that have not skill enough to avoid the snare, and have not strength enough to escape from it. Satan is the fowler; he has been so and is so still; and if he does not now attack us as the roaring lion, roaring against us in persecution, he attacks us as the adder, creeping silently along the path, endeavouring to bite our heel with his poisoned

fangs, and weaken the power of grace and ruin the life of godliness within us. Our text is a very comforting one to all believers, when they are beset by temptation. "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

First, *a few words concerning the snare of the fowler;* secondly, *the deliverance;* and thirdly, *the certainty of it;* dwelling upon that word *surely*, for it seems to be the diamond wherewith this precious golden promise is embellished. "*Surely* He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

I. First, then, THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER. It is an illustration too suggestive for me thoroughly to unravel. I must leave it for your meditations at home to enumerate the divers ways in which a fowler attempts to take his birds, and then you will have suggested to you the divers means which the evil spirit employs for the destruction of souls. Allow me, however, just to begin, and pass over two or three points connected with the fowler and with the evil one.

I. First, *the fowler's snare is intimately connected with secrecy.* "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Therefore the fowler carefully covers up his trap; or if the trap itself be uncovered, he doth well beguile the bird, so that it is utterly ignorant of his intention to take it in the trap, little thinking that the food laid there for its banqueting is really placed there for its enticement and destruction. The fowler when he goes after his birds is very careful lest they should discover him. We hear, for instance, that in the taking of wild ducks, in Lincolnshire, a man will hold before his mouth a piece of turf, in order that the smell of his breath may not be perceived by the birds, who are exceedingly wary. The temptations of the world are of this secret sort to a Christian, though not to the wicked man, for the wicked man sins with his eyes wide open; dashing into the net knowing it is a net, laying hold of iniquity with both his hands, even when destruction stareth him in the face. He will commit a sin that he knows is condemned even by the law of the land: he will rush into a crime, concerning the guilt of which no doubt can be entertained. Not so the Christian, he is taken by secrecy. "Ah!" says one, "If I thought such-and-such a thing were really wrong; if I were perfectly convinced of its wrongfulness, I would give it up." It is just here the difficulty lies. So would the bird say: "If I thought that really were a trap, I would not enter it; if I were perfectly persuaded that net would entangle me, I would not fly to such-and-such a spot; I would not approach there at all, if I were sure it would be my destruction." How many a professor there is who asks the question, "May I go to this place? May I go to that place?" and some of us answer, "No," and we are called Puritans for it; but let those who have attempted to keep their godliness intact, whilst they pursue the pleasures of this world, stand up and make the mournful confession, that the healthiness of the two things can never exist together. We must either serve God wholly, or serve the evil one wholly. "If God be God, serve Him; if Baal be God, serve him." One, or else the other. Many a man has been entrapped into sin by Satan, not knowing that it was evil! Some one has hinted to him in business, for instance—"You may very safely do such-and-such a thing; all the shopkeepers in the street have done it; it is not actually dishonest; it improves the article, it really does; and although you can thus sell an article at a dearer rate than you ought to sell it, yet you need not tell the public; and if the article is all the better for it, it is quite fair and safe that you should adulterate it." And so the good easy man, not opening both his eyes, I think, but shutting one of them a little, lest he should see too well to be able to fill his pockets in the dark, is a little taken aside; and by-and-by he is led to discover that the act which he has done is the taking of him in the snare of the fowler, for he has been sinning against his God, and his God therefore punishes him for it with many stripes, and lays His rod upon him.

I do not think that a Christian is so often betrayed into a sin that is palpable and known, as he is into a sin that is secret. If the devil comes to my door with his horns visible, I will never let him in; but if he comes with his hat on as a respectable gentleman, he is at once admitted. The metaphor may be very quaint, but it is quite true. Many a man has taken in an evil thing, because it has been varnished and glossed over, and not apparently an evil; and he has thought in his heart, there is not much harm in it; so he has let in the little thing, and it has been like the breaking forth of water—the first drop has brought after it a torrent. The beginning has been but the beginning of a fearful end. Take care, Christian, of things that are secret; take care of the common doings of the world, which are well enough for them, perhaps. We would not deny them their pleasures, for they have no others; but they are not good for you, for you have a finer life—a life of a finer texture and order than can exist in the haunts of ungodly persons. Remember, you are not to be a judge for others. Some men, especially those who are unconverted, can, without being led into sin, indulge in many gaieties and merriments; but the Christian is like the Englishman, who cannot hope to survive long where the jungle fever reigns. The native can live there, but he cannot. And so you who are twice-born men will find your piety ruined, by that which to a worldly man does not lead him into greater evil than that which he would naturally commit. You are to have a stricter rule on yourselves than others, and are to be more stern in your piety than the world would have you be; for sin is usually hidden, and the snare is not often made apparent. "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

2. In the second place, *the snare of the fowler is generally noted for its adaptation.* You do not find a fowler setting the same snare for one bird as for another; he knows his bird, and he adapts his bait to it. He would be an unwise fowler who should go to work with the same machinery to catch the lark that flies high as the duck that swims along the stream. The fowler is wiser than that: he adapts his snare to the condition of the bird which he desires to take. Satan the fowler does just the same. There is one man here; he tempts him to drunkenness. Perhaps that would naturally be his sin, if left without grace in his heart; and Satan knowing it to be his weak point, attempts to overcome him by surfeiting, gluttony, and drunkenness. Another man is utterly impervious to any temptation to that bestial habit; but, it may be, he is easily taken in another snare—the snare of lust; therefore Satan adapts his temptation to the hot blood of the man who naturally would be inclined to live a life of sin. Another one perhaps eschews every lascivious and

sensual habit: then Satan comes to him, and adapts his temptation to the shape of pride. The man is naturally a melancholy man, fond of solitude: Satan gets him, if he can, to wrap himself up in a solitary dignity, to say, "I am holy." "Lord, I thank Thee, I am not as other men are." Or if a man is not naturally inclined to a very high degree of pride, Satan takes him with sloth. The man likes an easy life; Satan therefore adapts his bait to him by letting him sit still, fold his arms, and so perish by slothfulness: and mark this, he who sitteth still in the frost, when the snow is on the ground, in the depths of the wild regions of the frozen zone, must as surely perish by his idleness, as if he drove a dagger to his heart. Satan knows that, and so adapts his bait accordingly. Oh! how often it happens, beloved, that you and I condemn a thing in another person which we allow in ourselves, perhaps without knowing it. We say of such an one, How proud he is! Well, our pride is not exactly of that shape; we have got another shaped pride, but the same article; labelled differently, but the same thing. Satan adapts the pride to each particular case. We are rich: he does not perhaps tempt us to the pride of riches, but he tempts us to the pride of mastership, and makes us harsh masters to our servants. Or if he does not tempt us to that pride, he perhaps enchants us with the pride of generosity, and we are apt to boast of our kindness, and of what we have given away. He will always adapt his trap to his man, and his bait to his bird. He will not tempt you all with the same temptation he would tempt me with; nor me with the temptation with which he would naturally assail another. "The snare of the fowler." A cunning enemy we have to deal with; he knows our weak points; he has been dealing with men for these last six thousand years; he knows all about them. He is possessed of a gigantic intellect, though he be a fallen spirit; and he is easily able to discover where our sore places are, and there it is he immediately attacks us. If we be like Achilles, and cannot be wounded anywhere but in our heel, then at the heel he will send his dart and nowhere else. He will find out our easily besetting sin, and there, if he can, he will attempt to work our ruin and our destruction. Let us bless God that it is written, "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

3. In the next place, *the fowler's snare is frequently connected with pleasure, profit, and advantage.* In the bird's case it is for the seed scattered on the ground that he flies to the snare. It is some tempting bait which allures him to his death. And usually Satan, the fowler, uses a temptation wherewith to beguile us. "Oh!" says one, "I cannot give up such-and-such a thing, it is so pleasant. Sir, you never knew the charms of such-and-such a pursuit, otherwise you could never advise me to relinquish it." Yes, my friend, but it is just the sweetness of it to you that makes it the more dangerous. Satan never sells his poisons naked; he always gilds them before he vends them. He knows very well that men will buy them and swallow them, if he does but gild them beforehand. Take care of pleasures; mind what you are at when you are at them. Many of them are innocent and healthful, but many of them are destructive. It is said that where the most beautiful cacti grow, there the most venomous serpents are to be found at the root of every plant. And it is so with sin. Your fairest pleasures will harbour your grossest sins. Take care; take care of your pleasures. Cleopatra's asp was introduced in a basket of flowers; so are sins often brought to us in the flowers of our pleasures. Satan offers to the drunkard the sweetness of the intoxicating cup, which rejoices him when his brain is rioting in frolic, and when his soul is lifted up within him. He offers to the lustful man the scenes and pleasures of carnal mirth, and merriment, and delight, and so he leadeth him astray with the bait, concealing the hook which afterwards shall pain him. He gives to you and to me, each of us, the offer of our peculiar joy; he tickleth us with pleasures, that he may lay hold upon us, and so have us in his power. I would have every Christian be especially on his guard against the very thing that is most pleasing to his human nature. I would not have him avoid everything that pleases him, but I would have him be on his guard against it. Just like Job, when his sons had been feasting in their houses. He did not forbid them doing it, but he said, "I will offer a sacrifice, lest my sons should have sinned in their hearts, and should have cursed God foolishly." He was more careful over them at the time of their feasting than at any other season. Let us do the same. Let us remember that the snare of the fowler is generally connected with some pretended pleasure or profit, but that Satan's end is not our pleasing, but our destruction.

3. In the next place, *sometimes the fowler very wisely employs the force of example.* We all know the influence of the decoy-duck, in endeavouring to bring others into the snare. How very often Satan, the fowler, employs a decoy to lead God's people into sin! You get with a man; you think him to be a true Christian; you have some respect for his character; he is a high professor, can talk religion by the yard, and can give you any quantity of theology you like to ask for. You see him commit a sin; ten to one but you will do the same, if you have much respect for him; and so he will lead you on. And mark, Satan is very careful in the men whom he chooses to be decoys. He never employs a wicked man to be a decoy for a good man. It is very seldom, when Satan would decoy a Christian into a snare, that he makes use of an open reprobate. No; he makes use of the man who is pretendedly religious, and who looks to be of the same quality as yourself, and therefore entices you astray. Let a bad man meet me in the street, and ask me to commit sin! The devil knows better than to set him at any such work as that, because he knows I should pass by directly. If he wants his errand well done, he sends one to me whom I call brother; and so through the brotherhood of profession I am apt to give him credence and pay him respect; and then if he goeth astray the force of example is very powerful, and so I may easily be led into the net too. Take care of your best friends; be careful of your companions. Choose the best you can; then follow them no farther than they follow Christ. Let your course be entirely independent of every one else. Say with Joshua, let others do what they will, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

5. Note, once more, that *sometimes the fowler, when he faileth to take his bird by deceit and craft, will go a-hawking after it*—will send his hawk into the air, to bring down his prey. It often happens, when the devil cannot ruin a man by getting him to commit a sin, he attempts to slander him; he sends

a hawk after him, and tries to bring him down by slandering his good name. I will give you a piece of advice. I know a good minister, now in venerable old age, who was once most villainously lied against and slandered by a man who hated him only for the truth's sake. The good man was grieved; he threatened the slanderer with a law-suit, unless he apologized. He did apologize. The slander was printed in the papers in a public apology; and you know what was the consequences. The slander was more believed than if he had said nothing about it. And I have learned this lesson—to do with the slanderous hawk what the little birds do, *just fly up.* The hawk cannot do them any hurt while they keep above him—it is only when they come down that he can injure them. It is only when by mounting he gets above the birds, that the hawk comes sweeping down upon them, and destroys them. If any slander you, do not come down to them; let them slander on. Say, as David said concerning Shimei, "If the Lord hath given him commandment to curse, let him curse"; and if the sons of Zeruiah say, "Let us go and take this dead dog's head," you say, "Nay, let him curse"; and in that way you will live down slander. If some of us turned aside to notice every bit of a sparrow that began chirping at us, we should have nothing to do but to answer them. If I were to fight people on every doctrine I preach, I should do nothing else but just amuse the devil, and indulge the combative principles of certain religionists who like nothing better than quarrelling. By the grace of God, say what you please against me, I will never answer you, but go straight on. All shall end well, if the character be but kept clean; the more dirt that is thrown on it by slander, the more it shall glisten, and the more brightly it shall shine. Have you never felt your fingers itch sometimes to be at a man who slanders you? I have, I have sometimes thought, "I cannot hold my tongue now; I must answer that fellow"; but I have asked of God grace to imitate Jesus, who, "when He was reviled reviled not again," and by His strength let them go straight on. The surest way in the world to get rid of a slander is just to let it alone and say nothing about it, for if you prosecute the rascal who utters it, or if you threaten him with an action, and he has to apologize, you will be no better off—some fools will still believe it. Let it alone—let it keep as it is; and so God will help you to fulfil by your wisdom His own promise, "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

And now, ere I close this point, let me observe once more, the fowler when he is determined to take his birds uses all these arts at once perhaps and *besets the bird on every side.* So you will remember, beloved, it is with you. Satan will not leave a stone unturned to ruin your soul for ever.

> "Amidst a thousand snares I stand
> Upheld and guarded by Thy hand."

Old Master Quarles says,—

> "The close pursuer's busy hands do plant
> Snares in thy substance; snares attend thy want;
> Snares in thy credit; snares in thy disgrace;
> Snares in thy high estate; snares in thy base;
> Snares tuck thy bed; and snares surround thy board;
> Snares watch thy thoughts; and snares attack thy word;
> Snares in thy quiet; snares in thy commotion;
> Snares in thy diet; snares in thy devotion;
> Snares lurk in thy resolves, snares in thy doubt;
> Snares lie within thy heart, and snares without;
> Snares are above thy head, and snares beneath;
> Snares in thy sickness, snares are in thy death."

There is not a place beneath which a believer walks that is free from snares. Behind every tree there is the Indian with his barbed arrow; behind every bush there is the lion seeking to devour; under every piece of grass there lieth the adder. Everywhere they are. Let us be careful; let us gird ourselves with the might of God's omnipotence, and then shall His Holy Spirit keep us, so that we shall tread on the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon shall we trample under our feet, and we shall be "delivered from the snare of the fowler."

II. Now we pass on to the second point—THE DELIVERANCE. God delivers His people from the snare of the fowler. Two thoughts here: *from—out of.* First, He delivers them *from* the snare—does not let them get in it; secondly, when they do get in it He delivers them *out of* it. The first promise is the most precious to some of us; the second is the best to others.

He shall deliver thee from the snare. How does he do that?

Very often by *trouble.* Trouble is often the means whereby God delivers us from snares. You have all heard of the old story of the celebrated painter who was painting in St. Paul's, and who, looking at his work, went gradually back inch by inch to get a view of it, so that he might see the excellence of its proportions, until his feet were just on the edge of the platform upon which he stood; and he would have fallen down and been dashed in pieces upon the pavement beneath, but just at that moment a workman who stood there, desirous to save his life, and not knowing how to do it, hit upon an expedient, which proved to be a very wise one. Instead of shouting out to his master, "Sir, you are in danger," which would most certainly have sent him backward, he took up a brush, and dipping it in a pot of paint, dashed it at the picture. The good man rushed forward in anger to chastise him; but when it was explained, he clearly saw that his servant had acted wisely. Just so with God. You and I have often painted a fine picture, and we have been walking backwards admiring it. God knows that our backsliding will soon end in our destruction; and He by a sad providence, blasts our prospect, takes away our child from us, buries our wife, removes some darling object of our pleasures; and we rush forward and say, "Lord, why this?"—utterly unconscious that if it had not been for trouble we might have been dashed in pieces, and our lives would have been ended in destruction. I doubt not, many of you have been saved from ruin by your sorrows, your griefs, your troubles, your woes, your losses, and your crosses. All these have been the breaking of the net that set you free from the snare of the fowler.

At other times God keeps His people from the sin of the fowler *by giving them great spiritual strength, a spirit of great courage*; so that when they are tempted to do evil they say, with decision, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Oh! that was a noble escape of Joseph, when his mistress laid hold of his garment; that was a noble escape of his, when his soul escaped like a bird out of the snare of the fowler; and I doubt not there are

many here who have done deeds almost as noble as that of Joseph, who have had grace within their hearts, so that they have turned away their eyes from beholding folly, and when they have been tempted to evil they have put their foot upon it, and said, "I cannot, I cannot; I am a child of God; I cannot and I must not"; and though the thing was pleasing to themselves yet have they abjured it. You remember the case of Mr. Standfast in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Madame Bubble had greatly enticed poor Mr. Steadfast with her offers. He says, "There was one in very pleasant attire, but old, who presented herself to me, and offered me three things, to wit, her body, her purse, and her bed. Now the truth is, I was both weary and sleepy: I am also as poor as an owlet, and that perhaps the witch knew. Well, I repulsed her once and again, but she put by my repulses, and smiled. Then I began to be angry; but she mattered that nothing at all. Then she made offers again, and said if I would be ruled by her, she would make me great and happy; for, said she, I am the mistress of the world, and men are made happy by me. Then I asked her name, and she told me it was Madame Bubble. This set me further from her; but she still followed me with enticements. Then I betook me, as you saw, to my knees, and with hands lifted up, and cries, I prayed to Him that had said He would help. So just as you came up the gentlewoman went her way. Then I continued to give thanks for this my great deliverance; for I verily believe she intended no good, but rather sought to make stop of me in my journey." That is how God delivers His people from the snare of the fowler, by giving them the spirit of prayer as well as the spirit of courage, so that they call upon God in the day of trouble, and He delivers them.

And I have noticed one more very singular thing. Sometimes I, myself, have been saved from the snare of the fowler (I cannot tell how exactly), in this way. I have felt that if the temptation had come a week before, my mind was in that peculiar condition, that I should almost inevitably have been led away by it; but when it came, the mind, by passing through some process, had become in such a condition, that the temptation was no temptation at all. We were just brought to such a state, that what might have ruined us before, we would not then look at. "No," we have said, "if you had offered me this some time ago it might have been accepted; but now God has, by some mysterious influence of His Spirit, turned my heart in another direction, and it is not even a temptation to me at all—not worthy of a moment's thought." So God delivers His people from the snare of the fowler.

But the second thought was, that *God delivers His people, even when they get into the snare.* Alas! my hearer, you and I know something about the net; we have been inside it, we have; we have not only seen it spread, we have been in its folds. We know something about the cage, for we have, unfortunately, been in the cage ourselves, even since we have known the Lord. The fowler's hand has been upon our neck; it has only been the sovereign grace of God that has prevented him from utterly destroying us. What a blessed thing it is, that if the believer shall, in an evil hour, come into the net, yet God will bring him out of it! Poor Christian and Hopeful got into the fowler's net when they entered into the castle of Giant Despair; but the key of promise picked the lock, and they escaped. They were in the fowler's net, too, when Flatterer cast a net over them, and left them in the lane; but there came one who, after he had beaten them full sore, took the net off, and they went on their way, better men than they were before they were in the net. I know one who is in the net now. Some bird, one of God's own ones too, has been taken in the snare, and is now groaning and crying out because, alas! alas! he has sinned. I have a person here, a good man, a professor of religion, and a truly worthy one! but alas! he has sinned, and at this hour the tears are in his eyes, and he is saying,

> "The tumult of my thoughts
> Doth but increase my woe;
> My spirit languishes, my heart
> Is desolate and low.
>
> "Turn, turn Thee to my soul;
> Bring Thy salvation near;
> When will Thy hand release my feet
> Out of the deadly snare?"

O backslider, be cast down, but do not despair; God will restore thee yet. Wanderer though thou hast been, hear what He says! "Return, O backsliding children; I will have mercy upon you." But you say you cannot return. Then, here is still a promise—"surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler." Thou shalt yet be brought out from all the evil into which thou hast fallen, and though thou shalt never cease to repent thy ways even to thy dying day, yet He that hath loved thee will not cast thee away; He will receive thee, He will admit thee into His dwelling-place, and will even now restore thee to the number of His people, and give thee joy and gladness, that the bones which He has broken may rejoice. "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

There have been very remarkable instances of God delivering His people out of the snare of the fowler, as the following illustration will show:

"A young lady who belonged to a church in the city of New York, married a young man who was not a Christian. He was a merchant, engaged in a lucrative business, and the golden stream of wealth flowed in upon him till he had amassed a large fortune. He accordingly retired from business, and went into the country. He purchased a splendid residence; fine trees waved their luxuriant foliage around it; here was a lake filled with fish, and there a garden full of rare shrubbery and flowers. Their house was fashionably and expensively furnished; and they seemed to possess all of earth that mortal could desire. Thus prospered and plied with an interchange of civilities among her gay and fashionable neighbours, the piety of the lady declined, and her heart became wedded to the world. And it is not to be wondered at, that her three children, as they grew up, imbibed her spirit and copied her example. 'A severe disease,' it is said, 'demands a severe remedy'; and that God soon applied. One morning intelligence came that her little son had fallen into the fish-lake and was drowned. The mother's heart was pierced with the affliction, and she wept and murmured against the providence of God. Soon afterwards, her only daughter, a blooming girl of sixteen, was taken sick of a fever, and died. It seemed then as if the mother's heart would have

broken. But this new stroke of the rod of a chastening Father seemed but to increase her displeasure against His will. The only remaining child, her eldest son, who had come home from college to attend his sister's funeral, went out into the fields soon afterwards, for the purpose of hunting. In getting over a fence, he put his gun over first to assist himself in springing to the ground, when it accidentally discharged itself and killed him! What then were that mother's feelings? In the extravagance of her grief, she fell down, tore her hair, and raved like a maniac against the providence of God. The father, whose grief was already almost insupportable, when he looked upon the shocking spectacle, and heard her frenzied ravings, could endure his misery no longer. The iron entered into his soul and he fell a speedy victim to his accumulated afflictions. From the wife and mother, her husband and all her children were now taken away. Reason returned, and she was led to reflection. She saw her dreadful backslidings, her pride, her rebellion; and she wept with the tears of a deep repentance. Peace was restored to her soul. Then would she lift up her hands to heaven, exclaiming, 'I thank Thee, O Father!—the Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.' Thus did her afflictions yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, and her heavenly Father chasten her, 'not for His pleasure, but for her profit, that she might become partaker of His holiness.'"

So God delivered her soul out of the snare of the fowler. She started afresh in the ways of righteousness, serving God with diligence and zeal, and growing up in His fear. By trouble and trial, by some means or another, God will surely deliver His people out of the snare of the fowler, even when they are in it.

III. And now, to conclude, I am to dwell for a moment or two upon that word "SURELY." The assurance of every truth of Scripture is just the beauty of it. If it were not sure, it were not precious; and it is precious just because it is sure.

Now, it says, "surely He shall deliver thee." Why? First because He has promised to do it; and God's promises are bonds that never yet were dishonoured. If He hath said He will, He will. Secondly, because Christ Jesus hath taken an oath that He will do it. In ages long gone by Christ Jesus became the Shepherd of the sheep, and the Surety of them too. "If any of them perish," said He, "at My hand Thou shalt require it"; and, therefore, because Christ is responsible, because He is the heavenly sponsor for all God's people, they must be kept; for otherwise Christ's bond were forfeited, and His oath were null and void. They must be kept again, because otherwise the union that there is between all of them and Christ would not be a real one. Christ and His Church are one—one body; but if any of the members of my body were cut off, I should be maimed, and if Christ could lose one of His children He would be a maimed Christ. "We are His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." If, then, the whole Church were not gathered in, Christ would be an incomplete Christ, seeing He would want His fulness. They must all be saved, for God the Father has determined that they shall be; nay the Son has sworn they shall be; and God the Holy Spirit vouches for it they shall be. None of God's people shall be cast away, or else the Bible is not true. The whole stability of the covenant rests on their final perseverance. The whole covenant of grace rests on this—

> "He shall present our souls,
> Unblemished and complete,
> Before the glory of His face,
> With joys divinely great."

And therefore they must be preserved out of the snare of the fowler, because otherwise the covenant would be null and void. If one should perish the oath would be broken; if one should be cast away the covenant would be void; and therefore they must be kept secure.

> "His honour is engaged to save
> The meanest of His sheep;
> All that His heavenly Father gave,
> His hands securely keep."

I have no time to enlarge upon that subject, which is big with glory, and might afford a topic for many discourses. I now close up by saying, Men and brethren, is this promise yours? "Surely He shall deliver thee." Are you the man? "How can I tell?" you say. Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you, as a guilty sinner, cast yourself wholly on the blood and righteousness of the immaculate Redeemer? I do not ask you whether you are a Wesleyan, a Churchman, a Baptist, an Independent, or a Presbyterian; my only question is, Are you born again? Have you passed from death unto life? Are you "a new creature in Christ Jesus?" Is all your trust put in the Lord Jesus Christ? Has His life become your model, and does His spirit dwell in your mortal body? If so, peace be unto you: this promise is yours. You may have been the worst of men; but if you have faith in Christ those sins are all forgiven, and you may take this promise to be yours for ever. But if you are self-righteous, self-sufficient, ungodly, careless, worldly, there is no such promise for you: you are in the snare, you shall be there, and you shall perish, unless you repent; for it is written, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." May God save you from perishing, by giving you an interest in the blood of Christ? and to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever and ever.

FRESH GRACE CONFIDENTLY EXPECTED

" I shall be anointed with fresh oil."—Psalm xcii. 10.

DAVID is very positive. He does not say " I hope I shall be anointed with fresh oil, and I have a pleasing expectation that it may be so " ; but he speaks of his future as absolutely certain : " I *shall be* anointed with fresh oil." Nor will it appear at all wonderful that he should be so positive if you read the psalm, for his subject there is the ever-living and all-sufficient God, and when we get near to God we get into the region of positive certainty. While we depend upon man we are in the realm of " may be's," and hopes, and perhapses, and peradventures ; but when we come to rest in God we are far removed from everything that is of chance and conjecture. Our God is the God of truth and righteousness. " He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." Man is but a treacherous quicksand where confidence is shipwrecked, but the Lord is a haven of security. We do well neither to boast in ourselves nor to place our reliance on the promises of our fellow-creatures ; but we may wisely boast in the great " I AM," and rest our souls securely upon His word and His love. He can neither change nor fail. " He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent." David therefore felt quite at his ease about the future. He felt certain that God, who had given him a measure of grace, would give him more grace. He entertained no suspicion that God's great resources would run out, or that God would withhold them from His own. He says, " I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Beloved, let us draw near to God, and so let us drink at the well-head which can never be dried up ; let us give up looking to the broken cisterns which do but mock us, and let us turn to the inexhaustible deep which lieth under, which is always ready to overflow for our need.

Let us think at this time of the confidence of David, and we shall remark upon it thus. First, *it was a confidence full of meaning :* " I shall be anointed with fresh oil " is a most expressive utterance. Secondly, it was a confidence *exceedingly well grounded ;* thirdly, it was a confidence which *calmed his fear ;* and fourthly, it *excited his hopes ;* and in the last place, if we possess it, it is a confidence which will *lead us to pity those who are destitute of it.*

I. THE CONFIDENCE HERE EXPRESSED IS FULL OF MEANING. What did he intend by saying, " I shall be anointed with fresh oil " ? He meant, first, that *his strength would be renewed.* It was a common belief amongst the Orientals that anointing with oil added to a man's vigour ; they regarded it as the symbol of renewed strength. So David felt and knew that God would, whenever it was required, renew his strength. Times of weakness will happen to us all, a great strain may be put upon us, and we may become exhausted, or, under severe depression of spirit, we may imagine ourselves to be ready to die ; but at all such times God will supply strength to us : our extremity will be His opportunity ; our time of famine will be His hour of plenty. Is not His strength made perfect in weakness ? Is it not written that " He giveth power to the faint ; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength " ? David sung in the One Hundred and Third Psalm, " He satisfieth my mouth with good things ; so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's," and he expected it always to be so. " He restoreth my soul," says he in the Twenty-third Psalm. Often do his psalms which commence in painful depression conclude with exultation, because heavenly love had poured fresh life into his swooning soul. From many a soul-sickness had the son of Jesse been recovered, from many a sinking had he been lifted up into holy joy. He here expresses his conviction that the Lord would always deal thus graciously with him. Expect this, then, my brethren, that God will give you new strength as you shall require it. " As thy days, so shall thy strength be." " He giveth more grace." Go thou unto Him in the time of thy weakness, in the confidence of this text : " I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

David meant, in the second place, that he should be *afresh assured of the divine favour.* To anoint a man with oil was a token of his welcome to your house ; his feet were washed that he might be refreshed, and then the notable guest, worthy of special honour, was anointed with perfumed nard. So David says that as he had received tokens of divine favour aforetime, he should receive them yet again. O beloved, ye know what it is to revel in the smiles of God, and find a heaven in His manifested love. You have basked in the sunlight of your Father's love, many a time, and felt an ecstasy such as worldlings cannot imagine. Hath not the Lord been pleased to make the name of Jesus to your souls " like ointment poured forth " ? Oftentimes has He brought you into His banqueting-house, and His banner over you has been love. He has made for you a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. You look back upon these seasons with inexpressible delight, and perhaps at this moment you are saying, " Oh, that it were with me as in months past." Pluck up courage, my brother ; thou shalt be " anointed with fresh oil." There are more tokens of love awaiting thee ; further signs of thy Master's love shall be afforded thee. Thou needest not cry with Esau, " Hast Thou but one blessing ? bless me, even me, O my Father," for the Lord abounds in blessings, and He delights to bestow them upon His beloved. Yea, there are even richer mercies yet to come ; the past, though full of blessedness, shall be eclipsed by the happy future. David had the favour of God as a shepherd boy, he found it anew as a warrior, and he had yet other tokens when he became king in Israel. Every favour received is a pledge of more to follow. Dawn is the earnest of noon. Within the sacred circle of fellowship to which thou hast already penetrated, there is a holy of holies of yet closer communion, and there thou shalt soon enter. " Friend, come up higher," is thy Lord's sweet invitation. Have faith and be of good cheer, for thou shalt see greater things than these. Thou shalt be baptized again into the Holy Ghost, thou shalt receive anew the spirit of adoption, and thy joy shall be full. Therefore lift up thy head.

But again, David meant that he should be *confirmed in his estate.* It is noteworthy that David was anointed three times; first of all by Samuel, in prospect of his ultimately becoming king; a second time by the men of Judah, when he reigned over a part of the nation; and a third time at Hebron, when the whole Israelitish nation came together, and David was solemnly elected to be their king. Perhaps he recollected this, and looking upon those various anointings as confirmations of his kingly state, he felt that God would yet further confirm him upon his throne all his days. Many were the rebellions against David's authority, but they were all futile. When his throne was shaken by his rebellious son Absalom, and his government almost annihilated, yet God restored him to the throne again, and in fact anointed him once more. Now this day, beloved, you and I, who are believers in Jesus, are kings and priests unto God, but if Satan could do it he would soon bring our kingdom and priesthood to an end: he is plotting and devising by all manner of means to work our destruction; but it is written, "Thou maintainest my lot." The great Keeper of our head is one who can never be overcome. The Lord who has set us on the throne with His Son, will neither suffer His Son nor us to be driven from it. The Lord reigneth, and while the Lord reigns His people shall reign too. "Because I live, ye shall live also," is the word of Jesus, and upon that word He hath caused our souls to hope. He will confirm you again, my brother, in your sonship; He will make you again to say, "Abba, Father," with an unfaltering tongue. He will confirm you in your position as a member of His body, He will make you feel that the anointing of the Head is still descending upon you, and you shall thus rejoice again and again in full assurance that what God has made you, you shall be even to the end. Thus, again, you see the Lord anoints His people with fresh oil, by confirming them in their estate.

Furthermore, David meant that he should be *qualified for his office* by the bestowal of fresh grace. This was, no doubt, the meaning of the anointing of a king. It was the type and token of his receiving royal wisdom and authority. So, too, in the anointing of a priest, it was the symbol of the Spirit of God being given to him that he might discharge his sacred office; and David felt that he should frequently need to be taught of God, guided, enlightened, and instructed, so that he might, as king and leader in Israel, act rightly; therefore he says, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Beloved, this is a very sweet confidence for us. If you are a minister of the gospel you will have a thousand reasons for feeling yourself to be incompetent, and you might well throw down the staff of your pastorate, and leave work, if you were not sure that your sufficiency is of God. In such work as the instruction of the young, the visitation of the sick, and the reclaiming of the fallen, or whatever it is that God has called you to, you will frequently tremble as you discover more and more your own unfitness to be used of God; but this will be counterbalanced by learning more and more the divine faithfulness. Do not relinquish your work because of your feebleness, for you shall be anointed with fresh oil. Do you want wisdom? Ask it of the Lord, for He giveth liberally. Do you want a warm and zealous spirit? Are you conscious of growing cold? Some drops of His dear love falling into your heart will set it on a blaze, and make you as earnest as you would desire. Do you want more power in prayer? Go to Him who understood the art of wrestling on the mountain's side at midnight, and He will teach you how to pray. In fine, is there anything you lack, in order to the full discharge of the ministry to which God has called you? Wait upon the Lord for it with unwavering faith, and He will grant it to you, and you "shall be anointed with fresh oil."

Once more, I think David meant that he should also *have new cause for delight.* Anointing with oil was intended to give pleasure. The element of joy in religion is looked upon with indifference by some, but they are unwise. There are some now-a-days who would like to strike out everything from mortal life which gives pleasure. We have societies now which are *anti* to every mortal thing that is pleasant and agreeable, and if there remains one solitary enjoyment to mortal men in this vale of tears, which has not some society opposed to it, I have no doubt some genius will commence a crusade against it to-morrow. The theory is, that all wholesome things are nasty, and that all gratifications are deadly. I wonder they do not make the parish pump run with wormwood tea, and paint the meadows a dun colour. Then, when we have abstained from all that is either beautiful or agreeable, and reduced ourselves to the condition of the savage who eats acorns and lives in a cavern, we shall have climbed somewhat near perfection. Now I do not believe in this theory for ordinary life, much less for spiritual life. Men used of old to anoint the heads of their guests to give them pleasure, and they were never blamed for it; and the Lord intends that His people should have the richest pleasures in their souls. He is the happy God, and would have those round about Him happy. He never intended this world to be a great workhouse, a vast drill-shed, or a convict settlement, so arranged that labour should banish joy, and a crushing sense of subjection should chase away love. He has made this world to be a happy lodging for His dear children, till He shall call them home, and He has provided for their delight many enjoyments, lawful and commendable, beneficial and spiritual. I believe the Lord intended His people to be the happiest people under the sun. When I see certain of them repining, complaining, fretting, worrying, and calling that state of mind "*experience,*" I pray, "The Lord save me from that experience, and give me to have His joy fulfilled in me." Our Lord Jesus was sorrowful, not as our example, but as our substitute; He was put to grief that we might be joyous; He bore our load that we might have no load to carry. He was full of cares for us, that we might have no care, but might rejoice in Him all our days. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice." The atmosphere we breathe should be fragrant with thankful joy. Like flowers, we ought to load each breeze with the sweet perfume of holy gratitude. We which have believed do enter into rest, and in that rest we discover new joys each day. The banks of the river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, are not dark with weeping willows, or dreary with a jungle of thorns and thistles, but they are lovely with the rose of Sharon and the lilies of the valley, and among its shady groves the righteous lie down at peace, and sing their song of loves touching their Well-beloved. Yes, we did rejoice, we have rejoiced, and we mean to rejoice again. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Put all those five thoughts together, and you have a great text

before you, too big for me to preach from, but it may furnish you with many a theme for thought. It is a bough with many clusters; eat thereof and be glad.

II. THE CONFIDENCE OF OUR TEXT IS WELL GROUNDED, because it is grounded upon God. We could not reckon upon having supplies all our lives if we depended upon the granaries of Egypt, or upon the storehouses of the wealthiest of the land; but when we rest in God we may boast ourselves as we may. I stood the other day, as you have often done, by a spring, pleased to see it constantly bubble up with cool, refreshing water. One who came thither to fetch water for her house, said to me, "It is always the same, sir, always the same. I never knew the sharpest frost to freeze it, or the most burning summer to dry it: the stream is equally full at all times in the year." This was very different from a fountain which I often pass, which more than half the year bears the notice, "This drinking fountain is closed during the winter"; and very different from those brooks in our own and other lands which live upon the rains, and therefore do not contain a drop of water in time of drought. Why does the spring always remain the same? Because it has tapped the great fountains. There is a deep that coucheth beneath; there are vast secret reservoirs in the bowels of the earth, and if you can set these abroach, you are sure of a perpetual supply. Many a man has his water laid on, as it were, from the water company; his dependence is on man; and therefore it fails him; or he depends on the circumstances which surround him, and therefore he finds his confidence to be as a deceitful brook: but if you live upon God and say, "All my fresh springs are in Thee"; you have tapped the eternal deeps, and you never need be afraid of drought, you shall drink draughts of living water—you shall be anointed with oil. Beloved, it is a grand thing to be thrown flat on God, however hard the fall; it is a glorious thing to hang upon the eternal arm with nothing else to hold you up. Just as yon unpillared arch of heaven never starts or quivers, notwithstanding that it is without a buttress, so does faith when it is built on God, stand gloriously serene in its mighty strength. "Trust thou in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

We are quite sure of fresh supplies, because of our union to Christ. Every Christian is a part of Christ, for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Now there can be no fear that my little finger will not be supplied so long as the head is nourished. If the head shall have sufficient nutriment so shall the meanest member of the body, and because we are one with Christ we shall therefore receive daily grace. Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure, and the sacred oil descends to the very skirts of His garments; and because without measure the Spirit resteth upon Him, therefore every one of us who belong to Him shall be anointed with fresh oil. Why does the branch of the tree expect to live? It sends out no roots into the earth, it makes no search for nourishment amongst the rocks and stones. No, but the branch expects to live because the sap flows into the stem, and from the stem to itself, and we expect grace because it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell. Oh, if we had a pinched and starveling Christ, we might expect to run short, but with one in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, we can have no cause for fear. If I have such a Christ as this, I *must* be anointed with fresh oil.

Again, we have another reason. We must have fresh grace because the Holy Ghost dwells in us. It was a good day for the poor widow of Zarephath upon which Elijah came to live with her. If I had been in her place I should have felt that I was safe enough, for if God did not think of me He would think of Elijah, and if Elijah lived in my house and went shares with me, I should not need to cry over that little meal in the barrel or that drop of oil in the cruse. I should feel, "Since Elijah lives with me, I shall share with Elijah; Elijah's God will take care of him, and I shall be taken care of also." O child of God, who is it that lives in your body along with you? Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost? and while the Holy Ghost lives within shall there ever be famine in the soul? Shall the cruse of oil fail; shall the barrel of meal be entirely empty, while the Holy Ghost is in us? It cannot be. Beloved, how many forget that precious doctrine of the indwelling of the Spirit in every believer, and yet if we did but realise it we should feel that while He who is the anointing oil dwells in our hearts, we must be anointed with fresh oil. There can be no fear about that.

Moreover, look at the promises of God's Word, and they will at once assure us that we shall have fresh supplies of grace according to our need. You do not need that I quote them to you this morning—they are legion; but I will tell you what I experienced myself in reference to those promises. They are to me a gradual revelation. Not but what they are all in the Book now, but I cannot realise, and grasp, and understand them except by degrees. I find a promise exactly suitable for me to-day; but there is another. I love it and bless God for it already, but I cannot get the sweetness of it to-day, it is reserved for days to come, I shall find it open to me to-morrow. Another is laid up for me in six months' time, and another in five years' time. The promises are fruits laid up to ripen in time to come, and as most fruits become ripest and sweetest in the winter, so have we found that God's promises have a peculiar mellowness in our times of distress and affliction, such a sweetness as we did not perceive in the summer days of our prosperity. The train which starts from London to go to the North continues to traverse the distance day by day—how is it supplied with water? Why, there are trenches between the rails in several different places, and from these the engine drinks as it rushes along its iron pathway; it is supplied as it runs. That is just what our heavenly Father has done for you. You are just like an engine on the road to heaven, and between here and heaven there are many stores of grace awaiting you; you will take up fresh water without slacking your speed, and so will be able to keep on to your journey's end. To use another illustration, when the Eastern nations used to trade across the desert in the olden times, in Solomon's days for instance, there were stations built, wells sunk, and provisions stored at convenient halting-places, so that the caravans might pause and take in fresh provisions. The caravans reached their journey's end because the long way was broken up by a series of resting-places. Now, the promises are resting-places for us between here and heaven. There is a long line of them at well-ordered intervals, and as we journey through this desert world we shall be constantly coming, first to one, and then another, and then another, and another, and so we shall find fresh provision stored up, that we may not fail. The manna

will fall daily till we come to Canaan. The promises of God are so numerous, that we are sure we "shall be anointed with fresh oil."

Once more, beloved, up till now our experience has proved that we shall be anointed with fresh oil, because we have been so anointed many a time already. I appeal to you who have gone for many years forward in the pathway where Jesus leads you; have you not known many times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord? You have had times of great depression, for changes are appointed us as long as we are here. Men may promise themselves they shall never see a change, but they are greatly mistaken. David said, "My mountain standeth firm; I shall never be moved," but in a very little time he sang another hymn. When I hear brethren so very confident that they shall never doubt again, I am reminded of a story I have heard of the olden times, when a young gentleman who had never travelled before went over Hounslow Heath, and was accosted by another gentleman who rode by his side, and joined in an interesting conversation. Our friend said at last, "I have always been told by my father that this is a very dangerous heath, but the old gentleman, I think, was exceedingly nervous, for we have come all this way without being molested by highwaymen." "Yes," said the other, "but now is the time for you to stop and deliver"; and he clapped his pistol to his ear. It often happens, when we say, "I shall have no more temptations," that our very confidence is in itself a temptation. O yes, there have been times of sore trial, but the Lord has appeared for us. Up to this moment not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord God hath promised.

> "Thus far we prove the promise good
> Which Jesus satisfied with blood."

We have no fault to find with our God. Jehovah Jireh, the Lord has provided to this day; in the mount of the Lord shall it be seen. Ebenezer, hitherto the Lord hath helped us. Well, then, if He has done so up till now, so will He, for He is an unchangeable God; therefore let us be assured that we "shall be anointed with fresh oil."

III. THIS CONFIDENCE CALMS ALL OUR FEARS. Sometimes, when we are not quite as we should be, we are filled with fear on account of our soul poverty. What a poor thing I am; how little grace I have; how weak in prayer; how slow in service; how frequently depressed; how easily tossed to and fro. How shall I hope to hold on to the end? Here is the answer to it—"I shall be anointed with fresh oil." I am poor, but I shall receive my daily pension; I am weak, and I have no strength in reserve, but my strength is laid up in God. Imagine two Israelites talking together one day, and one of them says to the other, "Your cupboard seems to be very empty, I fear you are improvident." "But," says the other, "Do you know we gathered this morning an omer full of manna, and it exactly supplied my family. I have a wife and a troop of boys with mighty appetites and very soon the omer which had been full was empty, but we look for more to-morrow." "Nothing in the house!" said the other, "do you not feel distressed?" "No, not at all." "Why not?" "Because I believe the manna will fall to-morrow morning, and that there will be just as much as I shall want, so that I have no need to lay by any in store." "Very imprudent," said the other; "I believe we ought to make hay while the sun shines. If you will come to my house, I will show you the good stock of manna which I have carefully laid by." "No," said the other, "I do not care to see it just now; but I will tell you what I will do; I will come down to-morrow at dinner time and see it." So the man gathered in the morning his own manna fresh, and his family have been satisfied with it and delighted, and after they have eaten he says, "I will go down and see my rich friend's manna; he was much better off last night than I was." He goes to his friend's door, but his friend does not seem pleased to see him. "I have come to see your manna that you stored up so carefully." But the other blushes, and owns that he has none to show. "Why not?" his friend enquires. "Well, the fact. is, I do not want you to come into my tent at all. I must come forth from it myself. There is a most detestable smell all through the tent. I had to take away the manna and bury it, for it bred worms and stank." "Ah," said the other, "then after all I did well to live upon daily manna, and to have no stock in hand; and you did foolishly to lay by a store." Now there may be some professors here who want to feel that they are strong enough for to-morrow, or that they have grace enough for next week; they want to have such a proportion of divine strength given them that they shall feel confident about themselves for years to come. All that will breed worms, and stink; all human confidence, glory, and pride must rot; but if you remain a poor sinner and nothing at all, daily depending on the bounty of God, you will have grace from heaven fresh and fresh, smelling of the hand which gives it every morning. Beloved, it calms our fears about our poverty when we remember that the granary of heaven is not exhausted, and that as each morning breaks we shall find the dew of grace lying about our tent.

This also removes our fears concerning violent temptations. We must all of us have felt afraid of being tempted. We are taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Sometimes our unbelief says, "If I am tempted in a certain way I shall certainly perish." My brother, you should remember that you will be anointed with fresh oil: when the temptation comes there will be a way of escape for you. What a happy circumstance it is for Christians that it is not often that the temptation and the opportunity come together. Have you not noticed that when wrong desires stir in your mind, they come to you at times when you cannot carry them out; and at other times when you have the opportunity to sin fairly before you, you have no desire for it whatever? That is often a way of escape for God's people. Do not be distressed about temptations. Such there will be in this world. Lay hold on the shield of your faith, and you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

But it may be you are afraid not merely of temptation, but of backsliding, and that is a very blessed fear, but do not let it depress you, for you will be anointed with fresh oil. If you had to keep yourself, you would certainly perish; if you had to sustain your own spiritual vigour, it would not be long before you would faint; but since you depend upon God, and He has to preserve you, He will not suffer you to leave Him, or if for a while you should depart from His way, He will bring your wandering heart back and set you in the King's highway once more.

Or it is possible you are afraid of some great and grievous affliction. I know dear sisters who are aware

that a certain disease is upon them which will one day come to such a point that either there will be a painful operation or else they may die. Dear friend do not fret about it. You have not sufficient strength for what is coming, but you will be anointed with fresh oil. Nobody wants to-morrow's grace to-day. When you are only up to your ankles in trouble you do not require the grace which you will have when you are up to your neck in it; you shall have grace in proportion. You shall have ballast for your sail, and sail for your ballast, for He is a good captain who intends to steer you into port. Do not be cast down, therefore.

Some of us, it may be, have been troubled about the future death of some dear one upon whom we depend, or whose life is very precious to us: we have buried them a hundred times over in our fears. Let us remember that when the trouble comes it will be time enough for us to be cast down by it; nay, we shall not be cast down, for God, who helpeth those who are cast down, will comfort us. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

And perhaps, dear brother, or sister, you have entered upon a new state of sorrow. You wear to-day the name of widow, which you never wore before; or, you are now called an orphan for the first time. In this new state resort to God to be anointed with fresh oil. He who made you a good wife will help you to bear well the trial of losing your husband: He who made you a dutiful child will be a Father to you, and help you to sustain the position of an orphan well. You shall be anointed with fresh oil, whenever affliction comes. I feel as if I could sit down now, and say to myself, "Cheer up, heart, cheer up, whatever ails thee; thou shalt be anointed with fresh oil. Look into the future—nay, do not care to look into it: do not wish to look into the book of fate and see

> "What gloomy lines are writ for thee,
> Or what bright scenes arise."

Thou shalt be anointed with fresh oil." This is a heavenly forecast of our nativity. We shall be anointed with fresh oil right to the end of our journey, and when death comes, if come it ever shall—for Christ may come, and we may not die—we shall be anointed with fresh oil. Very wonderful is the way in which God takes His people to Himself? Two good men have lately gone to heaven in a manner which rebuked their own prayers. They were taught in their church to say, and did say twice every Sabbath for more than fifty years, "Lord, deliver us from sudden death." Dear good men, the Lord knew it was a stupid prayer, and Mr. Robert Aitken, who had for many years served his Lord, fell down dead on the railway platform, and Mr. Pennefather dropped from his chair into heaven. The Lord seemed to say to them, "Why did you ask me to save you from sudden death? It was the best for you, and I gave it to you." To die in the pulpit preaching, to go straight from testifying about Christ below to seeing Him above—what better thing *could* be desired? Do not be afraid of dying: either you will be taken away gently, perhaps in your very sleep, and will never know you died at all; or, if you have to lie a little while and linger, you will be anointed with fresh oil, and you will turn your dying bed into a chariot of fire, you will be transfigured there in the presence of your family, and they will wonder that the grace of God could do such great things for a poor, weak, trembling mortal. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

IV. Now I must pass over the next point very briefly: THIS ASSURANCE TENDS TO RAISE OUR HOPES.

We tremble lest we should not hold on to the end, but now we know we shall be anointed with fresh oil we are filled with hope. Sometimes, when we meet with believers who are full of grace, full of patience, full of courage, full of zeal, full of love, we say, "I can never get where they are." Yes, we can, for we shall be anointed with fresh oil; and if we obtain fresh grace there is no place of eminence we cannot reach; what Abraham was, what David was, what Isaiah was, what Paul was, we may be. There is nothing in the whole range of Christian attainment from which we are debarred.

This raises our hope of useful service. Perhaps we have not done much for the Lord yet, or, having done something in our youth, are growing dull now and do not honour Him as we once did. Come, we won't give up and say, "I shall never serve the Lord," but we will rejoice that we shall be anointed with fresh oil. We have seen trees bear very little fruit for years, but they will have a splendid year by-and-by, and then they will be loaded with fruit. Sometimes an old tree looks dead, and yet at the scent of water it doth bud and bring forth fruit once more. So some of you may be like a dry, barren tree, but the Lord means to visit you, and you shall bring forth fruit to His name. I would say to every brother here who is conscious that he has neglected a great deal of what he ought to have done, and has not been as useful as he should, "Come, brother, mend thy ways, and have good hope of brighter times to come, for thou shalt be anointed with fresh oil."

Once more, this gives us hope of the fullest fellowship with Christ. Where John was when he leaned his head on his Master's bosom, I may be. Where Mary was when she sat at the Master's feet, I may be, if "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Come, lift up your heads, ye birds of heaven; do not sit moping here; lift up your heads, I say, and look the sun in the face, the glorious Sun of Righteousness, and rise with all your wings towards Him. He will upbear you, He will draw you to Himself. Does He not even now attract you by His own superlative beauties? "Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse," says He, "with Me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana." Up, up Christian, higher, higher, higher. The Lord will help thee, He will give thee new strength and the highest place of devotion, the loftiest elevation of piety shall be attained by thee.

V. Lastly, THIS MAKES US FEEL GREAT PITY FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT HOPE TO BE ANOINTED WITH FRESH OIL; and such are all who are destitute of faith. You have your choice; you who do not believe in the unseen, you have your choice in the seen things which you can see and hear. They are before you, and you are very fond of them, and you think they fill your spirit. So they may for the present, but there are evil times coming. The young man's youth will not last for ever. Eyes grow dim, as every old man will tell you; the joys of youth will not come to your rescue then; the remembrance of those early joys, as past and gone for ever, will only make your cup more bitter, and going down gradually to your grave, discontented and fretful, striving still to gratify passions for which you have no strength, looking again to broken cisterns, and finding only a little mud at the bottom, where once you found what you thought crystal waters, you will begin to cry out for fresh comforts: but you

will not find them. It is a blessed thing to be so rich that there is no end to your wealth, and nobody can say that but a Christian. It is a blessed thing to have a stream at your foot, which will never fail; and nobody has such a river but a Christian. If thou believest in God, God is thine; and all that thy soul can ever want is treasured up in the infinite God, for life, for death, for judgment, for eternity. Without God thou art naked, and poor, and miserable already in the highest sense, but what wilt thou be hereafter? Oh, the poverty of a man who lives without Christ; but oh, the poverty of the man who dies without Christ! Oh, the utter, utter poverty of a man who will live throughout eternity without Christ! He is a naked soul, and the blasts of wrath shall smite upon him without pause. He is a thirsty soul; oh, how he thirsts! but no drop of consolation will ever come to him. He is a crushed and broken soul, but there is no one to heal his broken heart, nor stanch his ghastly wounds. He is for ever destroyed and banished from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; and to that destruction no restoration can ever come; to that agony no relief; to that death no resurrection. To-day Christ is to be had; to-day all that your soul wants is to be had, and to be be had for nothing, to be had for the asking, to be had for the accepting; for whoever believeth in Him receives Him, and so is saved:—

"But if your ears refuse
The language of His grace,
And hearts grow hard like stubborn Jews,
That unbelieving race,
The Lord in vengeance dressed,
Will lift His hand and swear,
'You that despised my promised rest
Shall have no portion there!'"

God grant it may not be so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

MULTITUDINOUS THOUGHTS AND SACRED COMFORTS

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul."—Psalm xciv. 19.

IF man were a mere animal, his joy and sorrow would depend entirely upon outward things. Let but the trough be full, and the swine are happy; let the pasture be abundant, and the sheep are content. In the sunshine every sparrow will be twittering on the trees; let the heavens weep, and every wing is drooping. In long drought, or severe frost, or pinching famine, the animal creation languishes and pines. You cannot, however, be sure of making a man happy by surrounding him with abundance, nor can you plunge a Christian man into wretchedness by any deprivations which you may cause him. Man's greatest joy or sorrow must arise from inner springs. The mind itself is the lair of misery or the nest of happiness. Thoughts are the flowers from which we must distil the essential flavourings of life. Paul and Silas sing in the stocks because their minds are at ease, while Herod frets on his throne because conscience makes him a coward. The soul of Linnæus exults within him at the sight of a common all golden with blooming gorse, while many a millionaire has roamed amid his gardens and conservatories and found no joy amid them all. A crust of bread from one heart brings a song, from another a thousand acres of ripening grain can produce no thanksgiving. Alexander, according to the old classic tale, sits down to weep over a conquered world, while many a peasant who has not a foot of ground to call his own, rejoices in tribulation, and glories in reproach. Our weal or woe is the outgrowth of seeds germinating within, not of branches which from without run over the wall. Happiness lies not in the outward, but in the inward; the fairest garden is that whose walks and arbours are in the secret of the soul; the richest and most mellow fruits are not plucked from the trees of the orchard, but are ripened within the spirit. Hence the importance of our guarding well our thoughts. But this is the labour and difficulty, for thoughts are unstable things, unruly as the wild horses of the plains, fickle as the waves of the sea, swift as the swallow's wing, impetuous as the hurricane, changeable as the clouds of heaven. How are we to rule them? Sometimes they descend in clouds like the locusts, each one eager to devour our peace; they raven as the evening wolves; they howl like hungry dogs. Alas! poor bark, tossed to and fro by forces so subtle, variable, and ungovernable, what shall be done for thee? Hearken, for the text softly tells us that for the tempest-tossed mind there is a haven of rest, an anchorage where the weakest may find shelter from the storm. Even when multitudes of thoughts are let loose, and the soul is seething and raging like a tempestuous sea, there is rest to be had; peace and quiet are yet reserved for the chosen of the Lord.

The verse before us is most instructive, indicating as it does an oasis for desert travellers, a sunny island for weary voyagers. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul." Our first meditation, this morning, will be concerning *multitudinous thoughts and sacred comforts;* we shall afterwards pass on, more briefly to *take a nearer view of these divine consolations;* and we shall conclude by making *a contrast* from the text concerning those men who neither experience the multitudes of thoughts, nor the comforts from on high.

I. MULTITUDINOUS THOUGHTS AND SACRED COMFORTS.

This passage may be interpreted several ways. The most natural would be, I think, to refer it to *thoughts tumultous in the night of trial.* There are occasions when we are grievously tried with troubles of an unusual order, and then it often happens that the floodgates of our judgment are drawn up, and then our liberated thoughts, in a raging torrent, without order, rush upon us, foaming and threatening.

These thoughts will follow each other like gusts of an angry tempest. They may be such as these—the trouble itself, how severe it is, how it cuts one to the quick! Ten thousand other trials might have happened, any of which we fancy we could have borne more patiently, but this affliction is the direst of all, the fiercest lion of the wood. Will it be possible to escape from such a terrible calamity? Close upon the heels of this consideration will come the thought that the trial will be too much for you; that you will never be able to bear it; that your patience will give way; and your faith will cast away her confidence and give place to despair. Immediately in the rear of this, another suggestion will lift its black head; this trouble is the consequence of past sin; you have walked contrary to God, and He is now walking contrary to you. You would never have been made to smart thus if there had not been some gross disobedience of which you have not thoroughly repented, which God hath still upon His mind, and therefore doth He make you the target for His arrows. Then, like a serpent of the pit, there will dart upward hissing and devilish suggestion, God is now giving you up; He has been merciful up to this moment, but this peculiar trial, so severe, so long continued, so piercing and penetrating, touching you in your very tenderest part, this is the turning point in your history. From this day forward everything will go hard with you; all circumstances will be black and cloudy; you shall know no comfort and no rest, for God hath forsaken you; your enemies will persecute and take you, and you yourself will be cast out like savourless salt.

"Ah," saith one, "such thoughts as these ought not to arise in any godly mind!" I know they ought not, but there they are, and I question whether any child of God can affirm that he has been always altogether free from such conceptions in dark and tempestuous hours. Faith ought to shut the gate against every suggestion that would dishonour the veracity and loving-kindness of God, but unfortunately the watchman sleepeth and is troubled with weakness, and then the enemy cometh in like a flood; and happy is he who in such a moment shall be able by the Spirit of the Lord to lift up a standard against him.

The thoughts that I have just uttered are only specimens of what will occur when the child of God is in the furnace and under a cloud. Of course, these thoughts will be different in every case, but they will rush, as I have already said, like a raging torrent, sweeping everything before it in headlong fury. Now, at such times it is a great blessing if God's comforts are our stay and holdfast, delighting our souls. Happy is he who has found out a heavenly breakwater against the floods of great waters, a store of consolations for the most imminent emergencies. To these consolations may you be led by the Holy Spirit. For a practical list of them I would refer you to the psalm which lies open before us. You will observe that David derived comfort in his afflicted condition from the belief that God knew everything that he was suffering: "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Psalm xciv. 9.) "Ah," saith the soul, "whatever this trial may be, one thing is clear, my heavenly Father knows all about it; there is not a circumstance in my present condition which is hidden from Him. That eye which has watched me from my childhood is not closed towards me in this dark hour. He understandeth and knoweth the way that I take, and if I be surrounded with the thick darkness, it is no darkness to Him:—

> "E'en the hour that darkest seemeth
> Will His changeless goodness prove;
> From the mist His brightness streameth,
> God is wisdom, God is love."

"Thou God seest me": "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." There is no mean consolation in the golden words which fell from the Saviour's lips: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." The sevenfold heat of the furnace cools when we know that the Lord is there, "a very present help in trouble."

Next to this, the Psalmist was comforted by the belief that chastisement is blessed to the partaker of it. Note the twelfth verse: "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord." "Then," saith the soul, "if it be not prosperity which is set forth as a mark of blessedness, but if it be adversity which is the covenant spot, and the choice mark of a favoured child of God, then will I congratulate myself in being made to smart beneath my gracious Father's hand." Everything as to our state of mind depends upon the light in which we regard the dealings of providence. If our trouble comes to us as a curse, if indeed our afflictions be the first drops of that tremendous sheet of fire which will fall upon us for ever from an angry God, then trial is indeed an awful thing; but if it be so, that out of love to us we are made to undergo the needful processes of tribulation, to prepare us like winnowed wheat for the peaceful garner, then will we accept our sufferings with joy. Welcome, O grief, if thou art a black messenger loaded with treasure! Welcome, thrice welcome to my patient spirit, O rod of the covenant, soul-enriching and sanctifying! Here, beloved, is a second consolation which revives the fainting soul when ready to swoon amid the heat and burden of oppressive thoughts.

The Psalmist goes on to declare that all adversity will have a happy end, "Judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it." Then saith the spirit, "Though I may be cast down to-day and sore vexed, and though the wicked may be at ease and spread themselves like green bay trees, yet there is an end appointed when the axe shall be for the root of the ungodly, and when the glory shall be for the afflicted and poor saints." A sight of the end maketh us to judge rightly of the whole matter. All's well that ends well. If the cup be not poison, but medicine, then its bitterness shall be sweetness to me. If the ploughing be not for a sowing of salt beneath the curse of desolation, but for a seedtime of grace with a harvest of bliss, then plough on, O Lord, and though the furrows tear my soul, yet be it so, the end maketh amends, and therefore Thy will be done.

The Psalmist still further in the midst of his troubles stayed himself in the belief of God's faithfulness. I called your attention in the exposition to the strong utterance of the fourteenth verse: "For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance." If we could believe it possible that God might suffer His chosen children to perish, and that those who trust in Him might under certain circumstances be confounded, we might very well wrap our faces in sackcloth and go our way in wretchedness, like the slaves of despair; but the

Lord never has utterly deserted one of His servants yet, and He never will. When all His waves and His billows went over David, yet the Lord commended his loving-kindness in the daytime, and gave His servant a song in the night, for God was the health of His countenance and his God for ever and ever. The Lord has made His servants to endure trials great and many—they have gone through fire and through water; but in every case the delivering arm has been made bare, and in their extremity the opportunity of love has certainly arrived. Rejoice then, O you who are vexed with multitudes of troublous thoughts, and let the infallible faithfulness of your God delight your souls.

Once more, in that psalm David dwells upon his own past experience: "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." How often have you and I found it to be one of the shortest ways to renew our hope, when we have called to mind the former days, and the years of mercy past! We have said, "Was He not with me on the field of strife, to deliver me from the tumult of the people? Did I not obtain mercy from Him when I was brought very low? Did I not find safety beneath the shadow of His wings when the storm of the terrible ones assailed me? He that has enabled me to erect so many Ebenezers in days past, has not helped me thus far to put me to shame at the end; He has not revealed all this loving-kindness and truth to me that after all He may make me ashamed of my hope." We have not to deal with a changeable God. Oh, no! He assuredly will complete the work which His wisdom has begun; all His power shall be put forth to finish the work of grace. Such thoughts as these, in the times when our heart is much distracted, will be found to minister not merely consolation, but a deep, profound quiet, and even a holy exhilaration amounting, as our text has it, to "*delight.*" "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul."

Brethren, I have thus spoken upon the text as referring to tumultuous thoughts in the night of trial, permit me to remind you that it will be equally right to refer it to *perplexing thoughts and periods of dilemma.* The path of life to some men is remarkably straightforward: from their circumstances and surroundings they are very seldom at a loss to know the path of duty; but with many others the narrow way is, to all appearance, exceedingly like the track of the children of Israel through the wilderness—in and out, backward and forward, "progressive, retrograde, and standing still." Oftentimes have we come to a turning in the road, where human wisdom is at a nonplus to know whether to select the right hand or the left. Two ways may appear equally right morally, but yet the choice of either of them may involve the most solemn consequences as to our future. I suppose that almost every Christian man has had to look about him for signposts and way-marks, and at times he has found none; he has felt like a traveller in the trackless bush of Australia, and he has been obliged to go down on his knees and cry to God, that he may hear a voice behind him saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

I may be addressing some of you to-day who are perplexed with a multitude of conflicting thoughts as to your course in life. You do not know what to do. A certain plan has suggested itself, and for a time it has seemed the very best course for you; but just now your mind wavers, for another course presents itself, and there is much to say in its favour. You are bewildered, you cannot see the clue of providence, you are lost as in a maze. Indeed, at this moment you are much dispirited, for you have tried various ways and methods to escape from your present difficulty, but you have been disappointed where you expected relief, and probably that which you are about to attempt will end in disappointment too. Your thoughts compass you about like bees, or as the flies of Egypt's plague; they worry, but do not help you. You are distracted, and your thoughts have no order about them, for while they lean one way at this moment, they drag you in the opposite direction the next second. The currents meet and twist you as in a whirlpool. Now, my dear perplexed friend, at such a time your plight may remaind you of the children of Israel at the Red Sea, with the sea before them, and the rocks on either hand, and the cruel Egyptians in the rear, and you must imitate their action, and "stand still and see the salvation of God." But, you reply, "I cannot be quiet, I am too agitated." Brother, let patience have her perfect work. In quietness shall be your strength. Yet you reply, "My spirit is restless and impetuous; I wish I could be calm, for then I could better judge of my position, and probably discover the way of escape; but I am perturbed, perplexed, tossed up and down, distracted. Alas! what shall I do?" Listen then to the text, "In the miltitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul." Turn thine eye to those deep things of God, which have a divine power to allay the torment of thy spirit. Cease from a too anxious consideration of the things which are seen and temporal, and gaze by faith upon the things which are unseen and eternal. Remember that, after all, thy way is ordered by a higher power than thy will and choice. The eternal destiny of God has fixed thine every footstep. Believe thou that wisdom, not blind fate, but wisdom, has ordained the bounds of thine habitation, and fixed thy position and thy condition so definitely that no fretfulness of thine can change it for the better. In the ordinance of God, all thy history is fixed, so as to secure His glory and thy soul's profit. Thy present sorrow is the bitter bud of greater joy. Thy transient loss secures thine ultimate and never-ceasing gain. How I rejoice to believe that the Lord shall choose mine inheritance for me! All things are fixed by a Father's hand, by no arbitrary and stern decree, but by His wise counsel and tender wisdom. He who loved us from before the foundations of the world, has immutably determined all the steps of our pilgrimage. Wherefore then disturb thyself? There is a hand upon the helm which shall steer thy vessel safely enough between the rocks, and by the quicksands, and away from the shoals and the headlands, through the mist, and through the darkness, safely to the desired haven. Our Pilot never sleeps, and His hand never relaxes its grasp. It is a blessed thing, after you have been muddling and meddling as you ought not to do with the affairs of providence, to leave them alone and cast your burden upon the Lord. Oftentimes, in my own short career, in connection with this church, and with the many works of God committed to my charge, I have been brought to a nonplus; I have considered, and judged, and been perplexed, and then discovering my gross folly, in cumbering myself with much serving, I have, at last, resolved to lay my care upon the shelf, and I have said unto the Lord, "I will never fret

about this matter again; Thou shalt judge and work for Thy poor servant." Brethren, hear my testimony! things have always gone right with me when I have been brought to this; whereas they have been wrong enough when I have been befogged myself with care, and have wondered how the College and the Orphanage could be provided for, and fifty thousand other things. When I have left all with my Lord, He has brought forth my righteousness as the light, and my judgment as the noonday. I charge you, therefore, children of God, in dilemma, roll your burdens upon God, and He will sustain you, and give you to rejoice in beholding His wisdom and His love.

The text will endure no straining, if we read it as declaring that when *thoughts remorseful pass over us in the hour of recollection*, we may find peace in the comforts of God. Thoughts remorseful, I say—and what man among you could look back steadily and undismayed upon the whole course of his life? Take away the cross, and no Christian man dare recall the past to his memory. Each individual hair might stand on end with horror at the remembrance of the ruin into which our past iniquity has plunged us. Memory doth well, beneath the shadow of the Atonement, to turn over each leaf of her diary. There are the sins of our youth, and the sins of maturer years; sins of ignorance, and sins against light and knowledge; sins secret, and sins before the face of the sun—together, how many! who shall count them? We have perpetrated aggravated offences, inasmuch as we have repeated sins which we professed to have repented of; sins in our case have worn a blacker hue because of circumstances which made them to stand without excuse. How frequently our evil ways have been injurious to others! at times that thought stings as doth an adder, for we may have led others into sin who have not yet repented, who are going down to the pit to reap the reward of sins into which we drew them. Alas! the recollections of the past do not end in their painfulness with our conversion, since we have continued to transgress. Our sins of omission rise like Andes for height, our sins of commission reach to the clouds. Sins against the church and against the world, against our families, against ourselves; sins against the precious blood, sins against the blessed Spirit, sins against our loving Father—who shall count them? And when these sins are attentively viewed by the soul, not glanced at superficially, but looked into with hearty and honest repentance, how often will the question arise, "Can there be forgiveness for all these? Is it possible that they are blotted out? Is it not all a delusion and a dream, that such iniquity is really washed away?" And thought will follow thought, like lightning flashes in the thick of the tempest, till the soul will be broken in pieces with dismay, unless it turneth to God's comforts, which alone can delight the penitent soul. Behold them now! There is a God of mercy, infinite mercy, and the greatest sin cannot be equal to the greatness of His power to forgive. There is a fountain filled with blood, and the power of that blood is not exhausted. Jesus is a living intecessor; "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The five wounds are pleading still; and, though our sins be as scarlet, there stands the unwavering promise that they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as snow. Brethren, it is of great service to the soul for us to go back frequently to our first starting point. Our first penitence is one of the most lovely traits of the Christian character, and ought to be always manifest; we should be always weeping for sin, but the tears should fall upon the Saviour's feet; we should weep because it is forgiven; we should rest upon Jesus as guilty sinners still in ourselves, having nothing more to rest upon to-day, after twenty years of walking with God, than we had at the very first, for then we had the atoning blood, and we have nothing more than that at this hour as the ground of our acceptance with God. Oh let us keep to this, so that when many bitter thoughts are stirred as to the past, we may see the living Saviour presenting His atoning sacrifice before the throne, and may therein rejoice. The word "delight" has in this place in the original Hebrew the idea of dancing, and indeed our heart exults and leaps for joy at the sight of the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Bold can we stand before God when we plead the righteousness of Christ, for though our sins be many, yet none shall lay them to our charge, and though they be black, yet are they forgiven, and none shall dare accuse whom God absolves.

Let us not further linger. There are often with us *thoughts of heart-searching in seasons of spiritual anxiety*; and it is a blessed thing, in the multitude of our thoughts of heart-searching, if the comforts of God can still delight our soul. God forbid we should ever say a word to dissuade professors from the duty of self-examination. Our salvation is too solemn a thing to be taken upon trust. No man has any right to believe that he is saved upon any assumed and taken-for-granted ground of assurance. He who is afraid to examine himself has need to be afraid, for God will examine him. He who is right is never afraid of being searched, but rather he prays, "Search me, O God, and try me, and know my ways." Yet, under self-examination, thoughts like these will naturally take wing in the heart, Am I truly born again? That conversion of mine, was it a fancy, was it a reality? Do I know what the indwelling, purifying quickening power of the Holy Ghost is, or is my experience only imagination; is the change within me merely a transient desire after reformation; and am I still in a carnal and unrenewed state? Do I produce the fruits of righteousness? Do I live as Christians are said to live? Do I follow after holiness in the fear of God? Do I, in very truth, love Christ, or is it only a pretence? Do I heartily serve Him? Does the love of Christ actually constrain me? Ah! brethren, when I recollect my own daily infirmities, I must confess I cannot always answer those questions without much debate of spirit; and I suspect that the most of you, in the matter of solemn heart-questioning, do not find things going very smoothly with you. At such times, in the multitude of your thoughts within you, you will discover no delight, unless you cast yourself upon the consolations which God has prepared for such a case; and I think they are these; "Well, if I never did love my Lord, if it was all a mistake, yet still He receiveth sinners, and I will go to Him. If, after all, my religion has been a pretence, yet He hath said, 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved.' My faith shall even now look up to the Lamb of Calvary, the divine Saviour. Jesus, I am guilty, but oh, I trust Thee." I know there is no consolation like this. Never mind your experience; in hours of doubt leave it, and fly at once to Jesus. If the devil will needs call your profession a lie, let him do so; but there is no lie in that sacrifice that

makes reconciliation for sin between the believer and his God, and to that blessed sacrifice, all guilty and undone, let us fly at once.

These consolations will yet delight your soul if you push them further; and having looked to the precious blood, then read your adoption in Christ, your union to Christ, your interest in the covenant through Christ, your personal security by virtue of union to Christ. Get once to the cross, and you have reached the well-head of consolations.

We must not tarry there, however, but further observe that sometimes we have multitudes of *thoughts of foreboding in days of depression*. These dark prophesyings are sometimes about ourselves. How many of God's people say, "Alas! I shall die in a workhouse; I do not know what will become of me in old age, when these fingers cannot earn my daily bread." At other times, and with some of as much more often, we prophesy evil concerning our work; "The Holy Ghost will withdraw from our church; our ministry will not be useful; our various works will fall to pieces; we shall see those who profess to be zealous go back to the world again." Such thoughts as these haunt us. The Sunday-school teacher will be afraid lest there should be no conversions in the class, or that supposed conversions will turn out to be mistakes; and when you once get into the foreboding line, it is very easy to be a great prophet of evil, and to believe yourself when not a word of what you are saying has a smattering of truth in it. Then we dream dreadful things concerning our nation. According to the gloomy prophets, all England is going to the bad—not England alone, but all countries are hastening on to a general and everlasting smash. Then one begins to fret about the Church of God; for according to the soothsayers of the age, Antichrist is yet to come, and new heresies are to spring up; the dogs of war are to be let loose, the Pope is to rule and burn us, and one hardly knows what else. Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation have been made sometimes to minister poison to every bright hope, but here is our comfort with regard to the future—

> "He everywhere hath sway,
> And all things serve His might;
> His every act pure blessing is,
> His path unsullied light."

Let the worst come to the worst, the best will come of it ere long. "If the heavens were a bow," saith one, "and the earth were the string, and God should fit the arrows of His vengeance thereon, and shoot at the sons of men, yet they could find shelter with the Archer Himself." Our refuge is in God; let the worst calamities occur to the world in years to come, we are secure. It must be well; it cannot be ill. "Jehovah-Jireh." Lift high the banner and hopefully advance to the battle, for the victory shall surely come unto the arm eternal, the will immutable.

Once more. Occasionally we have *thoughts profound in times of meditation*; and whenever we enter into profound considerations, it is well for us to know the comforts which will delight our souls. Certain minds are very prone to contemplations upon themes more puzzling than profitable, such as predestination and free-will. We have all of us, I suppose, picked at that Gordian knot in our time, and we have been vain enough to hope to untie it; but that deed is not for us. Many and many a good hour have we wasted over that dark mystery—how far the eternal God hath fixed, and how far responsible man is left free. Milton pictures the very devils musing upon that metaphysical problem, and doubtless the angels have pondered it too; but only God's mind shall perfectly unriddle that enigma. Whenever we are oppressed with that great mystery, it must cheer us to know comforts of God which delight our souls. Amongst those comforts stands the grand fact that God is righteous, that He cannot err, that there cannot possibly be anything in sovereignty that wars with mercy or with justice. Believing, moreover, that whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus hath everything on his side, we can leave the riddle, solved or unsolved, and feel that it is small concern to us. There are many other great mysteries in the word of God, and foolish persons utterly befog themselves with them; indeed some minds never seem to be satisfied until they reach to something which they cannot comprehend, and then they are ready to give up the Bible altogether; they act like one who should come in to a feast, and after turning over all the good things, should at last find a bone with no meat upon it, and should insist upon it that he would not eat a morsel until he could digest that one particular bone. How foolish of men; they will not receive what they might grasp and comprehend, and might be improved by, because of some one thing that happens to be above their comprehension. I bless God for a religion which I cannot understand. If I could perfectly understand it I would not believe it to be divine: for I should be sure it did not come from the infinite God if I could grasp it and comprehend it. But oh, those blessed abysses of truth beyond my depth, where I am obliged to cast myself upon the Lord and swim in His love! Oh, those soul-expanding mysteries, how well they give play for faith and room for confidence in God, where the soul having done her best to grasp and comprehend, falls back upon her God, and says, "How infinite art Thou; what a worthless worm am I; I bow before Thee in adoration, and trust Thee in affection!" "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul." Enough, then, upon our first; I fear the multitude of my words have given you a weary sense of what a multitude of thoughts must be.

II. I could wish that we had time to VIEW THESE SACRED COMFORTS, which we have hinted at, more nearly this morning. But I ask your attention very briefly to a summary.

View these comforts in *their nature*. They are said to be God's comforts. "*Thy* comforts delight my soul," by which I understand that they are comforts concerning God, that is, connected with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This triple well continually overflows with consolation. The more a believer thinks of his God, the more comfort will he have. I understand the expression to mean also comforts prepared by God and comforts revealed by God—comforts which divine mercy has ordained for the troubled sons of men—comforts which the Holy Ghost has revealed in the page of inspiration. I understand, however, more than this. The comforts that make us glad amid distractions, are such as are applied by God Himself. This text has been read, and I believe rightly, by putting in a stop in a different place from that in which I have put it in my reading. "In the multitude of my thoughts, within me Thy comforts delight my soul." For only

when the comforts of God get within us do they become effectual comforts to us. Man may pour the richest balm into the ear in words, but only the Holy Spirit's pouring it into the soul in very deed and truth can make the heart glad. It may be possible, also, that my text may mean, "*Thy* comforts," that is, the very comforts enjoyed by Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, for in the multitude of our thoughts we are often brought to rejoice where Christ rejoiced, in the joy that is set before us of God's ultimate glory in the salvation of the chosen. We are made to drink of the cup of trembling of which Christ drank, and we are also enabled to drink of the cup of rejoicing which made Him glad in the house of His pilgrimage. Understand, then, the comforts which God gives us to be comforts about Himself, comforts prepared and revealed by Himself, comforts applied by the Holy Spirit, and comforts which have been participated in, in the days of His flesh by the Son of God Himself.

When Archbishop Whately lay a-dying, his friend said to him, "Sir, you are great in death as well as in life." The good man shook his head, and replied, "I am dying as I have lived, a simple believer in Jesus Christ." "But what a blessing it is," said the other, "that your glorious intellect does not fail you at the last." "There is nothing glorious," said he, "but Jesus Christ." "Still," said the other, "your grand endurance is a great support to you." "I have no support but faith in the crucified Saviour," said he. Comfort, you see, comes to believers from nothing in themselves; but all peace proceeds from the Lord alone.

Observe, next, these comforts in their *stability*; they effectually sustain the spirit in times when they are required, for "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul." Many consolations are like the lifebuoys we heard so much of a few weeks ago, which are exceedingly useful on dry land, but of no service whatever when once a man trusts his life to them in the sea; even thus the world's consolations are prized when they are not needed, but prove themselves to be something worse than ridiculous confidences when men most need their assistance.

Once more, I must ask you to notice concerning these comforts their real *efficiency*. "Thy comforts delight my *soul*." Not my animal nature, not my external nature, but my very self. The comforts of God penetrate to the marrow of our manhood; they feed the vital spark; they make the man himself most thoroughly glad. Your wine, your corn, your oil, these do but tickle the palate; your music, your viol, and your dance, these do but please the ear, the eye, the foot; but the comforts of God touch the man himself, the essential inner core of the man's nature. "Thy comforts delight *my soul*."

Note that word "delight"; God's comforts not merely console, sustain, and quiet my soul, but they "delight" it; and that too in the midst of tumultuous thoughts. Brethren, I do know and speak by experience what I now say. There is a sad uneasiness in mirth, and there is a matchless repose in sorrow. I have never been more deeply happy than when I have been laid low with chastening. When I have been broken in pieces all asunder, faith has found her strength in helplessness, her end of care in the end of her self-reliance. When unbelief whispered rebelliously, "God must have His way, His cruel way," then when the heart was reconciled to leave it there, a sweet peace reigned within. Yes, there is deep joy amid deep sorrow, when the spirit is hushed and quiet, and the soul is even as a wearied child. May it always be your case, beloved friends, if ever the Lord shall call you to pass through deep waters, to find the pearls that lie hidden there, to mark the light that springs up in the midnight, and the joy that cometh in the morning, when the weeping is over for ever.

III. Now, the last thing, with which I send you away, is A CONTRAST.

Too many of our fellow-men never think at all. Thinking should be the easiest thing a man could attempt, for he has not to lift his hand or move his feet, but the multitude of men will do anything rather than think. Their thoughts, if they have any, are like a swarm of gnats, volatile, dancing up and down, light, useless. Oh that men would think! It is always a hopeful sign, if not of grace, yet of a prelude for the working of the Spirit of God, when men are brought to consider. We need not so much dread infidelity as carelessness. I had rather men would think wrongly than not think at all. When a man is awake enough to defy God, it is an awful thing, but there is something to be made of him, he is not quite asleep. There is a chance that this Goliath, who defies his God, may have a stone sent through his forehead, and by the way of his thinking may yet be brought low. But it is your people who go about their daily work and pleasure, and never think at all, who seem to be the devil's peculiar portion. How few of these ever get to be converted! Oh for a thunderclap to make the world think! Cholera, pestilence, war, calamity, these oftentimes come from God as a voice to make men consider; but in these soft and gentle times, men are lulled to false security, and down to the abyss of woe the multitude are being swept. I cannot but resemble thousands of my fellow-men to the Indian whose story I remember to have read years ago in Whitecross's Anecdotes; whether the tale be true or not I cannot tell. It is said that on the great river of America, there was once seen a canoe some miles off Niagara floating down the stream, and as the current turned it so that those on the bank could well perceive it, they saw that the paddle was shipped and an Indian was lying in the canoe fast asleep. They shouted as best they could to awake him, for they knew well the imminent hazard of the poor wretch. They shouted, and called aloud as they ran along the bank, but it was of no use. He had either been drinking or had been so fatigued that his slumber was most profound, and the canoe went floating on, continually increasing its pace. It dashed at last against a headland and spun round in the torrent; and they said one to another, "He is safe, the man will be awakened. Such a start as that will surely arouse him, and he will paddle out of danger." But no, he went right on till the roaring of the fall was near, and then the course of the boat was so rapid that none could keep up with it, and it went whirling on faster and faster. So profound was the Indian's sleep, that for awhile even the roar of the fall did not awaken him, but at last he was aroused, and then he grasped his paddle; but it was all too late; he was borne onward, and the last that was seen of him was his standing bolt upright in the boat, as it plunged over the abyss, and was never seen or heard of more. Ah! my fellow-men, how like is this to those of you who are asleep and are borne onward

by the treacherous current. That fever, that sick-bed, like a headland jutting into the stream, methought it would have made you think. That frail bark of thine was twisted round and round. Oh that thy soul had but been aroused from its slumber! The noise of hell may well be in thine ears, and the sound that cometh up from the abyss of terror may well arouse thee; but alas! I fear thou wilt sleep on until the cataract of destruction shall be just before thee in the pangs of death, and then, alas! full of horror, thou shalt seek escape when escape is no longer possible. God grant that none of us may thus sleep ourselves into a world of woe, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

THE SEA! THE SEA! THE WIDE AND OPEN SEA!

"The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land."—Psalm xcv. 5.

THIS psalm exhorts us to sing joyfully unto God. Whether we contemplate the land or the sea, there will be found upon them both abundant reasons for adoring the great Creator. Some, I know, as they walk upon the land, can no more praise Him than if it were one vast desert of Sahara; and yet the earth is full of His goodness; it is as a garden yielding, not only food for man and beast, but flowers lovely and fragrant. Forest and field, mountain and plain alike sing out the praises of the Lord. Nor is the sea less rich in excitements to worship the Lord our Maker. Ignorant persons regard the sea as a dreary waste of waters. In the olden times, our home-loving forefathers were desperately afraid of the sea, and looked upon it as a devouring monster. It was a "melancholy ocean" to them, a place of constant sorrow, and sudden death; they shuddered as they thought of it. But, indeed, to him who is rightly taught, the sea is full of beauty, its every wave is lit up with splendour: the sea is the Lord's, and He made it. You see, then, that both on the land and on the sea adoration is in its place. Praise is never out of season at any time, and worship is never foreign in any land. It matters not whether we travel over sand or snow, or how we are tossed about, on Arctic or tropical seas, we are still in the pastures of the great Shepherd, and within the palace of the great King. Praise the Lord from the earth, and let dragons and all deeps join in the psalm. "Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."

At this time I shall ask you only to think of the sea. I could far more easily preach upon this text if I were standing in one of my delightful haunts by the Mediterranean, looking over its blue waters, hidden away in the cleft of a rock, with the spray at my feet; then, I think, I should not coldly read the words, but clap my hands, as I cried with my heart, "The sea is His, and He made it." Here we are, however, stranded on this white-cliffed island, and banished from the fresh sea breezes to this huge Babylon of bricks, where men appear to forget God, since they see so little of His works and so much of their own. Let us try, if we can, to transport ourselves to the wide and open sea, and as we gaze all around, and see nothing but the rolling waves, let us sing,—

"He formed the deeps unknown,
He gave the seas their bound;
The watery worlds are all His own,
And all the solid ground."

There is no need for any laboured divisions in our sermon to-night: our first point will be that *God made the sea*; and the second will be that *therefore it is His*; and the third shall come out of the next verse, *He is therefore to be adored*: "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."

I. Our first thought is that GOD MADE THE SEA. Somebody made it, and *who else could have made it but God*? It is not often that you find a seafaring man who is an atheist. Addison tells us of a time when he was on board ship, and there was a passenger on deck who was an infidel. He was reported to the captain as an atheist, and neither he nor the sailors could make out what sort of a strange fish that might be, and asked him what he meant. They were told that he did not believe in a God. A storm coming on, the men proposed that they should pitch him overboard, seeing he did not believe in God Almighty; but he was soon cured of his unbelief, for, when things looked threatening, the first person who was down on his knees, crying for mercy in great terror, was the precious atheist, who soon got rid of his atheism when he felt in danger of his life. A little while ago, a Christian minister crossing to America was walking the deck with a gentleman who called himself an atheist. It was a very bad night, and the vessel had to steam on in the teeth of a head wind. It would have been fatal to let her drift. The captain said, "We cannot keep any watch, we must drive ahead, and if we do run into an iceberg, there's an end of us." Our friend, who believed in God, hearing this, said that he should turn in, and go to sleep; his companion declared that he could not think of doing any such thing, he should not like to die in his sleep, and so he would walk the deck, rough as it was. All night long he who had no God was cold and wet with watching, and fretting, and worrying, because he was afraid he should die; while my friend slept sweetly, and rose in the morning fresh as a lark. Coming on deck, he accosted the philosopher, "What! have you not turned in?" "No, no." He was miserable, he was unhappy. "Why," said the believer, "I trusted in my heavenly Father, and I fell asleep, and I feel quite refreshed. What good have you got by staying here?" "I must confess," said the other "you believers have the best of it when you get to sea." Yes, and assuredly we have the best of it on land, too. We have the best of it in health, in sickness, in death, and we shall have the best of it for ever.

God made the sea, and *the prints of His hands are still to be seen.* Skilful persons can tell that a picture is by a certain artist by its style. It is not everybody that can judge so well ; but a man skilled in art knows the touch of each painter's brush. "That is Rembrandt," cries the artist, "he alone could produce such lights and shadows ; and the other is by Salvator Rosa ; I know the master's hand." He also who has sought out the works of the Lord, and hath pleasure therein, knows the great Father's style. The same sublime mind which gave us the Holy Scriptures also ordained the channels of the deep. I am absolutely sure that He who reveals the secrets of the soul is He in whose hands are the deep places of the sea. His commandment is exceeding broad, even as the main ocean ; and of His grace we are compelled to cry, "Oh the depth ! " even as when we sound the Atlantic.

I will not go into the question to-night, but there are wonderful points of likeness between the Word and the work of the Almighty. The sea is a mystery of waters, and Scripture is sometimes obscure ; but yet the sea shineth like a mirror, and in Scripture we see the Lord as in a glass. The Bible has its storms most terrible, and its calms most restful ; it is full of life, even as the sea nourisheth creeping things innumerable, both small and great beasts ; it is full of power, even as the sea moveth in the fulness of its strength ; there is a certain peculiar light of its own within the Word, as if it were all sun and flame, even as at times the waters are a liquid light, and the waves shine as with ten thousand stars. The wisdom, goodness, power, and infinity of God are all to be seen in the ocean by those who have opened eyes. He who knows God can see His hand in the scales of every little fish. If he takes up a five-finger or a crab, he perceives a master hand in the fashioning of its smallest members. If you take a beautiful needle, however admirably polished, and put it under the microscope, you say to yourself, "A man made this," for it looks like a rough bar of iron, the microscope finds out its want of finish ; but if you take a frill of seaweed, or the eye of a shrimp, and put these under the glass, you exclaim at once, "No man ever made this, no man could have made it. It is perfection." I shall not go into further details ; but I am sure that he who is acquainted with the works of God sees at once that the sea is God's creature, and in its ever-changing sameness, in its awe-inspiring majesty, in its tremendous force, and unsearchable mystery, its waves and caverns, its calms and storms, it tells of a hand invisible, a mind unsearchable.

God made the sea : you can mark His wisdom there. Philosophers tell us there is just as much water in the sea as there ought to be, and no more. Perhaps, if there were twice as much sea as we now have, we should not be able to live ; and if there were any less, the world would become too dry for human habitation ; the land and water balance each other to an ounce and a drop ; there can be neither more nor less. Permanent and fixed are the relations and proportions of matter ; substances may change their combinations, but of the elements the same amount must abide till all things pass away. That the sea is salt, and therefore does not corrupt, that it is moved with tides, and therefore does not stagnate, that it evaporates, and therefore does not increase so as to drown the earth, are all instances of divine wisdom. If its waters were more or less salt than they are, many fishes would die, and the floating power of the ocean would change. There is a relation between the size of the ocean and the balancing of a dewdrop upon its blade of grass, a proportion between a hurricane and the dancing of a gnat in the summer's sun. The more we study the sea the more shall we say, "Thy way, O Lord, is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters."

And certainly no man can deny the power which thunders across the billows. What tremendous force is there displayed ! "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice ; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea." When one has seen the damage the sea has wrought upon our coasts, the way in which the hardest rock has been worn away ; when one has sadly watched a huge barque tossed to and fro like a plaything, and when one has heard how the hugest vessels are caught in a cyclone, and whirled away like feathers ; one bows upon his face before the Almighty Lord who rules the sea. And yet God's goodness is there as well. The sea is a great benefactor ! Where were the clouds, and where the rains, and where our harvests, if it were not for the ocean ? The sea feeds myriads with its fish, and enriches many more by its commerce. It was once thought to divide nations, but now it has become the highway by which they communicate, a silver belt by which all lands are bound to one another. England, above all nations, has reason to see the goodness of God in the sea. Perhaps we had not even remained a nation if the silver streak had not separated us from the continent. Most probably we had not been a free nation, or a Protestant nation, if the Lord had not bidden the waters encompass us.

> "O Britain, praise thy mighty God,
> And make His honours known abroad ;
> He bade the ocean round thee flow,
> Not bars of brass could guard thee so."

May God inspire British hearts with gratitude to Him for setting old England like a queen in the midst of the sea, where she laughs at the tyrant's power.

Every attribute of God shines in the sea, although the more spiritual and precious are but dimly seen, these being reserved to be manifested in Christ Jesus the Lord, before whose feet the sea crouched in reverence. Perhaps e'en those attributes will be discovered to be there in some degree when our eyes shall be strengthened to see the glory of the Lord in all His works. Till then we will listen to the sea, and think of it as an—

> "Impassioned orator with lips sublime,
> Whose waves are arguments which prove a God."

God made the sea. I delight to reflect upon this fact, for *it brings us so very near to God.* Yonder at our feet are the blue waves which He has created. You have certain treasures which you value greatly because they were made by a dear friend, and you say, "Whenever I look at them I seem to feel him near." Thus do God's works make us feel that He is not far from us. Mungo Park, in the deserts of Africa, had his heart cheered by taking up a little bit of moss, and reflecting that God made it, and that the Creator had been there, and was there, watching over the tiny green thing. Come, then, my friend, and stand by the sea, and say to yourself, "The sea is His, and He made it. Here is something that my

heavenly Father made. He has left His footprints on these waves; He is here still, and His power worketh ever." The palpitating heart of the sea, with its perpetual tide, tells of God's present life. Its alternate advance and retreat at His bidding prove His present majesty, for He says, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

I trust many of my seafaring friends have often felt near to God when alone upon the vasty deep. God is in Ratcliff Highway, but it is uncommonly hard to find Him. We could find fifty devils there in five minutes sooner than find a trace of God; for there is the den of the drunkard, and there is the foul haunt in which men are robbed and ruined, the house of the strange woman, of which Solomon says, "the dead are there, and her guests are in the depths of hell." Far out at sea the sailor is free from the danger of falling tiles and chimney-pots, when the wind is blowing, and he is free also from many a temptation which besets him on shore. Often, I have no doubt, when you have been alone, watching at night, pacing the deck to and fro, and looking up to the bright stars, you have thought, "God is very near me now." I remember, when going to Hamburg, I stood at night with the captain upon the quarter-deck, and suddenly a light seemed to rush down the mast, and light up the rigging and the whole ship in such a manner as I never saw before. For an instant the vessel seemed to be on fire, and then the light was gone. "What is that?" I said. "What is that?" said he, for neither of us knew; but we felt awe-struck. Seafaring men meet with them often—strange things that we "land lubbers" never dream about. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep." God seems to come very near to those who are on the waters. When the wind howls, and the sea booms, the noise would suffice to drown a thousand volleys of artillery. "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters." When men mount up to heaven, and go down again to the deeps, then is God present to them, and they cry unto Him in their trouble. The sea has often forced men to exclaim,—

> "Great God, how infinite art Thou!
> What worthless worms are we!"

The fact that God made the sea *should make us feel more confidence in venturing upon it.* We may trust ourselves upon the King's highway: we may go where Jesus went, and where the Lord reigneth: "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." As "all things work together for good to them that love God," there is nothing left to work for evil. The sea cannot destroy those whom God would preserve. Even if the sea in its tempestuous mood should take away our lives, what will it do but waft us to the gates of heaven? It is as well to go to glory by water as by land; perchance drowning is an easier death than expiring with broken bones or torturing pains. You who are about to emigrate to Australia or to America, and are feeling dreadfully troubled to-night at the thought of the terrible sea, should be of good courage. Your Master went to sea, and His disciples went with Him: they, too, were tossed with tempest, and yet their vessel and the other little ships which sailed on the billows of dark Galilee were safe. Our Master, who is Lord High Admiral of the seas, brought all the fleet into harbour safe and sound. He has not given up His rank, or lost His power, and He will save all who sail under His convoy. No tempest or tornado shall wreck a soul that is in His charge.

This ought to make us feel at rest as to those who lie buried beneath the waves. I have heard it said by one or two whom I have known, "I would not have minded sir, if they could have found the body." I suppose there is something natural about that regret, but I do not greatly sympathize with it. The sea is God's own, and blessed are they who lie in God's most sacred sleeping-place, where no spade of sexton shall ever disturb their bones. Where can any of us lie better than where "pearls lie deep"? What myriads are there already! When the trump of the resurrection sounds, the sea must give up her dead, and myriads will stand upon the waves, as on a sea of glass, to be judged; and full many of them will rise to their eternal thrones from the caverns of the mighty main. God has but to speak it, and though the bodies may have been devoured by fish, or dissolved into their separate atoms by the perpetual beating of the surf, yet when He speaks it, frames shall be refashioned, life shall come back at His call, and our dead men shall live, and in their flesh shall they see God, who, ere they died, had learned to say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Do not be distressed by the fear of dying at sea. You must die somewhere. Do you know the old story of the man who asked a captain if he was afraid to go to sea? "I am not," said the mariner, "why should I be?" "Look at the danger," said the landsman. "How did your father die?" "He died at sea." "How did your grandfather die?" "He was lost at sea." "And your great-grandfather?" "Yes," he replied, "I have heard that he, too, was drowned at sea." "Surely, then, you are afraid to go to sea?" "No," said the captain, "I am not. Where did *your* father die?" "He died in his bed." "And where did your grandfather die?" "He died in his bed." "And where did your great-grandfather die?" "So far as I know, he also died in his bed." "And yet you are not afraid to go to bed!" There is good, sound reason in such a view of the matter. We shall not die before our time. Our lives are in the Divine hands. You may well smile at my tale, and I hope you will keep a gleam of that pleasant look for the next time death stares you in the face, and then say to yourself, "Be still, my heart. If my time has come, I will commit my spirit into the hands of a faithful Creator, and feel that, if I sink, I shall drop into my Father's hand, for He holdeth the waters in the hollow of His hand." Thus much upon that first point, God made the sea.

II. Our second point is, GOD OWNS THE SEA: "The sea is His, and He made it"; *He owns it by right of creation.* It is not everything that a man makes that is his own. Many tradesmen are occupied in making divers articles which, when they have made them, belong to their masters; but that is because the materials are found for them. God made the sea out of nothing, there were no materials ready to His hand to make this world of, but His own omnipotence spake it into existence. He filled the sea from His own treasury, the liquid stores were His own. There is not in the sea at this moment a single wave that anybody made but God, and all the constituent elements of it were created by Him, and by Him only. Therefore He claims the sea from shore to

shore, and who shall question His title? Not only did He own it once, but He owns it now; He has never handed over the ocean to any people or nation. David said, "The sea is His," and it is God's still, and it always will be His sea.

But the sea is man's. God evidently meant us to go to sea, because, when He made man, almost the first thing He said was that He made Him to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and I do not see how we can have dominion over the fish of the sea if we never go to sea at all. There are the fish, thousands of miles from the shore, and if no mariner shall ever cross the deep, what dominion can we be said to have over "the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas?" He made man to be a fisherman as well as to be a farmer; He meant Him to plough the waves as well as to plough the shore; in fact, our present race all sprang from one whose huge vessel was the cradle of the new race. Man owns the sea, but still the sea is God's. Man is God's viceroy, but God is the true King. Man is tenant under God, and should pay the quit-rent of reverential gratitude and adoration, for the freehold of the sea remaineth with the Lord. There may be a viceroy in India or in Ireland, but India and Ireland are still the Queen's; and so man may have dominion over the fish of the sea, but it is a delegated sovereignty, the sea is still the Lord's.

Old ocean does not belong to Neptune, as the heathen used to say; Father Neptune is an idle dream. The idolaters parcelled out the various kingdoms among their deities: one should rule the heavens, another the clouds, another the earth, and another the sea; but we know that there is one God alone. The sea is Jehovah's, and not Neptune's.

Though we sometimes sing, "Rule Britannia! Britannia rules the waves," the words are not true; Jehovah rules the waves, and not Britannia. There is a sense in which the patriotic song expresses a great truth, and I have not a word to say against it; but we all know that we may be on board Britannia's biggest ship of war, but the Union Jack cannot save us in the time of tempest. Jehovah must then interpose, and bid the billows sleep. "The sea is His, and He made it."

I sometimes feel very glad when I look at the sea, and think that it belongs to the great and generous God, and not to greedy man. Here upon land every foot of earth is enclosed by somebody, and jealously guarded from trespass. The village had a breezy common, upon which a poor man might at least keep a goose; but the great folks could never rest till every inch was put within hedges, and made their own. You can scarcely walk anywhere without being met by "*Trespassers, Beware.*" Mountains and hills, which everybody ought to be allowed to climb without leave, are fenced in and kept from all intruders. Men fight for years over a yard of ground. This is my lord's, and this is my lady's, and this is copyhold of the manor. "The heaven, even the heaven of heavens, is the Lord's, but the earth hath He given to the children of men," and they scramble for it, and divide it among themselves. No such greed can appropriate the sea. The free sea cannot be parcelled out, nor hedged, nor ditched, nor dyked, nor walled. It has no lords of the manor, but remains free and unappropriated for ever. "The sea is His, and He made it." According to law, a few miles from the shore the sea belongs to the country which borders on it; but once reach the main ocean, and nationalities are forgotten. The sea is neither English nor French, Dutch nor American. No barque is a trespasser there. No one ever thought of impounding stray whales for going out of their owner's fields. The pastures of the deep are for all fish; they may feed where they will, from shore to shore.

"The sea is His," and *this begets in you a joyous sense of liberty*, as though for once you were beyond bounds, and, like a sea-bird, feared no cage or fowler's snare. Oh, for a bound from billow to billow of the unpolluted main, where sail of man has never been seen, or voice of blasphemy ever heard! Who can hinder our liberated spirit as it dances on the wave, or dives beneath it? May we always wear that free spirit about us, even in these huddled homes and narrow streets! Let us not be grasping, mean, narrow; let us not hedge in all things unto ourselves, but desire that others may share in our blessings. May we have largeness of heart as the sand which is on the seashore, and greatness of love comparable to the immeasurable sea!

"The sea is His," then: *this sentence puts all other claimants out of court.* The sea is the Lord's, and therefore He ought to be reverenced on it. Hush! hush! What are you at, man? Swearing at God on His own sea! Stop till you get on land, and when you reach the shore, stop till you can find a place where God is not near you, for to swear at Him to His face is madness. Will you insult God on His own sea? No, surely. If the sea is His, you will mind what you are at. When a man is out in the street, when he wanders about as he pleases, he may often take many liberties; but if he is invited to a friend's house, he does not like to be too boisterous and noisy, but minds his manners. If any of us were invited to dine with the Queen, I am sure we should feel quite nervous, and ask of our friends, "Jack, how do you behave when you go into a palace? What is the way of doing it?" You would all be anxious to be proper and well-behaved. On the sea, it seems to me that you should be particularly careful of what you say and do, for you are on God's premises. Inasmuch as He can hear you think, mind what you think about. On the sea you are inside God's house; be holy, then, "for holiness becometh His house for ever." There is the throne of the great King, and around it is a pavement of crystal,—I mean the glassy sea,—and you sailors should think of yourselves as God's courtiers, permitted to come very near Him, and to behold more of His glory than any other men. Oh, that you may be led to think of your position in this light!

I wish you would think highly of your honourable calling. When a man thinks that his calling necessitates his being wicked, he is sure to be wicked; but when he judges that he is under obligation to be holy, peradventure he will desire to be so, and God's grace will help him to be so. Ho, you who do business on God's own sea, fly away from His royal domain if you resolve to rebel against Him. Do not dare to sin to His face. But where shall you go? If you take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, you are still within His courts.

There is yet another view of the matter; the sea is the Lord's, and therefore *I may confess my sin to Him when I am out on the ocean*, and He will hear me, for He is there; I may weep the tear of penitence, and He will see me, for God is there. Out at sea I may cry, "My Father," and He will hear His child. Brother, you may find Jesus at sea, for He was at home on the wave, and a companion of seafaring men.

The lake of Galilee was familiar with His voice, and saw His answer to the prayer, "Lord, save, or I perish." The sea around you waits to hear you pray, and to see God's wonders on the deep.

Something calls for a repetition of that "hush" which I gave just now, in the thought that "the sea is His," for *God reveals Himself through the sea*, therefore gaze with awe. I have not the slightest doubt that many a man has learned much of God on the ocean, although as yet he knows not the Redeemer and His salvation. I wish every sailor would daily read the Bible, which is our chart to heaven; but many, who have neglected that blessed Book, have found lessons of warning, aye, and lessons of hope, in the rolling wave. O hear the voice of God in the storm! Be warned as you escape from the jaws of death! Have hope as you cling to the rock! The sea is God's; take care that, when you fly over its hallowed surface, you read Jehovah's Book, bow before His throne, trust in His Son, and offer to Him continual thanksgiving.

It seems to me that, as the sea is God's, *then sailors should be His too*, or else they are trespassers. A man feeds his own sheep in his own pastures, and would not God have His own mariners on His own sea? Moreover, if God owns the sea because He made it, He owns *you*, because He made you too. You are His creature, and by all the rights of creatorship you belong to Him. He claims you; will you dispute the claim? I would not like to think of you as a blot upon the fair face of ocean. God is looking over all the waters, and seeing the white sails and the smoking funnels that even now are passing from shore to shore, and He is saying, "The sea is all Mine, but those men who breast the storm are not Mine. I preserve them, but they never think of Me. I have sent salvation to them, but they will not hear it. The fish and the birds know their seasons, but man rebels against Me." I cannot bear to think that it should be so. I long for the day when every ship upon the sea shall be an ark, and every sailor a Noah.

What are some of you sailors at? Why, there are many of you whom I would trust with anything: I would not count my gold, but trust you with my purse, I am so sure that you would bring it back safely. You hate dishonesty, and would not tell a lie. You speak out bravely, and fear no man, and yet some of you rob God. You may pay your debts to everybody most freely, but not to your Maker. You owe Him most, and yet think of Him least. Is not this wrong? See that child! They say he is very good to the servants and to strangers, but he always puts on a scowl when he sees his father, for he cannot bear him. Would you like to be the father of such a child? Yet you are like him. You are capital fellows on board a ship, capital men on shore too when you get among your families, and yet toward God you act shamefully. May the Spirit of God lead you to feel that you are wrong, and when you feel it, may you have grace to tack about, and steer for another point!

A little while ago, a vessel picked up a man far out at sea in an open boat; he was unconscious; the oars were lying by his side, and he had evidently drifted from off the beach, carried by a current right away from help. I wonder whether any man here is drifting right away; out of sight of land, drifting on and on! Ah, Jack, when you were a boy, you went with your mother to the little chapel in the village. Do you recollect that you were in the Sunday-school? You loved to worship with your mother, who is now in heaven; but you went away from home, and you went away from God too! You have been pretty nearly round the world; do you remember the places where you have landed only to plunge into sin? O, you forget, do you? I must tell you then, that God does not forget, and your own conscience does not forget, for the stain is on your soul to-day. You have drifted, drifted, drifted. How long is it since you read a chapter of the Bible? How long since you bowed your knee in prayer? You have drifted very far out. I wish this full-rigged ship of mine, which has just come within sight of you, might pick you up. At any rate, I hail you from this quarter-deck and if you are not quite unconscious, I hope you will hear the call. Poor shipmate, we would like to get you up the ship's side! Some of my crew will be after you in the boats directly, for there are true hearts here that love to rescue the perishing. If one of them comes alongside, just know that he is a friend, and that he comes in the name of Jesus, "mighty to save." May the Lord Jesus come Himself, and put out His hand to some simking Peter, and save him from a watery grave! Amen.

I wonder where the training ship *Atalanta* now is! Where are the other vessels which have been missed so long? We have reason to fear that they are lost! Fine vessels, and yet lost! Hundreds on board, and all lost! We cannot bear to think of it. If they are lost, it will be of no use to go after them; the swiftest vessel cannot overtake them, and the sharpest look-out will never see them. They are beyond hope; but what a mercy it is that *you* are not! If it had not been for the mighty hand of God last voyage, you would not only have been lost at sea, my friend, but lost for ever. To be lost at sea, if the soul is safe, is but a small calamity; but to lose the soul is to lose all. It were good for that man that he had never been born. Blessed be God, you are not in hell yet! You are not shut out from mercy yet; Jesus Christ still flies the mercy-signal, and His servant still cries to you, "Come, come, come, to Jesus. Come and welcome, come and put your trust in the Saviour." May His gracious Spirit lead you to do so! Recollect wherever you are, on whatever sea you may sail, the sea is His. His grace reaches to the uttermost. The shipwrecked soul is still within the reach of mercy; if God do but lead it to cry to Him out of the lowest depths, He will hear the voice of supplication.

III. I now invite you to the third and concluding point, "O COME, LET US WORSHIP AND BOW DOWN." You of the land, and you of the sea, let us together worship the Lord our God. It is no new work for some of us, for our life is spent in worship; but oh, if it be a new thing with any man here, I would gently take him by the hand, and say, "Come, friend, let us worship and bow down, let us do it together. You are a sinner, so am I; you have no merits, and I have none; if ever you are saved, it will be by grace alone, and so it will be in my case. Jesus must be your only hope, and He is mine. 'O come, let us worship.'"

Have you never worshipped God? Then, sit still in the pew, and do it. Say, "My God, Thou hast made me, teach me how to worship Thee." Shall I stop a minute while you ask pardon for Jesus' sake? (Pause.)

* * * * *

This is the last thing I have to say. I recollect a man, an old sailor, who had been a great blasphemer; he was a regular old salt; but there was no salt of

grace in him, for he hated religion. He heard the gospel, the Lord brought him to his knees, broke his heart, gave him deep conviction of sin, and afterwards led him to look to Christ, and trust Him, and find salvation. When this weather-beaten mariner came forward to join the church, he said, "I am come to get on the register, for I have got a new Owner; I used to carry the black flag at the masthead, and there was not a timber in me but what belonged to the devil. I carried many a cargo and sailed over many a sea for him; but now I belong to Jesus from stem to stern, and I want to run up the blood-red flag of Christ, who has bought me for His own. I want you to register me under my new Owner, and let me sail with those who belong to Him." We were glad enough to register him in the church-book. The first point is to get the Owner,—the Lord Jesus—and then to own Him before all the world.

You Christian sailors, wherever you go, show your flag! A dear man of God, a captain, was baptized here last Thursday night, and he told me that twenty or more of his crew were converted on the last voyage out. He said, "We cannot make Christians of them, but we give them an opportunity every day of hearing the gospel, and, blessed be God, many have found the Saviour." Captains, mind you look to your crews, and don't have their blood on your skirts through your neglect. If you are not captains, if you have any influence at all, carry the gospel wherever you go. I believe if you are nothing but cabin boys, you can speak a word for Jesus Christ, if you have Jesus Christ in your hearts; and then others will say, "Why, that boy shames us, for he loves the Saviour." Though they may scoff at you, and pretend to despise you, it will make a hole in their consciences, depend upon it. If you drop a lighted match down anybody's neck, he may say it is a small bit of timber, and laugh at it, but he will know it is there before long. If you get on fire with the love of God, if you are placed in the company of others, you may be very small and despised, but they will soon discover the heavenly flame. Only you must mind that you are really alight, and that the true fire is in your spirit; for an empty profession will only make religion a mockery. God bless you and bless the Society! (A voice: "Amen.") You said, "Amen." Well, there is to be a collection, and so I hope you will carry out your *Amen* in a practical way, and bless the Society by contributing to it as you are able.

SOWN LIGHT

"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."—Psalm xcvii. 11.

THIS appears to be the doctrine of the entire psalm, and the verse which follows, "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous," is intended to be the practical inference drawn from the whole of it. God would have His people believe that better times are in store for them, and, in the faith of the coming good, He would have them even now rejoice and be exceeding glad. If you will read the psalm you will notice that every verse may give us some strengthening of our faith as to the future blessedness of those that fear the Lord. The first verse declares that "the Lord reigneth." Shall so righteous a One sit upon the throne, and shall not those that fear Him have their reward? If He be King, will He suffer His loyal subjects to endure damage? Will He not ultimately come to their rescue? The second verse tells us that "clouds and darkness are round about Him," and this explains why for the present the upright in heart may seem to be forgotten. God's dispensations are not always clear. It is His glory to conceal a thing. He wraps Himself about in mystery, for the brightness of His glory is dark with excessive light. If His way is unsearchable, and His design deep beyond human understanding, we need not be surprised if we find it so in the dispensations of His providence towards His people. But still, as the second verse tells us, "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne"; we may be certain, therefore, that He will not be unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love, and that in dealing out judgment, both to His saints and to the ungodly, He will neither forget to reward the first nor to condemn the second. The third verse, which describes the glory of the divine power as displayed in deeds of vengeance, when the enemies of God are burnt up by fire, goes to prove that He will with equal certainty reward His people, for He who is stern to punish, surely will not be unrighteous to forget the gracious service of His saints. If He has promised, He will be as certain to keep His promise as He has been to fulfil His threatening. He will not be true on the black side towards the undeserving, and then be false on the bright side towards those who are made meritorious through the righteousness of His dear Son. He who keeps the thunder, and by-and-by will launch it from His hand, also reserveth mercy for His chosen, and favour for His people. Indeed, the sixth verse declares that the very constitution of the universe proves this—that every star twinkling in its sphere proclaims the righteousness and wisdom of God, and therefore, since for Him to be righteous is for His people ultimately to be blessed, we conclude that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

With no other preface than this, I shall take you at once to this very singular text, dwelling first, upon the remarkable metaphor here used—*sown light*; and then, enlarging upon that metaphor, taking you to *see the sowing*; and thirdly, to *survey and measure the field*; and fourthly, to take an *outlook upon the harvest in the future*.

I. First, then, the metaphor is a rather singular one, and yet full of poetry—LIGHT IS SOWN. We can very soon catch the idea if we follow Milton in his speaking of the morning.

> "Now morn, her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
> Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearl."

The sun, like a sower, scatters broadcast his beams

of light upon the once dark earth. Look up at night upon the sky bespangled with stars, and it seemeth as though God scattered them like gold-dust upon the floor of heaven in picturesque irregularity, thereby sowing light. Of if you want a fact which comes nearer to the sowing of light literally than anything which our poets have written, think of our vast coal-beds which are literally so much sown light. The sun shone upon primeval forests, and the monstrous ferns grew and expanded under the quickening influence. They fell, as fall the leaves of chestnut and of oak in these autumns of our latter days, and there they lie stored deep down in the great cellars of nature for man's use; so much sown light, I say, which springs up beneath the hand of man in harvests of flame, which flood our streets with light, and cheer our hearths with heat. Sown light, then, is neither unpoetical nor yet altogether unliteral. There is such a thing as a matter-of-fact, and we may use the expression rightly enough, without grotesqueness of metaphor. Understand then that happiness, joy, gladness, symbolised by light, have been sown by God in fields that will surely yield their harvest for all those whom by His grace He has made upright in heart. *Sown* light signifies, first, that *light has been diffused.* That which is sown is scattered. Before sowing, it was in the bag, or stored up in the granary, but the sowing scatters it along the furrows. There was happiness always in the mind of God. He is unspeakably blessed in Himself. We cannot dissociate the idea of Godhead from that of infinite delight. But all this happiness was nothing to us; we could not reach it; God might have been infinitely blessed, but we might have been shut up in hell, gnawing our iron bonds in the desperation of unutterable agony. But in due time, according to the eternal purpose, God sowed happiness for His people, took it, as it were, out of Himself, and cast it broadcast in the fields of His eternal purposes, and in the decrees of His divine providence, that there might be a harvest, not for Himself, for He was happy enough, but for all those whom He gave to Christ, who are made righteous in His righteousness, and upright through His Spirit. Thank God, you who love Jesus and are resting upon His atonement, that God's happiness is not kept to Himself, but is diffused for you and the whole company of His elect; and that the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore are not kept within their secret springs, but made to flow like a river; that you with all the blood-bought may drink thereof to the full.

Seed that is sown is not in hand. After the husbandman has scattered his wheat he cannot say, "Here it is." It is out of sight; gone from him. You may walk over the fields for the next few weeks and see no trace of it, and fools might say, "Ah! now so much wheat is gone from him; he is so much the poorer; he has it not." So the gladness which belongs to the righteous is not to be regarded as a thing of the present. Their great store of pleasure is yet to come; it is light that is sown, not light that now gleams upon their eyes; it is a gladness that has been buried beneath the clods for a special purpose, not a gladness which is now spread upon the table as bread that has been baked in the oven. The believer's greatest happiness is not like bread ready for food, it is seed buried by the sower. Brethren, let us remember that this world is not our rest.

> "We look for a city that hands have not piled,
> We seek for a country by sin undefiled."

To look for happiness here were to seek for the living among the dead. Christ is not here, for He hath risen; and our joy is not here, for our joy has risen with Him. Seed sown then is not within sight; and the great bulk of the Christian's happiness is not a thing of present enjoyment, not what he can see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and touch with the hands; it is a matter of faith; it is not to be feasted on to-day, but for a purpose it is withheld until patience has had her perfect work, and seen her joy blossom and bud, and open and ripen under the smile of the Lord her God.

As seed sown is not visible, so *it is not expected that it shall be seen or enjoyed to-morrow.* "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth." Only little children put their seeds into the ground and then turn up the mould to discover whether the seeds are growing on the morrow. It was said of the northern nations, near the pole, and said truthfully, that they sowed their barley in the morning and reaped it at night, because the sun goes down for four months at a time; but in sober truth we must not expect to have the rewards of grace given to us immediately we believe. This is the time for running, not for tarrying to gaze upon the prize. This is the hour for the battle, not yet may we rest on our laurels. There must be a trial of our patience and our faith. God delights that His servants should be put through many exercises and ordeals, in order that the praise of the glory of His grace may be manifest in them and through them, to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Wait, then, Christian; be content to wait. The Bridegroom cometh quickly; rest assured of that; and if you think He lingereth, ask for greater patience, that you may patiently work on, continuing steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Expect not your full reward of joy to-morrow; your lot is on the other side of Jordan; the bells of your wedding day shall ring out in another world, and your coronation will be received in the ivory palaces, upon which the sun hath never shone. You are espoused to a Husband who is not here; you look for a kingdom far above these changeful skies. Have patience, then, till the great hour shall come, and the King shall descend to take His own.

But while seed sown is not in sight, and is not expected to be seen to-morrow, yet *it is not lost.* No one but a person without sense would say that the farmer has lost so much of his capital when he has cast it in the form of seed-corn into the furrows. Nay, sir, he reckons that he has gained when he has sown, for the seed in the granary was worth so much, but that in the furrow is worth so much more on account of the labour expended in the sowing. The husbandman counts it gain to have sown his corn. He has transferred his treasure from one bank into another. He does not reckon that any of it has been lost. So with the happiness of a Christian. We may to-day seem less happy than the gay worldling who flaunts himself in the sunlight of human approbation, but it is not a loss to renounce such inferior joys. The postponement of our joys, our waiting, our letting joy lay by at interest, our tarrying for a moment that our position may be the richer, when we come into our estate, is no loss. Joy self-denied is not lost, Lost, my brethren? Lost, the happiness of a single hour in which we have wept for sin! Lost, the happiness of a single moment in which we have suffered affliction for Christ's sake, through

persecution and slander! Nay, verily, it is put to our account, and the record of it remains in the eternal archives, against the day when the Judge of all the earth shall measure out the portions of His people.

Corn sown is not lost, but *is actually in possession still.* If a farmer has to sell his field, he would of course ask much more for that in which the seed was sown than for one which was remaining fallow, because he counts that seed sown is still his own property. He cannot see it, but he knows it is there among those crumbling clods. He reckons that sown wheat, and puts it down in every inventory of his property. That seed which is under the soil is as certainly his as that which remains in the stack, or bound up in sacks; and so you may reckon the joys of the hereafter as your own, and you ought so to reckon them; they are the best part of your estate; they are yours, though you do not enjoy them. Yours to-day the seraph's wing and the angel's harp, yours to-day the cherubic song and the bliss of the immortals, the presence of the Lord, and the vision of His face. Come, count upon the resurrection, it is yours; upon the glory that follows it, it is yours; upon the millennium with all its splendour, it is yours; upon eternity with its unutterable joys, all these things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. You cannot see the heavenly light; you expect not to see it as yet; but, so far from being lost, it is yours this very day, and you only need by faith to write it down upon the tablets of hope, and to-day rejoice that you are rich in infinite possessions.

Sown seed *is in the custody of God.* Jehovah is the farmer's banker. Who can take care of those bags of wheat which have been thrown out from the hand during the last few weeks? Who, indeed, but the covenant God, who hath said, "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, shall not cease"? There may come the rotting under the clods, the worm, the bird, the mildew, the blast; there may come the long drought or the too plenteous moisture, but the farmer has scarcely a hand in the future destiny of his wheat and barley; the crop remains with God. You merchants may fancy you can do without the Lord, but the man who has to till the soil is obliged to feel, if he hath any sensibility, his entire dependence upon the God of the rain-cloud and the Lord of the sun. So, beloved, here is our comfort. The light that is sown for the righteous is in the custody of God. Our future happiness, our eternal bliss, are kept by the great guardian of Israel, who doth neither slumber nor sleep. Be not afraid, therefore, that you shall lose your heaven, for Christ keeps it for you. He has gone to take possession of it in your name, as your representative, and He will not suffer any to rob you of your entailed heritage. He will come a second time to take you to Himself to enjoy the portion which He has prepared for you. Oh, blessed fact, that the joys of the hereafter are in such keeping! Brethren, we have not to fight to maintain our rights in the eternal land; we have not to dispute in courts of law in order to maintain our claim to the everlasting inheritance. He is at the Father's side, the Man of love, the Crucified, and He takes care that all shall be safe and well for the people of His eternal choice. Light is sown for the righteous; that is to say, it is put into the custody of heaven, where it will be infallibly safe.

A thing that is sown is not only put into God's custody, but it is put *there with a purpose, that it may come back to us greatly multiplied.* The believer gives up in this life his self-seeking; he suffers some degree of self-denial; he yields up his own boastings to trust in Christ's righteousness; and he makes a good bargain thereby. What if he should be made poor by being honest, or if he should have to suffer through following Christ, yet the return, the reward, the recompense—these are so exceeding abundant, that the present light affliction is not worthy to be compared therewith. We suffer for a moment that we may reign for ever. We stoop for a second that we may be lifted up world without end. We shall get back the seed-corn multiplied ten thousand times ten thousand, and we shall bless and magnify for ever and ever the glorious Sower who sowed such a harvest for us. The drift, the whole drift, and meaning of this sown light is just this—that the righteous have their best things yet to come. God has begun very graciously with some of us, indeed, so well, that our loudest music falls flat compared with the praise which He deserves. And you are afraid, sometimes, that God will be worse in the future than He has been in the past! Oh think not so hardly of Him! You know what kind of feast the great Master makes. He does not bring forth His best wine first and then afterwards bring forth the worst. Oh, no! but He puts upon His table the worst, if so I may say, first, good as that is, and then we may say of Him afterwards, "Thou hast kept the best wine until now." The summers of our God do not begin with fervent heat and end with cold. God is not one who flatters us at the first to deal sternly with us at the last; but we shall go from strength to strength, from good to something better, and until life's happiness culminates in heaven's, we shall see more and more of the loving-kindness of the Lord. Our best is yet to come, and the mercy that is to come will be always coming, until life's end. There is a story told of Rowland Hill, which I have no doubt is true, because it is so characteristic of the man's eccentricity and generosity. Some one or other had given him a hundred pounds to send to an extremely poor minister, but, thinking it was too much to send him all at once, he sent him five pounds in a letter with simply these words inside the envelope, "More to follow." In a few days' time, the good man had another letter by the post, and letters by the post were rarities in those days; when he opened it there was five pounds again, with just these words, "And more to follow." A day or two after there came another, and still the same words, "And more to follow." And so it continued twenty times, the good man being more and more astounded at these letters coming thus by post with always the sentence, "And more to follow." Now, every blessing that comes from God is sent in just such an envelope, with the self-same message, "And more to follow." "I forgive you your sins, but there's more to follow." "I justify you in the righteousness of Christ, but there's more to follow." "I adopt you into my family, but there's more to follow." "I educate you for heaven, but there's more to follow." "I have helped you even to old age, but there's still more to follow." "I will bring you to the brink of Jordan, and bid you sit down and sing on its black banks, on the banks of the black stream, but there's more to follow. In the midst of that river, as you are passing into the world of spirits, My mercy shall

still continue with you, and when you land in the world to come there shall still be more to follow." Light is still sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.

II. Secondly, having opened the metaphor of sown light, let us now speak of the SOWING itself.

When were the happiness and security of the righteous sown for them? Answer; there are three great Sowers, the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, and all these have sown light for the chosen people. First, *the Father*. Long ages past, or ever the world was, it was in the Eternal mind to ordain unto Himself a people who should show forth His praise. In His august mind it was determined that although His loved ones should fall in Adam, they should be raised in Christ, should be chosen over and above all their fellows, and in spite of their sins should be loved with an everlasting love, should be kept in time, should be glorified in eternity. Now all those great decrees of God, of which He has revealed some inklings in His Word, were so much sowing of light for the righteous, so much provision of gladness in the future for the upright in heart. Yea, I venture to say that there was not a decree of God which in some way or other did not promote the happiness of His people, not a single covenant provision, not a single purpose of eternal wisdom but was intended and adapted to bring joy and peace to them. As all the rivers run into the sea, so all the purposes of God wrought together for this great central purpose of His that He might have an elect people in whom His name should be glorified. Think now for a moment, beloved, of the thoughts of God to you. Long, I say, before the sun began to shine, what thoughts of love were in the bosom of the Father! Trace up the mercies of the present to those grand projects of the past, and praise and magnify the name of God that such unworthy sinners as we are should be the objects of such infinite conceptions. When the covenant at length was formed between the Father, the Son, and the blessed Spirit, when the decree began to take shape and to be revealed, when in the volume of the book covenant mercies were written down for us, all the tenure of that covenant, every line, and jot and tittle, was so much sowing of light for the righteous; for throughout the whole of that mysterious transaction in the cabinet chamber of eternity, when the Father pledged the Son, and the Son pledged the Father, and they entered into covenant engagements one with the other in their mysterious wisdom, every part of those stipulations, every grain of those engagements was made for a sowing of light for the righteous. And so, beloved, when time had come, when man had fallen, the first promise that was ever spoken sowed light for the righteous. When Jesus Christ was given of the Father, His unspeakable gift, indeed it was a sowing time of light for the saints, for in Him was light, and the light was the life of men. When the Father begets again unto a lively hope His people by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, when He adopts them into His family and calls them His sons and daughters, when He receives the wanderers into His bosom, and feasts them at the table of His love, then, in all that, light is being sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Aye, and in the steering of the courses of the stars, in the ruling of the winds and tempests, in the government of nations, even in their crash, and in their fall, in the changes of events, and in all that cometh from the right hand of the eternal God, light is always being sown by the great Father for the righteous whom He loveth.

A second great Sower was *God the Son*. He sowed happiness for His people when He joined the Father in covenant and promised to be the substitute for His saints. But the actual sowing took place when He came on earth and sowed Himself in death's dark sepulchre for us. Well did He Himself say, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." He dropped Himself like a priceless seed-corn into the tomb, and what fruit He has brought forth let heaven and all the bloodwashed company declare. The flower that springs from His root is immortality and life. Jesus Christ has brought all manner of heavenly things unto His saints, and made them rich to all the intents of bliss, by the sowing of Himself as the life of His people. Nor must you think that He served us alone, and promoted our happiness only by His stripes and wounds, and bloody sweat and death; no, beloved, when He rose from the dead, the fact of His resurrection was a preparing and storing up of future blessedness for His redeemed. When He ascended up on high, leading our captivity captive, did He not then scatter gladness for us? And when He received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, did He not accomplish a boundless sowing of light for the elect people! At this moment, standing as He does the High Priest of our profession, pleading before the Majesty of heaven, what are those pleadings but a sowing of happiness for us, a laying up of bliss which we possess to-day in measure, and shall enjoy hereafter without measure in His presence before the throne? Beloved, let me remind you that in the government which Christ exercises as Mediator, even as Joseph governed Egypt for the sake of Israel, so doth the Lord Jesus govern the world for the sake of His people. In everything that He doeth He hath a design towards His elect ones. He may pause and wait with much long-suffering, bearing long with the ungodly, but in that delaying there is a sowing of light for the elect; every hour of delay shall have its recompense. And when He cometh, when the clouds of heaven shall make Him a chariot, and the doors of eternity shall be opened that He may go forth in all the pomp of His glory to judge the earth, then in that day light shall still be sown, and for ever and ever while Jesus Christ liveth, the friend and patron of His chosen, He shall for ever be preparing fresh joy for them that love Him, such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Once more, *the Holy Spirit* is a third great Sower, sowing in another sense, sowing in a sense that comes nearer home to our experience. Light is sown for the righteous by the Holy Spirit. In the hour when He brought the law home with its terrors, and laid us, broken and mangled at the feet of Moses, He was sowing light for us. Our humbling was the preface to our exultation; and we have already proved it so. In that moment when we were subdued, humbled, made to loathe our own righteousness, trampled into the very mire under a sense of weakness and death, He was sowing light for us. We did not know it: we thought that our destruction was near at hand, but oh! those precious drops of penitent tears, those blessed heartaches, what if I had said

those priceless broken bones!—out of them has come through Jesus Christ our present joy and peace. It needed that we should be weaned from self; it was necessary that we should make the terrible discovery of our soul's depravity, and as we passed through all that darkness and gloom of heart, the Holy Ghost was sowing for us our future perfection and glory at the right hand of Christ. To-day that Blessed Spirit continues His sowing in us. Every gracious thought; every stroke from the whip of affliction when sanctified; every down-casting of our proud looks; every discovery of our utter insignificance, worthlessness, and death; everything in us that harrows us, cuts us to the quick and wounds us, but yet brings us to the Good Physician that He may exercise His healing art; all these are sowing for us a blessed harvest of light for which we must wait a little while. Be thankful, brethren, for painful inward experiences; when they are most severe they they are often most beneficial. Be grateful to God that thus by His Spirit He is making you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, and in one word is sowing gladness for the upright in heart. Thus I have as well as I could shown you the Sowers.

III. Now I shall occupy a few minutes by inviting you TO GO TO THE FIELD.

God has sown happiness for His saints; but you must recollect it is only sown. You are not to expect to see it grown up while you live this side the moon. Now where are the fields that we may well say are sown by God's grace with happiness for us? Here is one field—*the field of His Word.* Ah! you may almost see the happiness here. We say the pearl is hidden in this field, but really it gleams upon the very surface. Every promise of God has a secret meaning beyond what we as yet have learnt, and that hidden sense is full of happiness for the children of God. Every page here is intended to be for their comfort, for their lasting good, either in the form of instruction, rebuke, or edification. The whole book as we pass from field to field, and, as it were, climb over one stile and another, lies before us as so many broad and fertile acres, all sown with secret light for believers. So it is with *providence.* Every event which can occur is sown with light for the faithful. It does not so appear; far rather the fields just now are very unpleasant to look upon; the water stands deep in those broad furrows; you cannot imagine there will ever be a harvest in a land so flooded with trouble, but wait awhile. Providence may look very dark to-day, but it is full of light—latent light—light which must flash forth as the noonday for brightness. All circumstances are teeming with benefit to you if you be in Christ. Ships with black hulls are bringing you bright gold. Ravens shall bring you meat, and even devils shall be slaves to your service. There is not a dying child or an ailing wife, there is not a dishonoured bill, there is not a wrecked vessel, there is not a burnt house, there is not a single diseased bullock but what you shall see at the last, and perhaps before then, to have been full of real blessedness for you. There is not only mercy in God's dealings with His people in the gross, but in the detail. All the providence of God, far reaching as it is, and extending from our cradle to our tomb, is full of the divine intent that His children shall be blessed, and blessed they shall be. You have sometimes read, I daresay, with wonder, that instance of Balaam trying to curse the people of God. He offered his seven bullocks and his seven rams, and went first to one hill and then to another, to look at them from different quarters, that he might be able to say a word against them, but every time that mouth of his was compelled to utter a blessing. And it is so with the great enemy of our souls. Sometimes we are tried with poverty, then he tries to curse us with envy; then we are tried with wealth, and he would curse us with pride; but from whatever quarter of the compass he may endeavour to bring an imprecation upon God's people, the only result shall be their greater blessing, for "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Beloved, the field of the Word and the field of providence are both sown with light. There is one little field called "God's Acre," which to some here present appears to be sown with much darkness, but is really sown with light—that sleeping place, the cemetery, where your loved ones lie beneath the sod. Yes, but they shall rise again, and so light is sown for you, even in the mouldering bones of your beloved children and friends. You would not have it otherwise, would you? Would you lose that seed? Imagine for a moment that it should never come again up from the sepulchre? Would not that grieve you beyond measure! It is your comfort to feel that these dry bones shall live, and all the band of those you loved so dearly who have gone from you for awhile, are not lost, but gone before. "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy." And what a happy meeting, what joyous greetings, what blessed reunions, when they meet to part no more! In that, "God's Acre," then, in the many burials we have attended, light is sown for the righteous.

Beloved, light is sown for the righteous, *even upon earth.* I mean there is a glory promised to the Church of God even upon this earthly globe. Time shall speed its flight, and the day shall come of the Master's ultimate triumph. The millennial age is certainly foretold, and faithfully covenanted by the promise of God; then the martyr's blood shall be rewarded, then the ashes of the saints shall prove to have been good seed-corn scattered to the winds, but vital in every atom. The day is coming when the monarchs of the earth shall yield their thrones to Jesus, and the gods that now do reign over mankind shall be cast away as ignoble things to the moles and to the bats. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the glory of their Father. What will be the bliss of a faithful servant of God at his Master's coming! It is not mine to give you fancy pictures, but to remind you of those words of the Master, that if we have been faithful in few things, He will make us ruler over many things. We shall be on earth kings and priests unto our God, and shall reign with Him. In the very land of persecution and rebuke, and of slander, and of scorn, the righteous shall put on their crowns, and shall walk in white with their Lord, for they are worthy. Light is sown for the righteous.

But I must ask you now to look beyond your cemeteries, and to look beyond this poor narrow world. What is this earth but a mere speck? Look into *eternity.* Can your minds conceive it? Eternity! Duration without boundary! The whole of that

boundless region is sown with light for you. Think of a prairie in America, a sea of grass; think of it all ploughed and tilled, and sown with wheat, and all yours! How rich would you be! But what are the prairies compared with the plains of heaven? And what the finest corn compared with heaven's light? All far away through all the ages of ages, when this world has been consumed with fervent heat, when sun and moon have passed away, like lamps blown out because the night is over, there shall still be an up-springing of never-ending blessedness for you. Eternity is sown with light for you. The Godhead shall be yours with all its infinity ministering to your delights. The Lord Himself shall be your portion; the God of Israel shall be your endless heritage. Brethren, what more can I say? We cannot possibly measure the great fields that are sown for us; so let us thank God and take courage, and go on our way believing that everywhere we have fields already sown, and we must wait awhile and we shall reap the harvest.

IV. The last head is the FUTURE, but it shall occupy only a second or two, as I must close with a practical application.

The *future*. That is always in the farmer's eye when the teams go out to plough, and when the sower's baskets are filled with corn; he thinks of next July or August, and the "Harvest Home," and the going to market with the yellow grain. So ought we always to have our eye upon the future, having respect unto the recompense of the reward. To-day is all sowing; but we do not know how soon the reaping will begin. "As the Lord liveth," said one, "there is but a step between thee and death." And it may be only a step to any of us, for the Lord may descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God, and may at once begin to reap. But what a reaping! O my soul, what an eternal satisfaction to thee to be for ever with the Lord! One glimpse of His dear face on earth has ravished thee, but what must it be for ever without a veil between to gaze into that beloved countenance, and to feel His love shed abroad in thy heart, and thy heart plunged as into a sea of that love ineffable! Beloved, it is but a mere film of time that divides us from our expected portion. Those of us who are still young and in hale health should remember, and remember with great satisfaction, that if we are spared for forty years, yet they are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night; while you who are getting grey and have reached your threescore years and ten, may be glad that with you it can be but a few more revolving moons, the passing away a few more Sabbath-days, and you shall be for ever with the Lord. Come, come, murmur not, if the inn be not so comfortable as flesh desireth, you are not to tarry long in it, you are on your journey home, and the cry is "Up and away." What if the way be rough, your face is turned Zionward. The road cannot be long, so smooth it with hope and cheer it with song. You are not like those unhappy creatures, some of whom are present here, whose life has been a sowing of darkness. They have leagues of thistles to reap, acres upon acres of briers and thorns of which they will have to make their bed for ever. They have been sowing the wind, and they will have to reap the whirlwind, which will carry their guilty souls for ever in its dreadful tornadoes. O you who have never had light sown for you because you have never sought mercy through Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit has never renewed your hearts and made you righteous, think of what your fate will be! You will be like the farmer who sowed not in the seed-time, and therefore reaps not in the time of harvest. Naked, and poor, and miserable, destitute and forsaken, you will beg in harvest, but you shall have nothing. You will ask God then to have mercy upon you, but He will refuse you. You shall clamour for the benefits of His grace, but they shall be denied you, for He will not hear you when once life is over. If we hear Him not to-day, neither will He hear us to-morrow. Oh for grace to have a seed-sowing here, that we may have a reaping for ever and ever!

I shall close by observing that the doctrine of our text ought to be very, very comforting to all of us who are in Christ. Sufferer, your pains are sharp; bear them manfully and repine not, for there is light upspringing for you. "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." Poor man, working hard for a little, with many wants and sufferings, light is sown for you. You shall soon dwell in the city of the many mansions, you shall walk the golden streets of the pearly-gated city, where poverty is banished for aye. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." Slandered one, whose name is cast out as evil for Christ's sake, bear it with rejoicing; light is sown for you. Amidst the martyrs and the throng of the chosen who suffered for righteousness' sake, you shall reap the sheaves of glory—reap them world without end. And you who have to suffer more than slander, who lose friend and home for Christ's sake, rejoice ye, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you: those ancient witnesses have reaped the light, and are reaping it, and even so shall you when worlds shall pass away. The Lord give us to forget the present, to rejoice in the future, and to count the reproach of Christ greater treasure than all the riches of Egypt.

THE NEW SONG

"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."—Psalm xcviii. 1.

THERE must be new songs on new occasions of triumph. It would have been absurd for Miriam with her timbrel to conduct the music of the daughters of Israel to some old sonnet that they had learned in Egypt. Nay, an old song could not have spoken out the feelings of that generation, much less could it have served to utter a voice, the jubilant notes of which distant posterity should echo. They must have a new song while they cry the one unto the other, "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." The like had never been known before, but henceforth father to son must show forth its fame. In after times, when Deborah and Barak had routed the hosts of Sisera, they did not borrow Miriam's song; but they had a new psalm for the new event. They said, "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam." In after years, at the building of the temple, or on the solemn feast days, it was ever the wont of the inspired poets of the age to cry, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord a new song." Thus the grateful notes of praise have gathered volume and augmented their compass as the ages have rolled onwards; and these as it were only the rehearsals for a grand oratorio. What then, shall be the marvellous novelty and the matchless glory of that song which shall be sung at the last upon Mount Zion, when ten thousand times ten thousand of the warriors of God shall surround Jesus the conqueror, when we shall hear a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and like great thunders, when shall be heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps; what shall be, I say, the strange novelty of that new song which they shall sing before the throne, when the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures shall fall before God upon their faces, and worship Him for ever and ever? Would that our ears could anticipate that tremendous burst of "Hallelujah! hallelujah! hallelujah! the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

I want to carry your minds, if I can, to-night, for a little season to that last and grandest, because the decisive victory, which shall tell out the name and fame of Jehovah in all His mighty attributes, and in all His majestic deeds, when the battle shall be over for ever, and the banner shall be furled and the sword shall be sheathed, because the last foe shall be destroyed, and placed beneath the feet of the Almighty victor; "His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory." My text seems, however suitable it may be to other occasions, to be most fitting to that last and most splendid triumph.

Three things there are in it: *victory transcendent; Deity conspicuous; holiness glorified.*

I. First in our text we perceive very clearly VICTORY TRANSCENDENT.

What shall we say of that victory? The shouts thereof already greet our ears, and the anthem that celebrates it is already prepared, when all the principalities and powers of this world shall be laid low, the pride of earth shall burst like a bubble, the great globe itself shall dissolve, and the things that are seen shall be folded up like a vesture, worn out, and crumbled with decay, that victory will be transcendent; there shall be none comparable to it; it shall stand matchless and unrivalled in all the wars of God, of angels, or men.

Well, we must say of that victory, *there shall be none to dispute the claim of God the Most High.* The most splendid victories of one army have frequently been claimed by the opposite partisans. If you stand beneath the triumphal arch in Paris, you will see the names of some battles which you simple-minded Englishmen always thought had been won by British soldiers; but you discover that our history was all a mistake, and that the Frenchmen really retired victorious from the plain. I suppose in America it is always difficult to ascertain who has been the conqueror; and where there are no generals, and the whole affair seems to be which shall kill the most and wade through the most blood, there naturally must be difficulty in ascertaining who has won the day. But in this case there shall be no dispute whatever. The dragon's head shall be so completely broken, that he can do nothing but bite his iron bonds and growl out his confession that God is stronger than he. The hosts of hell shall have been so utterly routed, that the deep groans of dismay and shrieks of terror shall be the confession that Omnipotence rules their terrible doom. As for Death, when he shall see his captives all loosed before his eyes; as for the grave, when the key shall be rent from her grip, and all her treasures plucked from her grasp—death and the grave shall both acknowledge that their victory is gone for ever; Christ has been the conqueror, the Son of God who in our nature has already taken away the sting. There may be to-day some who write their names down as atheists; there may be others who openly avow that they are the adversaries of God; and throughout the universe there are never wanting those who are hopeful that the issue will turn out as they wish—they are hopeful that wrong will master right; that evil shall drive out good, and darkness extinguish light. But there shall not be one such being left on that great day of victory; it shall be acknowledged even by the lip of despair that the Lord God, "with His own right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory." Blazoned across the sky in lightnings such as the eye of terror has never beheld before; thundered out with trumpet louder than even that which startled the sleeping dead, every tongue in earth and hell shall confess, because every ear hath heard, that the Lord reigneth, and is King for ever and ever.

But further, as this victory will be certainly beyond all dispute, let me remind you it will be transcendent, because *there shall be nothing that can occur to mar it.* When the last shock of the dread artillery shall have been endured by the hosts of God's elect; when the last charge shall have driven the foes before them as thin clouds fly before a Biscay gale; then, as the heroes sit down to read the

story of the war, they shall discover that there is nothing to mar the splendour of that glory, for it has been a victory throughout. Of all other victories we read, at one time the balance trembled—sometimes the host on this side wavered; perhaps for the first half day it seemed not only doubtful which would win, but it appeared as though the adversary at length defeated would certainly be the conqueror. But, beloved, when we shall read history in the light of heaven, we shall discover that God was never conquered—that never did the ranks reel; we shall see that even the most disastrous strokes of Providence, even the most dire calamities that ever occurred to the Church, were only the on-march, the tramp of victories yet to come. I am certain that those things we most deplore to-day will even become the subjects of the most marvellous gratitude to-morrow. We look to-day upon the black side of the question, and say, "Ah! here, indeed, goodness was foiled"; but when we look at the whole matter through, we shall see that every dark and bending line meets in the centre of the divine plan, and that which seemed the most incongruous and out of place with its fellow, was the most fitting and the most necessary of the whole programme. Satan at the last shall not be able to put his finger upon any spot of the battle-field and say, "Here my hosts routed the troops of Emmanuel." Everywhere it shall be seen that, from the dawning day, when first he struck the blow at Eve and made her sin, to the very last, when Christ shall drag him up the everlasting hills, led captive at His chariot wheels, from the first to the last, the Lord's "right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."

Remember, too, that *this is a victory all along the line.* The general's cautious eye marks that there the left wing has driven the adversary back, but for that right wing bring up the reserves, let not the ranks be broken. Stern liners, let your chivalry be seen yonder for that wing reels. Generally in the battle some part must fail, while in this portion or the other there shall be success. Ah! but at the last when Christ shall stand, and bare His brow in heaven's sunlight, and all His angels shall be with Him, it shall be seen that they were everywhere triumphant. The blood on Madagascar's rocks shall not defeat the on-march of God's armies. Saints may be burned, may be sawn in sunder, may wander about in sheep skins and goat skins, but they shall be victorious everywhere. Spain may shut her gates against the gospel, and the Inquisition may make that place its stronghold, but as sure as there is a God in heaven, Christ shall be conqueror there. Tyrants may pass edicts to exterminate Christians, conclaves may make decrees to drive out the religion of Jesus, but in every place, in every land, where ever foot of man has trodden this green earth, shall there be victory; from the north to the south, from the east to the west, everywhere shall be triumph—China and Japan, Brazil and Chili, the islands of the south, the frozen regions of the north, even Africa with her sable sons, the dwellers in the wilderness shall bow before Him and lick the dust at His feet. There shall be victory all along the line. Not from one place merely, but from all, shall be heard the tune—"His own right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."

And it shall be *a victory unstained by the news of the morrow.* Not so among the embattled hosts of men. How hard to brook the morrow! Then the general's brow is dark, and his eye is heavy, for the list of the dead and wounded is brought in for inspection. "Another victory like this," says one, "and I am defeated for ever. It is dearly purchased," saith he, "with the blood of these mother's sons. My comrades and companions in arms must bite the ground to let the country live." But in that last great battle of God the muster-roll shall be found without one missing in it; as they call their names they shall all answer, there shall not be one left dead upon the field. "How so? How so?" saith unbelief, "are they not dead and buried now? Have not their bodies lain to bleach upon the side of the Alps? Have they not been burned in the fire and scattered as ashes to the four winds? Do not the saints sleep to-day in our cemeteries, and in our grave-yards, and doth not the deep engulf full many a body that was a temple of the Holy Ghost?" I answer, yes, but they shall come again. Refrain thine eyes from weeping, O daughter of Jerusalem; refrain thine heart from sorrow, for they shall come again from the land of their captivity. We that are alive and remain shall not have the preference beyond them that sleep, "For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed; so when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." "His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."

And sometimes, on the morrow, the general feels the glory of the victory is marred, for there are many prisoners; they are not dead, their corpses lie not on the field, but they have been taken off by the opposite parties, and they are a prey; and who knoweth what may become of them; what dungeons may contain them; to what tortures they may be put. But in this last victory of God, *there shall be no prisoners,* no prisoners left in the hand of His enemy. I know there are some who say that we may be children of God, and yet fall from grace and perish. My brethren, it is a foul slander upon the faithfulness and power of the Redeemer I know that all He undertakes to save He will save, and He will bring the troops off from the battle field, every brow crowned with laurel, not one slain, not one a prisoner; the gates of hell shall never enclose the ransomed of the Lord; amongst the groans of the lost there shall never be heard a sigh from one that was once a saint before God. There are no prisoners. March out your prisoners, Prince of Hell, bring forth, if you can, one soul that Jesus bought with blood, one soul that the Spirit quickened, one soul that the Eternal Father gave to the hands of the Great Surety to keep for ever—bring him forth. Ah! ye have none. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" Thus saith the Lord, the God of Hosts, "My ransomed shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads"; then shall it be said, "His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."

But, beloved, after the battle is over, the conqueror wipes his brow and says, "Ah, but the scattered hosts may rally, and they who were driven to-day like chaff before the wind, may rise again, and long may be the campaign, and fierce the struggle, before we have stamped out the sparks of war. "Sleep on your arms," saith he, "you may be attacked to-morrow, be ready for the cry of 'boot

and saddle,' for there may be a charge again ere many hours are spent." But not so in this case: the victory is crushing, total, final; it is once for ever with evil, with darkness, with hell; they shall never again be able to tempt the righteous, or to cast them down, or to pale their cheeks with fear; they shall never be able again to win the world to their dominion, they are routed, routed, routed for ever. Hosts of evil, it is not your heel that is bruised—your head is broken; the Lord hath used His people as His battle-axe and His weapons of war, and He hath cleft ye and left ye without might or strength for ever and for ever. So, dear friends, this is our joy and comfort, that once the battle over, the whole campaign is ended; there shall be no further onslaughts; we rest eternally; we triumph everlastingly; no more fights to risk, no more conflicts in which to tug and strive. This shall be the note that shall ring throughout the arches of eternity—"The Lord's right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory for ever and for ever."

I think these are two good reasons why I should say this victory is transcendent—there is none to dispute it, and there is nothing to mar it.

But yet further we will venture to enlarge upon this victory by shewing its particulars. The ultimate triumph and victory of God in all His purposes will lie in several things How glorious the fact that *all whom He ordained to save are saved!* Calling was the first work which He wrought in them; they were called every one of them, but like the rest of mankind they would not come; their wills were so desperate that they resisted long; the minister preached at them; their mother wept over them; their father entreated them; providence came and hewed them; afflictions broke them in pieces, and they were unsaved still; but not in one case where God ordains to call has the calling failed. In every case where His electing love hath set its purpose, the will is turned round, the affections yield, the judgment gives way, the man is subdued—he is called, he is quickened. There may be some such here to-night, who think, "Well, I never would be saved upon such terms as acknowledging the sovereign grace of God, even if He wills to do it." Thy will must give way before the crushing force of the will of God. He hath mysterious ways of finding an entrance into the most reluctant heart, and taking up His throne there for ever.

How clearly is this victory seen *in the subjugation of the lusts and passions of the called sinner!* He may have been a drunkard, he thought he could not give it up, but the rod of iron "dashes in pieces the potter's vessel." He may have loved the pleasures of the flesh, they were dear to him as his right eye, but grace overcame the most darling lust, and threw to the earth the most pampered sin.

Not less conspicuously will it appear in the perseverance of every saint. Not a stone will have been left unturned by the adversary to prevent the saints holding on; the caverns of hell will be emptied against God's redeemed; Satan and his myrmidons will do their utmost to cast them down to destruction, but they shall hold on their way, they shall wax stronger and stronger, and when at last the gates of heaven shall be fast closed, because there are no more to enter, it shall be proclaimed, while devils bite their iron bands in shame, that not a soul who was written in the Book of Life was lost, not one whom Jesus bought with blood has been unredeemed, not one quickened by grace suffered to die, not one who truly began the heavenly race turned aside from it, not one concerning whom it was said, "These are Mine, and in the day when I make up My jewels they shall be Mine"; not one of these is lost, but all saved, saved eternally. Oh! that will be a splendid victory! What can be greater? You that know the conflict through which the child of God has to pass will bear me witness that if you get to heaven, you will sing with all your might the conqueror's hymn. And I think we all should do the same. I remember saying once that if ever I got to heaven I would sing the loudest there, for I owed the most to sovereign grace. But when I came downstairs, one said to me, "You made a mistake, I shall sing more loudly than you, for I owe more than you do." And I found that was the general opinion, that each brother and each sister thought that he owed most to divine grace. Now, if we are all to sing loudest what a shout of triumph there will be! And I suppose the verse in our hymn is quite true to the apprehension of each of us—

> "Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing
> While heaven's resounding mansions sing
> With shouts of sovereign grace."

What a transcendent triumph!

Not a few shall there be to share the triumph, but *a multitude that no man can number;* for the glory shall be enhanced *by the salvation of so many.* Heaven is none of your narrow places for narrow-hearted bigots. No, brethren, our largest imagination never yet could grasp heaven, but it will hold multitudes of multitudes. Nor will the praise be any the less, when we consider that there were so many of such varied clans and climes, some of all kindreds on the face of the earth, swarthy or white. There shall be found in heaven the vilest sinner that lived, there shall be brought thither the proudest rebel, and the stoutest hearted, and the most obstinate of sinners; there shall be such in heaven as would have made a wonder in hell, some, I say, who would have been such great sinners, had they been suffered to go to hell, that their dreadful fall would even hell itself appal, but they are in heaven, saved by sovereign grace. And, O beloved! as there are such persons, this will help to make the victory grand, that they were saved by such means, such simple means, by the simple preaching of the gospel; not by wisdom, not by science, not by eloquence, but by the simple telling out of the story of the cross. How this will tend to make the triumph brighter than it could have been in any other way.

And, O beloved, this victory will excel all others in *the routing of such foes, such cruel, such crafty, such mighty, such numerous foes.* Sin, sin, it is a name of horror—sin o'erthrown. Death—what glooms are concentrated in that word!—death destroyed. Satan—what craft, what cruelties, what malice linger there—Satan bound hand and foot, and led captive. Such a victory over such foes. I find no words in any tongue by which I can describe its magnitude. And oh! the results of that victory, how bright! Souls knit to Christ by such love, tongues tuned to such music, hearts burning with such fire, heaven filled with such devout, such holy inhabitants, the ears of Deity regaled with such grateful music, heaven filled with such myriads of happy spirits. The peaceful results, setting aside the over-

throw, will be enough to make this victory grander than all the triumphs of men or angels put together.

Say now, and gather up all your enthusiasm to say it—What a victory shall that be, when *there shall not be a single trophy in the hands of the adversary.* The victory shall be unparalleled in this, that all the success which the enemy thought he had achieved shall only tend to make his defeat the more galling, and add lustre to the victorious King of kings. You see sometimes hanging up in old minsters tattered flags, that were taken from the adversary; sometimes when the report of battle comes in, we are told the battle was won, that so many cannon and so many flags were left with the enemy. But, O Lord God! Thou hast not left a single trophy in the hands of Thy foe. I said he had no prisoners, but he shall not even have a flag, not one truth rent in pieces, not one doctrine of revelation hung up to rot in the minsters of hell; not one single attribute of God that shall be trailed in the mire, not one single truth of Christianity to be laughed at, and despised by fiends, not a trophy; there shall not a hair of your head perish, not so much as that shall Satan gain, not a bone, not a fragment of the saint, either of his body or his spirit—no trophies left. And all this will make hell angry, to think that God gave him vantage-ground, let him contend with poor feeble men; but God was in man, and fought with Satan—man, a poor feeble worm, fought with Satan, and, like David, he threw the stone of faith at the giant's head, and destroyed him with his own weapons. God hath destroyed death by the death of Christ, destroyed sin by the great sin-bearer, yea He has destroyed the dragon by the Seed of a woman, who bruised his head with that very seed whose heel the serpent once did bite. Glory be unto Thee, O Lord! This is Thy victory. The more we muse upon it, the higher doth our rapture rise, and the more prepared do our hearts grow to peal forth the words of the Psalmist, "His right hand, and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory."

II. Secondly; observe that DEITY IS CONSPICUOUS HERE.

Man is not made mention of. There is no name of Moses, or of the prophets, or of the apostles here; I read not the names of Chrysostom and Augustine, nor of those modern fathers of the Church, such as Calvin, and Zwingle—the stars are lost in the blaze of the sun. O God! how glorious is Thy right arm, and how do Thy disciples, Thy children, hide their heads and say, "Not unto us, but unto Thy name be all the glory!" But mark, beloved, as they are not mentioned it is not because the mention needs to be avoided, for the more we talk of instrumentalities, or rather think about them—(I do not say the more we think *of* them, but the more we think *about* them)—the more persuaded we shall be that it only adds to God's glory to use men, for men are such poor tools to work with. You have heard of the celebrated painter who gained renown by painting with poor brushes, when the good ones were stolen; and Quintin Matsys, who made a cover for the well without tools, when all the proper tools were taken away; he wrought the ironwork with such poor implements as he could get. So was the skill of the painter or artizan admired in that he could produce such effects under such disadvantageous conditions. Ah! then what an artist must he be! they exclaim concerning the one. And they look upon this piece of ironwork, and say of the other, "What! no graving tools, no casting, how could he do it?" So when we shall come to look at men, when we look at them in the light which eternity shall reveal, we shall say of the best of them, "How can the Lord have won such victories with such poor things as these!" So that you may mention the instruments every one of them, from righteous Abel down to the last preacher of the Word, and yet it shall be true, that the victory shall speak the sole praise of the General. No doubt dear friends, this will be a part of the splendour of the triumph to think that He did win by men. It was in man that Satan conquered: Adam and Eve were led astray by the crafty wiles of Satan. It is by man that death came, and by man comes the resurrection of the dead. This will be gall and wormwood in the cup of the lost, when they shall see the *Man* Christ Jesus, the seed of the woman, sitting at the right hand of God. This is judgment's greatest terror, "Hide us from the Lamb"; and this shall be hell's greatest horror, "Hide us from the Lamb; let us not behold His face." But glory be unto Thee, most gracious God, for Thou hast lifted man up above all the works of Thy hands, and given him dominion above all creatures, so that principalities and powers are put beneath his feet in the person of Christ. And all this only proves that "His own right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."

I wish I might enlarge here and speak of the conspicuous glory of God in this respect, that all the persons of the Trinity will be glorified, the Father, the Son, the Spirit. All the attributes of God, His unsearchable greatness, and His unrivalled majesty, His grace, His power, His truth, His justice, His holiness, His immutability, these shall shine forth with resplendent lustre. His wondrous works and His terrible acts shall declare His praise; they shall be the theme of every tongue, and the topic of every conversation. "Men shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power." All His decrees shall be seen in their final accomplishment, every one of them fulfilled, the counsel answering to the providence. Of all that the Father willed, of all that the Son performed, of all that the Spirit revealed, not one thing is frustrated. How shall I gather up these things? Oh for the voice of a mighty angel! Oh for a seraph's lip of fire, to speak now of the splendour of that last day, when not only the great but the little, not only the abundance of God's providence, and the great deeps of His counsel, but even the small deeds of His loving-kindness shall be made to sing forth His praise, when not only the leviathian deeds of God shall make the deep to praise the Lord, but even the little fish that move therein, shall leap up to join the chorus, and everywhere from everything, for everything, there shall be heard the tune—"His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."

III. We have in our text a third thought, which we can only hint at. In all this—HOLINESS WILL BE GLORIFIED.

Note the adjective,—"His *holy* arm." When we contemplate any actions of God, you will notice that the name which cherubs utter, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," is always brought out. Where Christ bears sin, and overcomes it, I hear the cry of "Holy, holy, holy," from the cross. Where Jesus breaks the tomb, and conquers death, I seem to hear the note of "Holy, holy, holy," for it makes the day holy on which the deed was done. And when He ascends to glory, and the Father says, "Well done," we seem to hear still the note, "Holy, holy, holy."

In everything, from the manger to the cross, and from the cross onward to the crown, holiness becometh God's house, and all God's acts for ever. Is it not, dear friends, after all the hinge of the struggle? Is not this the point, just as you know in great battles, there is some one mountain or hill, which is the object of struggle, not for the value of that particular hill, but because on that the battle will depend, so holiness is just the point, the rallying point between God and Satan. Here are the two war-cries. The hosts of evil cry, "Sin, sin, sin"; but the cry of the armies of the Lord of Hosts is this, "Holiness, holiness, holiness." Every time we strike a blow it is "Holiness"; and every time they attack us it is "Sin." Sin is the real object of their aim. When Satan attacks, it is to stab at holiness, and when we resist, it is to guard holiness, or to drive back his sin. Mark you, this, I say, is the point of the battle, and by that ye shall be able to judge on which side you are. What is your war-cry? What is your war-cry? When Cromwell fought with the soldiers of the covenant at Dunbar, you will remember they were distinguished by their cries, on the one side, "The Covenant, the Covenant;" and on the other side, "The Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Hosts." And so to-night there is the cry on either side, "Sin and the pleasures thereof." Is that your war-cry, friend? You say "No,"—how is it then you were at the theatre the other night? You say "No,"—how is it then you frequent the tavern? You say "No,"—how is it then you have got so many misgotten gains about you now? You say, "No,"—how is it you make appointments for deeds of sin, and perhaps to-night, or to-morrow night, intend to fulfil them? I tell you, sirs, there are many of you whose war-cry to-night is "Sin, and the pleasures thereof." On the other hand, I trust there are not a few in this vast throng, who can say, "Oh! sir, feebly though I speak it, yet my war-cry is 'Holiness, and the cross'"—that goeth with it, "Holiness, and the cross." Ah! beloved you are just now on the side that is laughed at, the world points at you and says, "There are your saints." Yes, here they are, sir, what dare you say against them? Abide your time, man, and have your jeering out; ye shall change that laugh for everlasting howlings by-and-by. "There are your Methodists; there are your hypocritical professors." What, sir, dare you say it? The servants of the living God will know how to answer you in that day, when their King shall be revealed in the clouds of heaven, and His glory shall be manifest, and they shall share His triumph, and all flesh shall see it, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Come, we will pass that question again to-night, "What is your war-cry?" There has been a good deal of wickedness these last few days in London. I love to see holy mirth; I delight to see men well feasted. I like Christmas; I wish it came six times a year. I like the generosity of those who give to the poor. Let it be extended. I would not stop a smile. God forbid me! But cannot men be happy without drunkenness? cannot they be mirthful without blasphemy? Is there no possibility of being happy without lasciviousness? Are there no other ways of finding true pleasure besides selling your soul to the devil? O sirs! I say there have been thousands in this huge city who have been going about the streets, and whose cry has been, "Sin, and the pleasures thereof! Where is the music-hall? Where is the Casino? Where is the Coal Hole? Where is the tavern? Where is the ball-room? Sin, and the pleasures thereof." O Satan! thou hast many soldiers, and right brave soldiers they are, and never are they afraid of thy cause, nor ashamed of thy name nor of thy unholy work. Aye, thou art well served, O prince of hell! and rich will be thy wages when thy drudges earn the fire for which they have laboured. But I hope and trust there are some to-night who will change their watch-note. Ye have not nailed your colours to the mast, have you? Even if you have, by God's grace I would pull the nails out. Are ye determined to die? Will you serve the black prince for ever, and perish with him? Jesus Emmanuel, the captain of our salvation, bids me cry to you, "Enlist beneath My banner." Believe in Him, trust in Him, and live. Oh! trust the merit of the cross, the virtue of the blood, the tears, and the dying groans. This it is to be a Christian, and ever afterwards this shall be your war-note—"Holiness, and the cross thereof!" Oh take this, all! Fear not. The cross with holiness will bring the mortifying of the flesh, the shame of the world, and the reproach of men. Take both, for now the battle is raging. But, O my brethren, another crush, and another, and another, and another, and we shall gain the top of the hill, and the shout of "Holiness and the cross!" shall be answered by the echoes all round the world, for everywhere holiness shall be victorious, and men shall know the Lord. Aye, and the echoes of heaven shall answer, too, and the spirits of the sanctified shall cry, "Holiness, and the crown thereof!" Then we will change one word of our watch-note; and as our enemies have broken before us and are utterly destroyed; as they melt away like the fat of rams; as unto smoke they consume away, we will sing for ever, "Holiness, and the crown thereof! holiness, and the crown thereof!" But that shall be only one note: this shall be the song—"His own right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory."

I would that some soul would believe in Jesus to-night, that it might share in the victory. I would that young man's heart would be given to Christ to-night, or yours yonder. He deserves it of you: if it were only His mercy in having spared you, He deserves it. And thou grey-headed sinner there, does He not deserve thy heart for sparing thee so long? Yield, I pray thee; His love meets thee. Yield; His terrors threaten thee. Yield; lay down thy weapons, and be for ever forgiven. May God help thee to do it. The Lord prove His sovereignty and His power to-night in the conversion of many of His chosen; and unto Him shall be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE CLAIMS OF GOD

" Know ye that the Lord He is God : it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves ; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise : be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good ; His mercy is everlasting : and His truth endureth to all generations."—Psalm c. 3, 4, 5.

BRETHREN, it is a trick of Satan to call off our minds from the most important and vital matters by the suggestion of trivial considerations. When the best blessings are asking for our acceptance He will bring the most trifling things into our minds ; he will fill our eyes with dust to prevent our looking to the brazen serpent for healing. From the preaching of Jesus he endeavoured to distract human attention by debates upon the tithing of mint and anise and cummin, the making broad of the borders of one's garments, the wearing of phylacteries, the straining out of gnats, and I know not what beside. He followed this method at Jacob's Well. When our Lord spoke to the woman about living water, and the salvation of her soul, the evil spirit prompted her to ask concerning Gerizim and Zion : " Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem men ought to worship." With this same art Satan worketh still. It should be our business, not being ignorant of the devices of the enemy, to be more than a match for him, by breaking away from all vain janglings and trivial questions to the foundation truths, the corner-stones of faith, the realities of life everlasting, the vitalities of godliness ; and these lie all Godward and Christward, away from the shadow of ceremonials, and the cloud wrack of vain speculations, over there to the eternal rock and everlasting hills whose golden tops are, to the eye of faith, bright with the blessed daybreak. Let us get away there this morning from the vanities of earth, and may the breath of the Spirit speed us towards the realities of heaven, that to things essential we may give the attention which is essential to them.

For what were we created, my brethren ? I know no better answer than that of the Assembly's catechism, " Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." There is a vast amount both of theology and philosophy in that simple answer, which our old divines have put into the mouth of a child. Had man remained what God made him, it would have been His very element to glorify his God ; to do the will of God would have been as natural to us as to breathe, if we had not fallen from original perfection. Creatures which abide as God created them obey His will, I was about to say unconsciously ; but where there is consciousness there is added a supreme delight which makes their consciousness and willinghood the highest boons. Look at yonder ponderous orbs ; they are not stubborn with the so-called *vis inertiæ*, but joyfully roll along in their predestined courses because God commands them to keep their settled track. See yonder watching stars : they close not their bright eyes, but smile upon us from age to age ; those sentinels of heaven quench not their lamps, but shine right on day without night because God has said " Let there be light," and from them light must come.

We hear of no rebellion in the spheres, no revolt against the law which holds them to their celestial courses. Orion breaks not his bands, the Pleiades cease not their sweet influences. These orbs, mighty as they are, are as subservient to God as the plastic clay to the hand of the potter. And where there is intelligence, as long as the intelligence remains as God made it, there is no revolt against His will. Yon mighty angel " whose staff might make a mast for some tall admiral," counts it his honour to fly like a flash of light at the bidding of the Eternal. It is no demeaning of his dignity, it is no diminution of his pleasure, to do the commandment of the Most High, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Were we to-day what we should be, it would be our element to love, to serve, to adore our God, and we should not need ministers to stir us to our pleasurable duty or remind us of Jehovah's claims. Even the august language of our text would not be needed to bid us worship and bow down, and know that Jehovah is God, who has made us, and not we ourselves, for we should bear this truth in every particle of our being. As things are, however, we need recalling to duty and urging to obedience, and this morning, with the help of God's good Spirit, we will submit our hearts to such a call.

I. First we will consider THE CLAIMS OF GOD, ON WHAT ARE THEY GROUNDED ? " Know ye that the Lord, He is God ; it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves ; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving." The claims of God are grounded, first of all, upon *His Godhead.* " Know ye that Jehovah, He is God." As Matthew Henry has very properly said, ignorance is not the mother of devotion, though it be the mother of superstition. True knowledge is the mother and the nurse of piety. Really to know the deity of God, to get some idea of what is meant by saying that He is God, is to have the very strongest argument forced upon one's soul for obedience and worship. The Godhead gave authority to the first law that was ever promulgated when God forbade man to touch the fruit of a certain tree. Why might not Adam pluck the fruit ? Simply and only because God forbade it. Had God permitted, it had been lawful, God's prohibition made it sin to eat thereof. God gave no reason for saying to Adam, " In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." His commandment, seeing He was God, was the supremest reason, and to have questioned His right to make the law, would have been in itself flat rebellion. God was to be obeyed simply because He was God. It was a case in which to have introduced an argument would have supposed unwillingness on man's part to obey. Adam could not want more than to know that such and such was the will of his God. The same truth of Godhead is the authoritative basis of the moral law of ten commands. From Sinai no claim for obedience was set up but this, " I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." In that word, " GOD," is comprehended the highest, the most weighty, the most righteous reasons for

man's yielding up his entire nature to the divine service. Because the Lord is God therefore should we serve Him with gladness, and come before His presence with singing.

It was upon this point that God tested Pharaoh, and Pharaoh may be regarded as a sort of representative of all the enemies of the Lord. "Thus saith the Lord, Let My people go." There was no reason given, no argument, but simply this, "Thus saith the Lord"; to which Pharaoh, fully appreciating the ground upon which God was acting, answered, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" So they stood foot to foot in fair battle, Jehovah saying, "Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let My people go," and Pharaoh replying, "I know not the Lord neither will I let Israel go." You know how that battle ended. That song of Israel at the Red Sea when the Lord of Hosts triumphed gloriously, was a prophecy of the victory which will surely come unto God in all conflicts with His creatures, in which His eternal power and Godhead are assailed.

The argument derived from the Godhead has not only been used with haughty rebels, but also with questioners and debaters. Observe how Paul speaks. He has entered upon the thorny subject of predestination, a matter which none of us will ever comprehend, a matter wherein it is better for us to believe than to reason, and He is met with this, "If all things happen as God decrees why doth He yet find fault, for who hath resisted His will?" To which the apostle gives no reply but this, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Against God there can be no answer. If He wills it, so let it be. It is right, it is good because He so decrees. Is He God? Submit. If there were no other argument, or reason, let Godhead convince you.

Good men have been argued with in the same way for their profit. That is the core and pith of the Book of Job. There is Job in conflict with his three friends, who are arguing that he must be a wicked man or else God would not so sorely smite him; to which reasoning he replies that he will hold fast his integrity, and will not let it go. Then comes Elihu, and he has much to say that is wise, but he cannot settle the matter. At last comes God into the controversy, and what is the Lord's argument? Does He proceed to justify Himself in what He has done with Job, to give Job reasons for covering him with boils and blains, and excuse Himself for having taken a perfect and upright man and laid him prostrate on a dunghill? No, but instead thereof He unveils a portion of His Godhead, and reveals His power in some such language as this: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof? Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him?" Thus the Lord displayed the greatness of His power, while Job sat cowering down, and cried out, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Ah, men and women, if ye did but know what God is, and who He is, if but some flashes of His divine omnipotence, or any other of His glorious attributes, were let loose upon you, you would perceive that He has the fullest claims upon your allegiance, and that you ought to live for His glory. Imagine that at this instant midnight darkness should settle over us, out of which should burst forth a thunderclap making each stone in this building to tremble, while down every one of yonder columns lurid lightning should begin to stream; imagine that the earth beneath us rocked and reeled after the manner of the city of Lisbon, or Aleppo in years gone by; conceive that peal on peal again of that terrible thunder should be heard; why there is not one of us but would long to be the servant of that terrible God, and instinctively inquire what He would have us to do? Atheists, in times of tempest and storm, have found but little help in their philosophy; like Pharoah, they have been ready to cry, "Entreat the Lord for me." But the reeling earth, or heaven on a blaze, what were these? The touch of His finger and glance of His eye would do far more. He touches the hills, and they smoke, but as for Himself, who shall conceive of Him? Let us adore His overwhelming majesty, and bow down before Him, for the Lord He is God.

The second ground of the Lord's claim is *His creation of us.* "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." We are every one of us the offspring of the divine power. This is a fact of which we are informed by revelation, but it is also one which every instinct of our nature agrees with. You never saw a child startled when it was told for the first time that God made it, for within that little mind there dwells an instinct which accepts the statement. The theory that we are not made, but are mere developments of materialism, wears upon its face all the marks of unsupported fiction. Certain statements are called axioms, because they are self-evident truths, but this is an axiom reversed, for it is a self-evident lie. To an unsophisticated mind its repetition is its refutation; indeed, whenever I hear people mention it they seem unable to suppress a laugh, and I do not wonder, for even nature itself forces them to despise what they pretend to believe. The atomic theory was originated, I have no doubt, either in Pandemonium or in Bedlam: it is worthy of either, but it is unworthy of any man who possesses either sanity or morality. No, we did not become what we are by chance or growth. God made us. This belief is the easiest escape from all difficulties, and besides, it is true, and everything in us tells us so. Now, since the Lord made us, He has a right to us. The property which God has in man is proved beyond dispute by our being His creatures. The potter has a right to make the vessel for what use he pleases, still he has not such absolute right over his clay as God has over us, for the potter does not make the clay; he makes the vessel from the clay, but the clay is there from the first. The Lord has in our case made the clay from which He has fashioned us, and therefore we are entirely at His disposal, and should serve Him with all our hearts. Why, man, if you make anything, you expect to use it. If you make a tool for your trade you reckon upon employing it according to your pleasure; and if it would never bend to your will, or be useful to your purpose, you would speedily put it away. So is it with you, the Lord who made you, has a right to your service and obedience. Will you not acknowledge His claim? Consider what He has made us. No mean things are

we! Who but God could make a man? Raphael takes the pencil in his hand, and with master touch creates upon yonder canvas the most wondrous forms; and the sculptor with his chisel and his hammer developes amazing beauty; but there is no life, thought, intellect, and if you speak there is neither voice nor answering. How different are you from the canvas and the marble, for in your bosom there is a mysterious principle, which makes you akin to the Deity, for your soul can know reason, believe, understand, and love. I had almost called the soul infinite, for God has made it capable of such wondrous things. Thus has He trusted us with high powers and faculties, and lifted us up to a high position; surely, then, it is ours to serve Him with a loving loyalty.

I like to think that the Lord hath made us, and to yield myself to Him on that ground, because while the grandeur of what He has made us calls us to homage, even the lowly side has its claim too, and a sweet one. Our powers are finite, and sometimes we are troubled about that fact, wishing we could do more for our Lord: but we need not fear when we remember that He hath made us, and therefore fixed the measure of our capacity. In Roger de Wendover's *Flowers of History*, an ancient Saxon chronicle, we read of a Saxon king, who, riding through a forest, came upon a little church in which a priest was saying prayers, and this priest was lame and hump-backed; and therefore the rough Saxon king was ready to despise him, till he heard him chaunt these words, "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." The king blushed, and owned his fault. If, then, we are of small beauty or slender talent, let us not complain, but serve Him who has made us what we are. If we are amazed at a truth which we cannot comprehend; if we find portions of God's word to be beyond our depth, let us not complain, but remember that the Lord could have made us understand all things if He had chosen, and as He has not done so, "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." When any say to us, "Your religion is beyond you, the truths you believe you cannot comprehend," we answer, "We are quite satisfied it should be so, for the Lord hath made us, and not we ourselves." If He has made us capacious to a larger degree than our fellows, we will give Him all the more honour; but if we be vessels of small capacity we will not wish to be other than our Maker would have us to be.

Dear brethren, I cannot conceive any higher claim upon our service than this, that God has created us, except that the same truth may be sung an octave higher. Common men may sing, "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves"; even the brute creation might join in that confession: but, O ye saints, yours is a loftier note, for you have been twice made, born again, created anew in Christ Jesus, and after a nobler fashion ye can sing, "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." Creation has its claims, but election and redemption rise still higher; from those peculiarly favoured the Lord must have peculiar praise.

A third reason for living unto the Lord lies in *His shepherding of us.* "We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." God has not left us and gone away. He has not left us as the ostrich leaves her eggs, to be broken by the passer's foot. He is watching over us at every hour; even as a shepherd guards his flock. Over us all He exercises an unceasing care, a watchful providence, and therefore we should return to Him daily praise. It has been well said that some men represent God as having taken the universe like a watch, wound it up, and then put it under His pillow and gone to sleep: but it is not so. God's finger is on every wheel of the world's machinery; God's power is that which puts force into the laws of the universe, they were a mere dead letter if He were not powerfully active evermore. Child of Adam, in thy cradle thou art not rocked by wild winds, but by the hand of love. Daughter of affliction, thou art not laid prostrate on yon bed to be the victim of heartless laws, but there is One who makes all thy bed in thy sickness with His own kind and tender hand. God giveth us day by day our daily bread. God clotheth us; He gives breath for these heaving lungs, and blood for this beating heart; He keeps us in life, and if His power were withdrawn we should sink immediately into death. Now, therefore, because it is so, we are bound to give our great Shepherd our daily service. Ye are the sheep of His hand; for you the hourly provision, for you the constant protection, for you the wise and judicious governance, for you the royal leadership through the desert to the pastures on the other side of Jordan, for you the power that chases away the wolf, for you the skill that finds out the pastures of the wilderness, for you those superior comforts which come from the redeeming angel's presence, and flow from the very fact that He is yours. Therefore, render to the Lord your homage and your praise. Men, because ye are men, adore the God who keeps you living men; but saintly men, men renewed and fed out of the storehouse of divine grace, serve your God, I pray you, with all your heart, and soul, and strength, because you especially are the sheep of His pasture and the people of His hand.

A fourth reason for adoration and service is given in the last verse of our text, it is *the divine character:* "For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations." Here are three master motives for serving the Lord our God. Oh that all would feel their weight. First, He is *good.* Now, if I were to lift up a standard in this assembly this morning and say, "This banner represents the cause of everything that is just, right, true, kind, and benevolent, I should expect many a young heart to enlist beneath it; for when pretenders in all lands have talked of liberty and virtue, choice spirits have been enchanted and rushed to death for the grand old cause. Now, God is good, just, right, true, kind, benevolent; in a word, God is love, and therefore who would not serve Him? Who will refuse to be the servant of infinite perfection? Oh, were He not my God, but another man's God, methinks I would steal away to Him to be enlisted beneath the banner of such a God as He is. To keep the laws of God must always be incumbent upon us, because those laws are the very essence of right; none of them are arbitrary, all of them the requirements of unsullied holiness and unswerving justice. Indeed, commands of God are something more than merely right; they are good in the sense of kind. When God says, "Thou shalt not," it is only like a mother forbidding her child to cut its fingers with an edged tool, or to eat poisonous berries. When God says, "Thou shalt," it is practically a direction to us to be happy, or at least to do that thing which in due course leads to happiness. The laws of the

Lord our God are right in all respects, and therefore I claim from every one of you the obedience of your heart to God.

Then it is added, "His mercy is everlasting." Who would not serve One whose mercy endureth for ever? Observe, that He is always merciful. Never does a sinner come to Him and find Him devoid of pity. The Lord is merciful and gracious when we are children, He is equally so to us in middle life, and when we grow grey in years He is merciful still. We cannot wear out His patience nor exhaust His forgiving love. He has given us a Saviour who ever liveth to make intercession for transgressors. What a blessing is this. So long as we sin we have an advocate to plead for us! He has set up a mercy-seat for us for all times, and to it we may go as often as we will. He did not erect a mercy-seat on earth for a hundred years and then withdraw it, but, blessed be His name, we always have the right of access, and we have still a plea to urge, for Jesu's blood has not lost its savour. There, too, is the Spirit of God always waiting to help us to pray, and whenever we wish to draw near to the mercy-seat He is ready to teach us what we should pray for as we ought, and even to utter for us groanings which we ourselves could not utter. Oh, who would not serve a God whose mercy is everlasting? Cruel is that heart which infinite gentleness does not persuade. If God be merciful, man should no more be rebellious.

It is added, "His *truth* endureth to all generations," that is to say you will not find in God one thing to-day and another thing to-morrow. What He promises He will perform. Every word of His stands fast for ever, like Himself, immutable. Trust Him to-day, and you will not find Him fail you, neither to-morrow, nor all the days of your life. The God of Abraham is our God to-day, and has not changed through the revolutions of years. The Saviour whom we trusted in our boyhood, is still the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Blessed be His name. I think it was this attribute of God that had the greatest charm to my young heart, it seemed so sweet to rest my soul with an unchangeable God, so delightful to know, that if I did once enjoy His love He would never take it away from me, that if He was once reconciled to me by the death of His Son, I should for ever be His child and be dear to His heart. This gave my heart gladness and I hold forth this truth now as a sweet inducement to those present who have not trusted to the Lord that they should do so, for the Lord is good and His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth to all generations. Thus I have set before you the grounds of God's claims; are they solid? Do you consent to them? Oh, that sovereign grace would constrain each of us to live alone for the glory of God. It is His most righteous due.

II. Now very briefly indeed, THE CLAIMS OF GOD—HOW HAVE WE REGARDED THEM? Answer for yourselves. Alas, some have paid no respect to these claims—in fact they have denied them, and have said in effect, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" Have I one such person here? I pray God to change his heart, for the gnat may much more wisely contend with the flame which has already burned its wings than you contend with your Maker! As surely as you live, God will vanquish you, and make you own His supremacy. If you will not obey Him He will dash you in pieces like a potter's vessel.

A far larger number of persons, however, ignore rather than oppose God's claim. They have lived in this world now perhaps to middle age and never thought about God at all, though He has made them and kept them in being. That is the way that many a debtor has done with his debts. He has felt easy because he has not been dunned about them; but surely that is a doubtful honesty which rests in peace because the creditor does not happen to clamour. A truly honest man is dissatisfied till he has discharged his obligations, and every noble spirit will be discontented with itself because it has not paid its due to God. What if the Lord has used no severities, has sent no sheriff's officers, of sickness or bereavement, shall we not all the more heartily enquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" Shall we rob God because He is merciful? Shall we make His goodness a reason for neglecting Him? Can it be right that we should never render to the Most High according to the benefits received?

There are multitudes who in theory acknowledge all the claims of God, but as a matter of fact they deny them, or they evade them by a merely outward religiousness. They will not be honest, but they will go to church; they will not cleanse themselves from iniquity, but they will be baptised; to live a holy life is a matter they care not for, but they will take the sacrament; believe in Jesus, and yield themselves up to the love of God, they will not, but they have not the slightest objection to joining in a procession or going upon pilgrimage—thus giving God brass counters instead of gold, outward appearances instead of real obedience. The love of the heart and trust of the spirit man refuses to his Maker, and so long as he does so all his offerings are vain.

Sorrowfully must we confess also that where we have tried to honour the Lord, and have done so in a measure by His grace, yet we have failed of perfection; we have to confess that oftentimes the pressure of the body which is near, and of the things that are seen and tangible, has been greater upon us than the force of the things which cannot be seen, but are eternal. We have yielded to self too often, and have robbed the Lord. What shall we do in this case? Why, we have to bless our everlasting God and Father, that He has provided an atoning sacrifice for all our shortcomings, and that there is One, partaker of our nature who stands in the gap on our behalf, in whom we can be accepted, notwithstanding all our shortcomings and offences. Let us go to God in Christ Jesus. He bids us believe in Jesus, and assures us of pardon and salvation on the spot if we do so. The demands of God are met in the life and death of His only-begotten Son: faith lets us see that they were met for us, and that we are clear. Brethren, we have believed, yea, and we will believe, that Jesus died for us, and here comes our joy, that we are delivered from the wrath of God, notwithstanding that we have fallen short of His deserts. And now what follows? I feel concerning it just this, that now there are more bonds to bind me to the service of God than ever; He has forgiven me for His name's sake, and washed me in the blood of His own Son, and I am His by firmer bonds than ever. No obligations are so forcible as those which arise out of free grace and dying love. Pardoned sin is no argument for the indulgence of future sin, but an abundant argument for future holiness in every heart that feels its power. O ye saints of God, transgression being blotted out ye will no more

transgress; made His elect, you elect to serve Him; being His adopted children you rejoice to do your Father's will; and now henceforth and for ever you are the Lord's.

III. This brings me to the concluding note of our discourse, which is this—THE CLAIMS OF GOD, WHEN THEY ARE REGARDED, HOW DO THEY INFLUENCE MEN? Give me your hearts a few minutes. I am persuaded, brethren, that the noblest form of man that is to be found on the face of the earth is the man who serves God; that all other forms of manhood are faulty and imperfect in themselves, to a very high degree, and are also far inferior in force and beauty to that which is produced in men by consecration to the service of God. A man who is guided by the Holy Ghost to live for the Lord is a nobler being altogether than one moved by a less lofty aim.

Let me show you how healthy it is to serve God. The man who serves God, led by the Spirit of God so to do, is humble. Were he proud it were proof at once that he was not serving God; but the remembrance that God is his sovereign, and has made him, that in His hand is his breath, makes the good man feel that he is nothing but dust and ashes at his very best.

He cannot cry out with Nebuchadnezzar, "Behold this great Babylon which I have builded:" he is far more likely to crouch down where Nebuchadnezzar did after God had taught him better, and to say, "Now I extol and honour the King of heaven." Serving God keeps man in his right place. It is a poise to him, without which he might be drifted to destruction, like the myriads of butterflies which I have seen far out at sea, condemned ere long to sink into the wave. At the same time, while it sobers a man it fills him with joy, and praise, and gratitude, thus giving him sail as well as ballast. A man who loves to serve God receives mercies at His hand with great thankfulness and joy, and is content with the will of God, and therefore is full of gratitude to Him; and let me tell you there are no sweeter moments in a man's life than those which are occupied with adoring gratitude.

Nothing is more purging, or cleanses a man more from earthly grossness, and from all the defilement of selfishness, than to serve the ever-living and ever-blessed God, and to feel that there is one so much greater, so much better than oneself, towards whom we aspire, for whom we live. Thus is a man at once humbled, cheered, and elevated.

The service of God is honourable as no other service is. There is a man who lives for himself; his great object is to get money. Look at him and consider him well! Is not the greed of wealth one of the most beggarly passions that can possess a human bosom? Yon ant, which labours for its commonwealth is to my mind up among the angels, compared with a man who sweats and toils and starves himself, merely for the sake of heaping up for himself a mass of yellow metal. Can I more highly commend the lover of pleasure? What is pleasure? As the world understands it, it is a hollow sham, a veneer of mirth, covering deep dissatisfaction. I often think when I hear worldlings laughing at such poor nonsense, that they pull each other's sleeves and say, "Laugh. You ought to laugh." I cannot see the mirth of their amusements, but they do. They struggle to seem happy, but what after all is it to have lived to be amused? To have spent all one's powers in killing time! Is anything more contemptible?

How horrible it is when man lives for lust, and puts forth all his strength to indulge his passions! Brutes! beasts! Alas! I slander the beasts when I compare them to such men. The man who lives for God is a far nobler being. Why, in the very act of self-renunciation and of dedication to God the man has been lifted up from earth, and from all that holds him down to its dust and mire, and he has risen so much nearer to the cherubim, so much nearer, in fact, to the divine. This makes a man a man, for a man who serves is courageous, and too manly to be a slave. "Nay," he says, "God bids me do such an act, and I will do it straight ahead; and though such and such a thing you bid me do, since God has not commanded me, your bidding is no law to me. My knee was made to bow before my God and not to you, and my mind to believe what God reveals and not what you choose to tell." He is the free man whom the love of God makes free. What wonderful proofs we have had of this throughout history, for the men who have served God have been the most intrepid of mortals. Behold the burning fiery furnace, and the tyrant's face almost as red as the furnace itself; he can hardly speak, he is choked with passion, because the three young men will not worship the brazen image: but look how cool they are as they say "The God whom we serve is able to deliver us, but if not, be it known unto thee that we will not bow down to the image which thou hast set up." Here is the true style of manhood. The love of God makes heroes.

Give a man a resolve to serve God and he is endowed with wondrous perseverance. Look at the apostles, and martyrs, and missionaries of the faith, how they have pressed on, despite a world in arms; when a nation has been apparently inaccessible they have found an entrance; when the first missionary has died another has been ready to follow in his footsteps. The first church, in her weakness, and poverty, and ignorance, struggled with philosophy and wealth, and all the power of heathen Rome, till at last the weak overcame the strong, and the foolish overthrew the wise. They that serve God cannot be conquered, from defeats they learn victory; if they have to wait they can wait, for they have linked themselves with the lifetime of the Eternal, and God is in no hurry, nor are they. If to secure a hearing for truth takes a generation, let it take a generation; if it takes fifty generations, let it take them, but the deed shall be done, and the truth shall be preached, and the idols shall be abolished, and God shall be adored. O Lord, Thy service makes us akin to Thee. Blessed are they that wear Thy yoke! How strong they grow, how patient to endure, how firm to stand fast, how swift to run. They mount with wings as eagles when they learn to serve Thee.

The man who is led by the Holy Ghost to serve God is incited thereby to a zeal, a fervour, and a self-sacrifice to which nothing else could bring him. If you are familiar with the lives of the pioneers of the cross, and especially with the deaths of the martyrs, you will have seen what grace can make of men. Are not their deeds sublime? Why, these men laughed at impossibilities, and scorned difficulties. They counted the rack and the torture mere every-day things, and learned to smile in the face of death itself, because they served God. They never thought of running away, nor dreamed of retracting their testimony. Men said, "You are fools": they were prepared to hear them say that, and reckoned it a fulfilment of prophecy. The kings of the earth stood

up, and the rulers took counsel together and said, "We will stamp you out." They were prepared for that also, but they were not stamped out. They saw insuperable difficulties in their way to the eye of sense, but they did not care what the eye of sense saw, they used the eye of faith, and believing that they were engaged in the service of God they knew that God would be with them; they felt that all the forces of nature on earth, and all the angels in heaven, and all the attributes of deity, were on the side of the man who is doing God's service, and therefore they went straight on. I have heard say that a mad man will often display the strength of ten men; and I know there is another side to that fact, for when a man becomes possessed with the divine Spirit, and is carried right away with it, there is no telling what force is in him, he will be ten men in one. Why, there are cases in which a nation of men seem to have been bound up into one single humanity, when the man has surrendered himself to the service of God. Look at Martin Luther! You cannot regard him as an ordinary man, you cannot help viewing him as a conglomeration of a whole tribe of men. He believes he has truth to proclaim, and in God's name he preaches it, and if there are as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the tops of the houses it is nothing to Luther; and if the Elector of Saxony tells him that he will no longer shelter him, what will he do? Why he declares that he will shelter himself beneath the broad shield of the Eternal God. When the Pope issues a Bull against him he burns the document. What cared he? He would have burned Rome itself for that matter. The man had courage enough for anything. Or take John Knox, all emaciated, weak, and ready to die, and yet so God-possessed, so inspired, that he is not preaching for a quarter-of-an-hour before you think he will dash the pulpit to shivers; he shakes the whole of Scotland, and is more dreaded by the Popish Queen than an army of ten thousand men, for God is in the man. Oh, get to feel "It is God's will, and at all hazards I am going to do it, for God bids me." Why sir, you may as well try to stop the sun in its course as to stop a man who is mastered by that conviction. If ever this drivelling age of little men is to be lifted up into something like respectability, and redeemed from the morass of falsehood in which it lies festering, we must breed a race of men who mean to serve God, come what may, and to make no reckoning but this: "Is this right? It shall be done. Is this wrong? Then it shall cease." There must be no compromise, no talk about marring our usefulness and spoiling our position by being too exact. Usefulness and position! let them be marred and spoiled if truth comes in the way, for God is to be followed into the jungle, aye, and down the wild beasts' throats, and into the jaws of hell, if He leads the way. God must be the guide, and if we follow God it shall be well with us. But if we do not, that which man thinks easiest is after all the hardest. He thinks it easiest to be as near right as you can, but to run no risks; he thinks it best to keep peace at home, to yield many points, and not be too puritanic and too precise, and so on. That is the easy way, and the way which God abhors, and the way which will end in a festering conscience at last, and in being shut out of heaven. But the way to serve God is to be washed in the blood of Jesus, and then to obey the Lord without reserve, and seek His honour only. This is the way to heaven, and when we reach those blissful seats we shall be all in tune with the perfected, for they serve the Lord day and night, and find it bliss to do so. This preparation and service on earth is absolutely essential to the enjoyment of heaven above. May God grant you then, by His Holy Spirit, to yield yourselves up to God, henceforth to serve Him, and may we meet above. Amen.

A HOLY AND HOMELY RESOLVE

"I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart."—Psalm ci. 2.

THE hundredth Psalm is perhaps the best known song of praise in the Word of God. To sing the "Old Hundredth" has been a habit of worshippers from generation to generation—the custom of every succeeding age, as it is our custom still. "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands." Now, it is somewhat significant that the hundred-and-first, which immediately follows it, should be such a practical psalm,—all about how a man should walk in his house, how he should put away sin from his very eyes, and keep himself from evil companionship. What does it seem to teach us but this, that the best praise is purity, and that the best music in the world is holiness? If we would extol the Lord, the best way to do it is to labour to keep His mind before us, and to walk in His commandments. The sweetest sounds that ever came from the heaving bellows or the organ pipes can never have so much melody in them as a life that is tuned to the example of Christ. If we obey, we praise. He singeth best who worketh best for God. There is no praise that excels that which is like the praise of angels, "who do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word."

I suppose that this Psalm was written by David about the time when he was invested with regal authority, and took the reins of government in his hands. Three times, you will remember, he was anointed king. First, in the house of his father, Jesse the Bethlemite, when "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brethren." (1 Sam. xvi. 13). Secondly, at Hebron, when "the men of Judah came and there they anointed him king over the house of Judah." (2 Sam. ii. 4). And thirdly, when all the elders of Israel came to the king seven years and a half afterwards, "and David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel." (2 Sam. v. 3). With the solemn responsibilities of government in view, he sat himself down and considered how he would behave himself when he should come to the throne, and this was the resolution which he passed,

and laboured by the grace of God to carry out. It has been well said that, in this Psalm, David was merry and wise. He was merry, for he said, "I will sing of mercy and judgment"; and he repeated his resolution to sing by saying, "Unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing." Such merriment as that it were well for all of us to cultivate. We cannot sing too much when we sing unto the Lord; and, provided that the songs be the songs of Zion, the more of them we sing, and the merrier we are in singing them the better. But he was merry and wise, for, having spiritual merriment, he also sought to have spiritual holiness, and he passed this resolution—"I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way."

Our meditation, then, will be of a practical character, and it will divide itself thus. First, in the text we have *a comprehensive resolution:* "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way"; then, as if he started at his resolve, feeling how much he had resolved to do, and how little power he had to do it, we have, in the second place, *a devout ejaculation:* "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" But, still being firmly set upon his first hallowed resolution, he returns to it again; and that leads us, in the third place, to notice *a particular application of his resolution.* He applies it to his own domestic household life: "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." May God the Holy Ghost, who alone can make us practically holy, help us now while we consider the holy resolutions before us.

I. WHAT A COMPREHENSIVE RESOLUTION THIS IS! "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way."

With a full knowledge of all the care and circumspection it entailed on himself, and with as clear an apprehension of all the risks of popularity it involved among his subjects, this was David's *deliberate choice.* Influenced by the grace of God he, like his son Solomon after him, chose wisdom as the principal thing, and accounted the fear of the Lord as the choicest safeguard. Many a young man, if he were about to be promoted to a throne, would say, "I will behave myself grandly. In the dignified position to which I am about to be uplifted, I will be every inch a king. I will make them know how stately is my bearing, how sovereign is my word, how nobly I can play my part, how well a crown befits my head. There shall be no Shah or Sultan more dignified than I." David might have chosen an empty conceit, but he did better, he elected a discreet conduct. He said not "I will behave myself grandly," but "I will behave myself wisely." There are men, too, who, having David's opportunity, would have said, "I will have a merry time of it. Once let me mount to Israel's throne, I will give myself up to the full indulgence of every passion. There shall be nothing that my soul shall lust for, but what my hand shall grasp. Let me have horses and chariots in abundance, and singing men and singing women. I will get myself all manner of the delights of the flesh with whatsoever enjoyments I can devise. I will behave myself right joyously when once I come into power." Not so David. His deliberate choice was neither grandeur nor pleasure, but wisdom. "I will behave myself *wisely.*"

Now, brethren, there must be some of you just starting in life. Before that household is formed, sit you down and consider what is the best way of action. Or, perhaps, though you have not yet left your father's house, and commenced business for yourself, you contemplate doing so; this then is the time to take stock of your moral resolutions. Or, it may be, you are in such a condition that you are now starting afresh, commencing life anew, though perhaps farther advanced in years and experience of the world than the young man I have just referred to. Now, how will you act? what will you choose? You shall be happy indeed, if the grace of God leads you to say, "I choose wisdom, the truest and best wisdom. Be it mine to live as God would have me live: understanding His testimonies and yielding obedience to His laws. Fain would I live as the Incarnate Wisdom lived when He was here below. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way." I say it was David's deliberate choice. Oh, that every young man here would emulate his example! Oh, that every one of us in our present condition, and in full view of whatever prospects may be opening up before us, might be led now, once for all, with the full consent of all our powers, to say, "Whatever happeneth to me, this is my resolution. I desire to behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Should others run after gain or fame, ease or luxury, let them cry, 'Who will show me any good?' Let them make self their idol, or follow after gold. As for me, my soul is made up to this one purpose, and to seek but this one thing. I would be wise, my God, and behave myself wisely in a perfect way."

This deliberate choice of David was no doubt *suggested by a sense of necessity.* He felt that he needed to behave himself wisely. He was to be a king, and a foolish king is no ordinary fool. It used to be a proverb some three or four hundred years ago that every king was born a fool, and in truth they generally so acted as to merit the opprobrium. The common people were not too severe in the judgment they passed on their rulers. But alas for the misfortunes of a country whose king is a fool! You know what troubles came upon the Jewish nation through Rehoboam and others, who were too foolish to sway the sceptre righteously. David could hardly fail to remember that as he succeeded the dynasty of Saul, Saul's descendants would survive and seek to regain the crown, therefore he would need to act very discreetly to preserve himself from the pretenders and their faction. He knew that enemies would be sure to track his course, that if they could find any fault with him they would. He needed, therefore, to have great wisdom if he was to walk aright. "Well," say you, "but the lesson concerns people of rank and pedigree, it does not concern us, we are not going to be kings." Granted; that may be, so but you need wisdom in every grade of society, however lofty or however lowly it may be. The humblest waiting maid, as a Christian, needs wisdom to do her duty and adorn her position. Those entrusted with children need peculiar wisdom, for a child's mind may be warped by a servant as well as by a superior teacher. Any little misfortune happening to a child through your negligence may do it serious damage. If you are a tradesman, you need wisdom in such an age as this, with competition so fierce, and temptation so abundant. And I am sure, if you are a father, and you wish to see your children trained up in the fear of God, you have a task before you that might tax the wisdom of a Solomon: to judge this boy's disposition, and to understand that girl's character, so as neither to be too severe nor too lenient,—to know how to deal with each one just as a gardener

deals with each separate plant in the conservatory, the one wanting dry heat and the other needing moisture, and not injuring or destroying either by applying the wrong treatment. Many have been injudicious with their children, to their own anguish of heart in after days. O, parents and heads of households, masters of factories, managers of business houses, and you, too, ye working men and servants, ye all need wisdom, and you must have it, or you will make shipwreck. If the fisherman's little boat be wrecked through mismanagement, it is as bad for him, especially if he be drowned in it, as if he had lost the greatest steamship that ever ploughed the waters, and perished with the vessel. It is his all; and your all is embarked in the momentous voyage of life. If you make shipwreck of the life that God has given you, and the humble position in which He has placed you, it is your all, and to you it is as much a ruin as if you had been a monarch. You need to behave yourselves wisely whatever your vocation in the world may be.

Moreover, David recognised that *to behave oneself wisely one must be holy;* for he says, "I will behave myself wisely in a *perfect* way." Observe that. He felt he could not be wise if he were unacquainted with the true ideal of absolute unblemished perfection; wisdom lay there. Folly might suggest a specious but vacillating policy; that, however, would be an imperfect way. Always remember this. In common life the wisest thing is the right, straight, undeviating course. The right thing is always the wisest. Sometimes it looks as if really it was necessary to go off the straight line—(you mean to come back again, you know)—just to take a short cut across Bye-path Meadow, and leave the road, for it is covered with flint stones. Surely you think it must be better just to cut that corner off. It *seems* so. It *never is*. The tale of Bye-path Meadow is a book of lamentations from beginning to end. Thousands have tried it, but always with the same result. The wise man will keep along the king's highway, cost what it may. We have heard of young men who, under extraordinary pressure, have felt as if they must relax integrity a little to obey a master, and thus keep the position they hold. Well, from that time forward their nose has been to the grindstone as long as they have lived; and if they had had the manliness, let alone the godliness, to do the right it would have been the turning point in their entire career, and have saved them from a thousand sorrows. But you do not need to be a philosopher, and consult huge books, to discover how you ought to act under any circumstances. The way to act in every case is to fear God and keep His commandments. Constantly I receive letters asking special counsel for peculiar emergencies. It is to me an every-day annoyance. Persons tell me of painful dilemmas in which they are placed, and frequently wish me to reply to such and such a place, without giving their names. Now, they need not ever write to me for *indulgences*. I have no power to grant them. All trouble might be spared. Straight ahead! —that is the way to go in every case. If the conscience of man be elastic, the law of the Lord is inflexible. "What, and lose all I have?" Yes; you will lose less by doing right than you can possibly lose by doing wrong, for if a man were to lose all the property he possessed by a right action, it were better than that he should lose his soul by deliberately choosing to avoid poverty or acquire wealth instead of seeking to abide in the favour of God. "I will behave myself wisely," says David. But he knew that the perfect way, the way of right, the way of God was the way of wisdom. Prince Bismarck may have a long head and a far-seeing eye, and he may be able to dictate the shrewdest policy under the most distracting complications; but were you to consult him in any strait of your own he could not tell you anything that is wiser than this—to do justice and righteousness and truth towards your fellow-men, and to walk humbly with your God. Keep to the eternal principle which God has revealed. Keep to the sacred instinct which the Holy Spirit sows in every regenerate heart. Keep to the example of your Lord and Master, who has bought you with His precious blood. Should it cost you trouble, should it cost you your life, "it were better to enter into life eternal halt or maimed than, having two eyes or two feet, to be cast into hell fire." And "what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The perfect way is the wise way, and the wise way a perfect.

David seems to have felt that this resolution would cost him a great deal of effort and strength; he does not look upon it as a light thing; he weighed it in all its bearings before he said with so much emphasis I WILL. "I will—behave myself wisely in a perfect way." Though he does not say so much, he fully implies determination without power. My will or desire is to behave myself wisely; my dependence is on Him whose cause I espouse. The next clause seems to say, "I must have more grace, and I must get it too. I must have help more than ever I can find in myself; I must use all the means of grace; I must call in God to be my helper in this matter, for, whatever it may cost, I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way." He felt that character was too momentous to be trifled with, that it must be of sterling metal, or else it was mere dross, and that the actions of a man's life were too signal to be insignificant. It shocks me—I cannot help saying it—it shocks me to my very soul when I hear persons talk about the doctrines of grace, which are dear to my heart as life itself, who uphold the principles while they ignore the practices of godliness, for their lives are inconsistent with their professions. I have known professors that never talk so well about theology as they do when they are half drunk, and never seem to be so sound in the faith as when they can hardly stand on their legs. They will tell you that good works are nothing at all, and they glory in free grace. Ah, dear friends, God save you from being Mr. Talkative, who could descant upon free grace but never felt the power of it. If the grace of God does not save a man from drunkenness, and from lascivious conversation, from lies in trade and lewdness in jests, from slandering your fellow-men, and scowling at your fellow-Christians, then I think the grace of God must be a very different thing from what I read of in this precious book: either my judgment is at fault or your pretensions are spurious. The grace of God, where it does come, comes freely as the sovereign distinguishing gift of heaven, but it makes men to differ, and it makes them differ in holiness of character, and if a man shall say to me, "Character—I don't care anything about that," I am not quick to answer him, neither need anybody care much about him. I think Rowland Hill was right when he said that he did not believe in a man's religion if his cat and his dog were not

the better for it—if everybody in his house was not the better for it. If it does not make you, as a master, gentler and kinder to your servants, if it does not make you, as a servant, more respectful and more diligent,—if it does not make you, as tradesmen, more scrupulous and more honest,—if it does not make you, as a workman, less of an eye-servant,—if it does not, in fact, make you more moral (that is the least thing to say of it),—if it does not make you more holy (that is the higher thing by far), you may well question whether you know anything about the grace of God in your soul at all. David did not say, "Well, I am washed: He has made me whiter than snow, and He has created a new heart and a right spirit within me; and that is quite enough. As to my outward actions, what do they signify? We are not saved by works, you know: it is all of grace." Ah, but that is not the language of David or of any other legitimate child of God. It is this,—"I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way." I have heard say that where they talk a great deal about good works you will not find them; but I hope among those of us who talk much about grace good works will always be found, for where good works do not follow upon faith, such faith as there seems to be, is dead, being alone.

God grant you, dear friends, to take this as the resolution of every child of God, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way."

II. But now the text is interrupted. There is a break; there is a piece inlaid, as it were, of a different metal. It is AN EJACULATION. "O, when wilt Thou come unto me?"

Many inspired writers, without diverging from their train of thought, interline their purpose with a prayer. There is an old proverb that "kneeling never spoils silk stockings." Prayer to the preacher is like provender to the horse. It strengthens and cheers him to go forward. As the scribe halts to mend his pen, or the mower to whet his scythe, without loss of time, but rather with more facility to do his work; so you expedite instead of hindering your business by stopping in the middle of it to offer a word of prayer. So here it is written, "O, when wilt Thou come unto me?" and he means by that, "Lord, I want to be wise. Come and teach me. I want to behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Lord, come and sanctify me. I know not how to act till Thou dost instruct me. Open my lips that I may show forth Thy praise. Guide my feet that I may run in Thy commands. Keep my eyes that they look not upon sin. Hold back my hand from iniquity. When wilt Thou come unto me? I need the influence of Thy grace to guide me in Thy ways. Lord, come and teach me." Then he meant further, "Lord, come and assist me. If there be any holiness to which I have not yet attained, come, Holy Spirit, lift me up unto it. If there be any sin which I have not conquered, oh, come Thou conquering Spirit of holiness and overcome the evil. When wilt Thou come unto me? I am feeble, I can do nothing, but when I have Thy mighty aid I become strong and can perform all things. When wilt Thou come unto me?" It is a crying of his soul after divine teaching, divine direction, divine assistance; nor less, I believe, is it a yearning after divine fellowship. You know, beloved, we never walk aright unless we walk with God. As I have said that holiness is wisdom, so let me say that communion is the mother of holiness. We must see God if we are to be like God; and if from day to day we can live contented without a word from the mouth of God, go to business without prayer, come home and go to our beds without seeking the face of our Father who is in heaven—then, to walk wisely is impossible. The neglect of prayer is a fatal flaw in any life. Communion with God is so essential, and the disregard of it is such a folly, that it is simply ridiculous for the negligent man to talk about behaving himself wisely in a perfect way. Godliness is the soul of life. Get near to God—that is the thing. If we walk with Him we walk in the light, but if we get away from Him we walk in the darkness. It cannot be otherwise, and he that walketh in the darkness will stumble. He may not know at what he stumbles, but stumble he will. Only he who walks in the light will be able to pick his steps, and verify the blessed fact: that "If we walk in the light as God is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." And thus we are enabled to walk wisely in a perfect way when the light comes to us.

"I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O, when wilt Thou come unto me?" appears to me like an expression, of holy awe, as if he said, "Lord, I had need behave myself aright, for Thou art coming. I am a steward; Thou art my Master, and Thou art coming to say, 'Give an account of thy stewardship.' I am a servant. I need mind what I am about and how I acquit myself, for my Master can see me, and my Master is on the way to say to me, 'What hast thou done with thy talent? How hast thou laid it out?' When wilt Thou come unto me? It makes me feel a trembling in my soul, and brings the tears into my eyes, when I think of having to go before my Lord to give Him my account. Such a stewardship as mine will not easily be accounted for." I often envy George Fox, the Quaker, who, as he died, used these remarkable words, "I am clear, I am clear, I am clear!" Doubtless, he meant that he was "clear of the blood of all men." Grand thing for a minister to be able to say. It will want all the grace that God can give a man to be able to say that. Now I ask you, fathers of families, were you called upon at once without further notice, to give in your account, can you tell the Lord you are clear about your children? Mothers, can you say you are clear about your boys and girls, as to the way you have brought them up—as to your efforts for their souls? Masters, mistresses, are you clear about your servants? Young men, young women, are you clear about those that you work with, and in whose house you live? If the Lord were to say to you, "Come, now, I have entrusted thee with a talent; how hast thou used it?" are there not some of you who would have to go and take up that napkin in which you have hidden it away till it has grown rusty? "O, when wilt Thou come unto me?" seems to me a question full of solicitude. Lord, it may be Thou wilt come on a sudden with a surprise, for Thou hast told me that in such an hour as I think not Thou wilt appear. Am I ready? Am I able to give in a satisfactory account as to what I have done as Thy servant, in my general walk and conversation? Come, let me press these thoughts upon myself, and then upon you. "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way;" and well I may, since Thine eye is on me, O my God, and Thy day is coming when I must be put into the balances, and if I am found wanting, terrible must be my doom,

for other eyes than mine shall search my heart, and other scales than I am able to use shall give the final test, and settle once for all my endless state. God grant you to order your lives by His grace. You cannot do so without the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh that whenever the Lord shall come you may meet Him with joy.

III. Now to our third point. After a parenthesis of devotion, he returns with more earnestness to his resolution. IN A MOST PRACTICAL MANNER HE CONCENTRATES HIS AIM—"I will walk within my house with a perfect heart."

With his house or household in view, for which he felt a deep responsibility and a yearning anxiety, he applies himself with a delicate consideration to the state of his own heart. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." A very wise thing. Elisha healed the springs when the currents ran foul. It is of no use attempting to cleanse the courses when the fountain is corrupt. The thing is to heal the springs. The heart wants putting right. When the heart is right then all will be right. If anywhere we show our hearts it is at home. Then we wear our hearts upon our sleeves. Outside in the world it is not safe to show too much of our heart. There are some of us who always say everything that is uppermost. We cannot help it. We have not learned to be guarded yet, but we have had our knuckles rapped pretty dreadfully sometimes for our unguardedness. No doubt there are many men of a reserved disposition who go through the world more easily than those of a more open-minded character. At home everybody should be open-hearted and transparent. Hence the necessity that if we are to walk aright at home, the matter should begin with the heart being sound. If any man were to say to you, "I mean to be a good husband, a good father,"—if any woman shall say, "I mean to be a good mistress," or "a good servant," that will not do, unless you understand that the heart must first of all be altered. If the heart be right, other things will surely follow in their place. Now, the heart, if we are to walk rightly, must show itself in the house. "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." The heart must be perfect, and then we must show our heart in our actions. I think that it is a miserable thing when a man does not open his heart in the sacred precincts of his own home. I can understand his restraining his feelings abroad, for he may be conscious that he is rather among rivals than friends, but when at home that restraint is unbecoming. You know the sort of man whose hospitality is repulsive. I have been to see him at his house. I dare say you are welcome, but you would not think you were by the sinister greeting you receive when he shakes hands with you: his hand drops into your hand just like a dead fish. You talk with him, and he is perfectly indifferent. When he is most friendly there is not any freedom in his conversation. Well, now, see the way in which he treats his wife. No love. He is afraid of spoiling her. I recollect very well going to a house where I sat with the husband, and I heard a gentle tap at the door, and his lordship said "Come in." Who should enter but his wife. What a delightful picture of obedience! Knocking at a husband's door occurred to me as not the style of thing that most of us are accustomed to, or would like to see. I very soon perceived that she was the principal servant in the house. That was all he accounted her, and she had learnt to form no higher estimate of herself. The man had not got any heart. We talked about a son that was dead. Well, he seemed to regret that he was gone: he was a very good help to him in his business. That seemed to be the principal point about his deceased son: he was a great help to him in his business. No heart! no heart! no heart! no heart! It is worse when you see a woman with no heart. And there are some such; and if they are Christian people—well, I often wonder at the Lord's choice of any one of us, but I certainly do wonder when He chooses any of that sort. They do not seem to be the stuff out of which you can make a Christian. No feeling—hard "Gradgrindy" sort of people. They seem to think that people are just so many machine-wheels, to grind round at a regular rate. And the strong-minded woman simply puts a little oil now and then, occasionally, as a trade to the machinery, and administers it just in that style. No heart! Now, David did not mean to go through the world in this fashion. Oh, a house is all the better for having a heart inside it, and a man is a man, and he is more like God when there is a heart inside his ribs. When he gets home the children feel that father has got a heart, and as they climb his knees and smother him with kisses, they delight to know that he has a warm heart; and when he greets his dear relatives, especially those that are part and parcel of himself, he has got a soul that goes beyond his own little self, and is enlarged and inspires the whole of the family. Oh, give me heart! and that is what David meant when he said he would behave himself wisely. But when he was in his own house he would walk with a perfect heart. He would be hearty in everything he did and said.

Well, now, having noticed those two things, that the heart must be right, and that the heart must be expressed, the next thing is that the conduct at home must be well regulated. "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." The Christian man at home should be scrupulous in all departments within his house. We may have different rooms there, but in whatever room we are we should seek to walk before God with a perfect heart. Ah, dear friends, there are many professors that fail in this. I am not disposed to pry into your homes; I do not want to undertake the task. It would be a sad thing if it were part of a minister's duty to be peeping through your keyholes, seeing how you act. Still we have reason to fear that some people who pass current as saints abroad behave themselves like devils at home. It used to be so, and it is so still, and you may depend upon it the *man* is what he is *at home*. This is a simple but a crucial test of character. If a man does not make his family happy, and if his example be not that of holiness in the domestic circle he may make what pretension of godliness he likes but his religion is base, worthless, mischievous. The sooner he gets rid of such a profession the better for himself, for then he may begin to know what he is and where he is, and seek the Lord in spirit and in truth. It is at home that the want of true religion will do most damage. If you are a hypocrite, and go out into the world, you will soon be found out, and the people who observe you will not be much influenced by your example. They will come to the conclusion that you are what you are, and they will treat you as such, and there will be an end of it. But that will not be so with little Master Johnny who sees his father's actions. He is not able to criticise

but he has a wonderful faculty for imitation. And, mother, it is not likely that little Polly will begin to say, "Mother is inconsistent." No, she does not know that, but she will take it for granted that mother is right and her character will be fashioned upon your pattern, and you will be injuring her for life unless the grace of God wonderfully prevent. Why, at home, to our children, especially when they are young, we are, as it were, little gods; they take their law from us, and their conduct is shaped according to the pattern we set before them. Round the hearth, if anywhere, holiness ought to be conspicuous, for there holiness is most beautiful, most useful, and most productive.

It is a blessed thing for some of us that we can look back upon a father's example and a mother's example with nothing but unalloyed gratitude to God for both. But there are others among you, who, in looking back, must say, "I thank God I was delivered from the evil influence to which I was subjected as a child." Do not let your child ever have to say that of you, dear friend, but ask for grace that in your own house you may walk with a perfect heart. For surely, dear friends, if we are not living in our households as we ought to do, this above all common faults and infirmities is one of the most disparaging and condemnatory marks wherewith we can possibly be attainted. In the world we may be under some pressure, but at home we are left free, for every man's house is his castle; and if, inside his own castle, he does not walk before God, then he stands condemned by the depravity of his temper and his habits. Outside, men are checked and kept within decent bounds by the example and the observation of their fellow-men, so that they are not altogether what they seem, but they are partly regulated by what they wish to appear. Even when they are in the church they are under some restraint; they are constrained to show some deference to the place and the assembly, but at home they are altogether untrammelled; they can think aloud, speak without premeditation, follow their own tastes, and gratify their natural inclinations. There, therefore, if anywhere, the man is what he is. Now you need not tell me what kind of appearance you will put on next Sunday morning. You need not tell me that. I would rather ask you to judge yourself by your deportment on Saturday night. I do not particularly ask you how you feel on Thursday night at this particular hour. How will you be at half-past nine, and how will you be to-morrow morning, and what will you be to your servants, to your employers, to your children, to your neighbours? If God, by His infinite grace and the power of His Holy Spirit, helps you to walk with a perfect heart at such times and in such places, then will you be an honour to the Church of God, and you will have a blessing upon your own soul.

Now, the things that I have talked of seem to be very homely, but indeed they are most important. I love to expound Christian doctrine: I love to open up the promises. This is all sweet work, but we must have the precepts. We shall never have a large increase to an unholy church, or, if we do, that increase will be a bane instead of a blessing. I believe that the greatest power in the world, next to the ministry of the Word is, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the holy living of Christian families. Let us plant in this dark world garrisons of holy men and women with their children about them, and this will be a means whereby the world shall be conquered for Christ.

Ah, I may be addressing some who have no part or lot in true religion. It is just possible that they are at the heads of households, and yet they may have never considered this question about walking wisely. Permit me to suggest to you how necessary it is. I have known men who, though very ungodly themselves, have been shocked at the idea of their children growing up in worldliness and wretchedness. And I have, on the other hand, known persons converted late in life who never could forgive themselves when they looked upon their children who had grown up in sin. I recollect very well a poor woman who had received good under my ministry, and found the Saviour. She earned her living by washing. When I went into the house to see her she hastily wiped her hands, and, as she greeted me, the tears were in her eyes when she spoke about her conversion, and she wrung her hands in bitterness, for she said, "I was left with six little children when my husband died. As a lonely widow I worked hard for them; I never had any help from anybody, but I brought them up myself, and now my son is this, and my daughter is that, but," she said, "they are every one of them unconverted—every one of them; and after I was converted myself I found that I had lost the opportunity of influencing them. I never took my children to the house of God. My eldest boy, when I went to see him the other day, and asked him to go with me, said, 'No, no; you never took us when we were little, and you need never expect us to go now.'" That was the trouble that bowed her down with heaviness when she was relieved of the former obligations to find them in daily bread. O, fathers and mothers, if you are not converted early you will live to regret, if God does save you at all, that you saw your youngsters grow up till they got beyond your influence, and they grew up unsaved. You young persons who are just commencing life, I do charge you; perhaps God has sent you here that I may ring these counsels and cautions in your ears. Do pause, think, consider, look; and may God give you grace and sense enough to see that it wants wisdom to steer the barque through this voyage of life, and that wisdom is to be only had from heaven. May you bend your knee at this very hour, and say, "Lord, give me Thy grace; give me a renewed heart; give me Christ to be my Saviour, and help me to behave myself rightly in a perfect way, till Thou shalt bring me to see Thee in heaven in Thy glory." God fulfil to you this petition, for Jesu's sake. Amen.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE DESTITUTE

" He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer."—Psalm cii. 17.

OBSERVE that the verse which precedes the text describes the Lord as appearing in His glory. His Zion is to be built up, and therefore her King puts on the robes of His splendour. The imagery sets forth the Lord as a great monarch, superintending with great pomp and state the building of a sumptuous palace. We see Him commanding the architects and the workmen, and passing from point to point amid attending courtiers. Trumpets are sounding, banners are displayed, princes and nobles glitter in their array, and the King appears in His glory. But who is this whose mournful wail disturbs the harmony? Whence comes this ragged mendicant who bows before the Prince? Surely he will be dragged away by the soldiery, or cast into prison by the warders, for daring to pollute so grand a ceremonial by such wretched presumption! Were there not streets, and lanes, and dark corners enough for beggars? Why need he thrust himself in where his rags are so much out of place? But see, the King hears him, the sound of the trumpet has not drowned the voice of the destitute. His Majesty listens to him while he asks an alms, and in matchless compassion pities all his groans. Who is this King but Jehovah? Of Him only is it said, " He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." The verse is enhanced in its beauty by its connection, even as a fair jewel receives an added beauty from the lovely neck upon which it sparkles. Let us read the verse again in this soft silver light. " When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." It is clear that the heart of the Lord delights in the cries of needy souls, and nothing can prevent His hearing them. No occupation is so sublime as to distract the Lord's attention from the prayer of the humblest of His mourners. The songs of seraphs, the symphonies of angels, the ceaseless chorales of the redeemed, are not more sweet in the ears of the all-merciful Jehovah than the faint breathings of poor dying wretches who confess themselves condemned by His justice, and, therefore, appeal to His loving-kindness and tender mercy.

This morning I am going to preach about the destitute. I hope there are many of them here; at any rate many are here who once were destitute, and would be so now if it were not for the riches of divine grace. Hear me, ye poor in spirit, and may the Lord comfort you by my words. Our first work this morning shall be to speak about a *spiritual pauper*, the " destitute "; then we will talk of *his special occupation*—it is clear that he has taken to begging, for the text speaks twice of his prayer, and prayer is the essence of begging; then, thirdly, here is *a very natural fear* of this spiritual mendicant, namely, that his prayer will not be regarded, and will even be despised; and then, fourthly, the whole text is *a most comfortable assurance* to this spiritual mendicant that his begging will be successful, for the Lord of whom he begs will regard his prayer, and will not despise his supplication.

I. First, then, let us go down among the beggars, and look upon THE SPIRITUAL PAUPER. It will do you good to have your spiritual gentility shocked for a while, and it will be a lasting benefit if you are made to feel anew your own poverty, and to cry, " I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

The spiritual pauper is, in our text, described as *destitute*, and you may take the word in its extreme sense—the spiritually poor man is not only positively but utterly, thoroughly, terribly destitute. He is destitute of all wealth of *merit* or possession of righteousness. Time was, years ago, when he was as good as anybody else in his own esteem, and perhaps a little better; he was rich, and increased in goods and had need of nothing. True, he had some faults but he considered them to be outweighed by his excellences, and if he fell sometimes into error and sin, he had most ingenious excuses with which to shift the blame—either some companions beguiled him, or else his circumstances necessitated the fault. He was a sinner, he admitted that, but he put his own meaning upon the title, so that he did not feel degraded by it. He was no vagrant or pauper in the universe of God, but rather a fellow-citizen with the worthy, and of the household of self-satisfaction. He was at least as good as the average of men, and possibly better than, under present circumstances, men may generally be expected to be, and if he did not actually claim anything of God by way of merit it was because he deferred to the crotchets of the Protestant religion, but in his inmost soul he really thought he could have maintained a decent position on the score of good works, and have shown up a very presentable righteousness had it been asked for. He never did in his heart see anything amiss in the Pharisee's prayer, " God I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." He himself reflected with a very great deal of comfort upon the fact that he had never been a drunkard, that no profane word had dropped from his mouth, that he had been upright in his business, and that to all intents and purposes he was a reputable and respectable man, worthy of the divine regard. This, however, is all changed. The man has come down from an emperor to a penniless beggar. His outward character may not have changed, but his own estimate of himself is as different as light from darkness; for now he sees the hollowness of an outward morality which does not proceed from a renewed heart; now he knows that the sins which he has committed were exceeding sinful, and that the religious professions he has made, being nothing better than mere pretences, the heart not going with them, were a mockery of God and an insult to the Most High. See him, then, you rich men; here was one of yourselves, richer than the most, and far superior to the majority, but now he is as poor as the unfeathered bird which cruelty has flung from its nest; he has no good work that he dares bring before his God, but he owns to ten thousand thousand sins every one of which accuses him before the Most High, and demands punishment at the hands of justice. He feels this, and shivers in his wretched rags. Do you inquire, Where is he? Is he not here at this moment? Can I not see his tears, and hear

his groans? "God be merciful to me, a sinner," is his cry. He is so far from claiming anything like merit that he loathes the very thought of self-righteousness, feeling himself to be guilty, undeserving, ill-deserving, and hell-deserving, meriting only to be banished from the presence of God for ever.

There is a kind of destitution which is bearable. A man may be quite penniless, but he may be so accustomed to it that he does not care; he may even be more happy in rags and filth than in any other condition. Persons of this order are well known to the guardians of our workhouses. Have you ever seen the lazzaroni of Naples? Notwithstanding all their attempts to move your compassion, they generally fail after you have once seen them lying on their backs in the sun, amusing themselves the live-long day. You feel sure that beggary is their natural element; they are perfectly satisfied to be mendicants like their fathers, and to bring up their sons to the profession. The ease of poverty suits their constitutions. But the spiritual pauper is not a member of this free and easy lazzaroni club by any manner of means, he is destitute of *content*. The poverty which is upon him is one which he cannot endure, or for a moment rest under; it is a heavy yoke to him, he sighs and cries under it. His is hungering and thirsting after righteousness. He knows there is something better than the state into which he has fallen, and he pines for it; he knows that if he does not escape from his present condition, he will fall into woes infinitely worse, and he trembles at the grim prospect of it, and therefore he sighs and cries before God in bitterness of spirit. "Have mercy upon Thy poor destitute creature! Have mercy upon Thine undeserving servant." He has no contentment in his poverty, his penury is irksome to the last degree, and he cannot complacently endure it.

A man, however, if he be without money, is still not utterly destitute if he has *strength*, a stout pair of limbs, and can work, and earn wages. Such a man will soon get out of his destitution; only give him a chance, and those rags will be exchanged for decent attire. Skin and bone he will be no longer, he will improve into good condition, only give him employment and fair pay. But this is not the case with the spiritual pauper. He has no merit, and he cannot earn any. His strength is gone. Once he was so strong that he used to think if heaven were to be merited by good works he could do it; or, if not, if eternal life were to be had by conversion, and by believing in Christ, he could be converted at any time, and believe in Jesus just whenever he liked. Religion appeared to him to be a very easy matter. "Only believe, and you shall be saved,"—could not that be managed in the twinkling of an eye? If ever he heard a sermon about "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it," he disliked the doctrine and the preacher; he could not away with such narrow-minded views. He felt that he had all requisite spiritual power within himself, and he did not believe either in natural depravity or spiritual inability. He had done well in business, and was a self-made man; he had forced himself up from the lowest ranks into an honourable position, and surely he could do the same in the matters of his soul as in the affairs of the world. That gentleman is not one of the destitute, you clearly see; and I have nothing to say to him except that I pray God to take away his fancied power from him, and make him feel himself to be weak as water. The spiritual pauper feels that he can do nothing aright, and that he cannot even think a good thought without the help of divine grace. As to believing in Jesus, simple as that matter is, he has come to this pass:

> "I would but can't believe,
> Then all would easy be;
> I would but cannot; Lord, relieve,
> My help must come from Thee."

He is so staggered with doubts and fears, and so bemisted and beclouded with dark remembrances of his past sins, that he does not seem able to fix his eye upon the atoning sacrifice, and to find comfort there. He is destitute in the very worst sense, because he is "without strength."

Still a man may be very poor at present, and he may have no power to earn his bread, but he may not be utterly destitute, for he may have an estate in *reversion;* when his long-lived uncle dies he may come into a fortune. It may be that in some years' time, if the steed can live till then, the grass will be up to its knees. Many a man pressingly needs present help, though by-and-by he will have enough and to spare. The spiritual pauper has nothing to look forward to which can at all alleviate his soul's distress; his future is even gloomier than his present. Well do I remember when I looked out upon eternity and saw nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation for me. I peered into the future, and I could not expect to live a better life, for I had so often tried and failed, that I feared I might be left to a callous conscience, and so go from bad to worse; in fact I knew I should, unless Christ would interpose and save me. And as for my hope in another world, alas, alas! I saw nothing but the great white throne, an angry Judge, and everlasting fire in hell. Hopes I had none, but fears numberless. Such is the outlook of every man whom God really convinces of sin. He is stripped of hope itself, and the man who has lost hope has lost all, and is destitute with a vengeance; for him there remaineth neither in heaven nor in earth any hope whatever, unless he can obtain one as the gift of grace. He has indeed reason to cry unto his God.

A man who is spiritually destitute is destitute of all *friends* who can help him; for those who love him best can only pray for him, they cannot save him. We who would help him if we could can only point him to the Saviour; but then he has a blind eye, and how shall he see while he is in the dark?

He is also destitute of all *plans* for doing better. Schemers sometimes manage to live by their wits when they can no longer subsist by their hands, but the poor soul who is really destitute before God has not even a plan by which to help himself. All his schemes have turned into mere wind-bags, and his hopes from his own wisdom have altogether failed him. He has, in fact, nothing left, nothing whatever; he is as naked as Adam and Eve beneath the trees of the garden when God their offended Maker met them, and they sought to cover themselves with fig-leaves. He has come to the very lowest degree of spiritual penury; it is only necessary for death to put an end to his present misery for him to be in the ruin that will never end. Such is the case of the spiritually destitute.

I do not know whether I have managed to photograph in any way the state of any really distressed

conscience here ; I have tried to do so, but if I have failed, suffer me to add another sentence or two. If any in this place feel that they are sinful, feel that they deserve the wrath of God, feel that they cannot help themselves, that unless infinite mercy shall interpose they must for ever be lost, if, moreover, they cannot discover any reason why they should be saved, cannot find any argument which could move the heart of justice to have pity on them, they are just the very persons intended by my description and by the text, and I pray them not to put away from them the comfort which the text contains, but listen to it as we read it again : " He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer."

So much, then, for the spiritual pauper.

II. Secondly, here is HIS SUITABLE OCCUPATION, —he has taken to *begging*, and it is a very fitting occupation for him, indeed there is nothing else he can do. When a man is shut up to one course, it is useless to raise objections to his following it, for necessity has no law, and hunger will break through stone walls. The man can do nothing else but beg, and so, since we cannot let him perish, and he will not himself perish through lethargy, he turns to do the only thing he can do, namely, to begging and praying. Blessed is that soul which is shut up to prayer. It thinks itself accursed, but indeed now the blessing is come upon it. If you feel you cannot do anything but pray, but equally feel that pray you must, I have hopes of you. If now you dare not appeal to justice, but simply cry " Mercy, Lord ! mercy, mercy ! I have no merits, but, oh, forgive me for Thy mercy's sake ! " I am right glad of it. Why, dear man, you are shut up in the very same place where David was shut up when he could only say, " Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness ; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." You are shut up where every soul has been shut up that ever was saved, for unless you are driven to own that nothing can save you but undeserved mercy, pity, and free grace, you have not come to the place where God can meet with you in pardon ; but when you stand as a condemned criminal at the bar, and plead " Guilty, guilty, guilty," then you stand where God can look upon you with an eye of pity, and can save you.

The trade of begging is one which is most suitable for a spiritual pauper, because, if he cannot do anything else, I warrant you he can do this right well. They say in London that many of our beggars are mere actors, they mimic distress ; if so they do it uncommonly well, and are splendid imitations. But I will venture to say this, that nobody will ask help so well as the man whose distress is real ; he needs no one to teach him, starvation is his tutor. Take away his diffidence, and give him courage enough, and his distress will make him eloquent. You may by chance have been accosted by a man who sought alms with awful eagerness, hunger looking out of his eyes, and speaking from his pinched countenance. He has held on to you with terrible vehemence, and at last has said, " I have not eaten anything myself for many hours." You can see by his very looks that it is true ; and he adds, " I could bear to famish myself, but I have seven little children at home, and unless I take them bread they will be crying about me, and therefore I do entreat you to help me." Now, if all this be true, and you look into the case and find it so, the man's case speaks for itself, and he is the man to move your heart. He does not need to go to a boarding-school to learn elocution ; want schools his tongue, the words drop into their right places of themselves ; and, as to his gestures and postures, they are all apt and telling, though no teacher of rhetoric ever gave him a lesson. He will be sure to plead rightly, the suit lies heavy on his heart. Nobody prays before God like a man who feels his sins. He cries, " God be merciful to me a sinner," and says it as it ought to be said. Ah, brethren, some of us have to pray often in public, but we never pray so well as when we feel your needs, and the needs of the times, and of the country pressing urgently upon our hearts. You yourselves also pray best when your own sense of sin and need most burden your souls. You are the men to pray, I say, you destitute people. You make the best of beggars, for you are most in need ; you pray best who feel that you must have mercy or die.

There is this to be said about the spiritual beggar, that he is begging where he is permitted to beg. I remember being in Paris on a certain day in the year, I forget the name of the *fête*, and I was astonished at the immense number of the beggars, and at their pertinacity and daring. I had not observed them before in such swarms and such force, but I found that on one special day licence was given to the poor, the lame, the halt, and the blind, to persecute everybody for alms. I warrant you they made good use of the permission, and needed no pressing or inviting. Ho, spiritual paupers, this day, even this day, is a day of grace ; a warrant has come from the King's court that you may ask and it shall be given you, you may seek and you shall find, you may knock and it shall be opened unto you. Yea, every day is a free-grace day, a festival for prayer ; long as you live and are in necessity, you have the King's permit to open your mouth wide and He will fill it ; you have His royal authority that you may come to His mercy-seat and ask in every time of need right boldly for whatsoever you want. Well may the spiritual pauper take to a trade which is permitted by the King of Heaven. He is mendicant by appointment to the King's Most Excellent Majesty.

Yea, more, spiritual begging is commanded by supreme authority. " Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." It is the privilege of a sinner to be allowed to ask for grace ; it is also the duty of the sinner to seek mercy at the Saviour's hand. " Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace." " Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." These are promises, but they are also precepts, precepts with the weight of commands. Oh, who that is poor will be slow to beg when the Lord of love Himself commands him to ask ? At the back of this, there is an implied certainty, there is a sacred promise that he who asks shall surely receive, for God would not tantalise us by commanding us to pray if He had not at the same time intended to give.

Let me further remind every spiritually destitute man here that he may pray with confidence, because begging has been the source of all the riches of the saints. Some of them are rolling in heavenly wealth, for all things are theirs. Their mouths are satisfied with good things, and their hearts are filled with gladness. You may see their riches, for the joy of

their countenances, and the bliss of their daily work are visible to all. Do you not envy them, for they feed on Christ every day, and have the bread of heaven always on their tables, and the water of life always flowing at their feet? Do you know how they became so rich? I will whisper it in your ear. They gained all they have by begging. "Not very creditable to them," say you. No, but wonderfully creditable to HIM who gave them all they have, and they are accustomed to give all the honour and the glory to that dear, and blessed, and generous Saviour, who has never denied them their requests. If the richest saint on earth were to take you into his spiritual mansion, he would say to you "Do you see this treasure, and that covenant blessing, and yonder priceless boon? I obtained all these by begging. I asked and I received; all that I have came to me in that way." The Lord has said, "For this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Now, since all the saints on earth have grown rich by beggary, I recommend you poor destitute souls to take to the business, and you will find it the most remunerative one that ever you undertook. You cannot dig, do not be ashamed to beg. Your digging will dig your own grave, that is all you will do by your self-righteous efforts, but you will obtain grace for the asking for, pardon for the asking for, and heaven for the asking for. Who would not be a spiritual beggar when he may be thus enriched?

One thing more I will say, and leave this point: you may begin begging directly. You, who are poor in spirit, may begin begging directly. I could not start in some trades to-morrow morning; I should want the capital, and should need to go to the wholesale traders and get what I needed to stock me in trade; but a beggar wants neither stock nor capital to begin with, all his capital lies in his want of capital. He never makes a good beggar till he has nothing left, and then, when his clothes are rags, and his shoes are old and clouted, and he himself looks sick and wan, then he is the man for his business. And you, sinner, you want no preparations in order to ask for mercy; nothing need be done in you, or for you, in order to prepare for the mercy of Christ; you may come to Him just as you are. Tarry not to mend or wash, or cleanse; come in your foulness, come in your rags, come in your loathsomeness, come just as you are; the worse you feel yourself to be, the more room for the display of the wonders of divine grace.

"Cast thy guilty soul on Him,
Find Him mighty to redeem;
At His feet thy burden lay,
Look thy doubts and cares away;
Now by faith the Son embrace,
Plead His promise, trust His grace."

Still, perhaps, there will be some here who say, "I do not feel in a fit state to ask for mercy." My dear friends, it is your unfitness that is your fitness. Your poverty fits you for alms, your sickness fits you for the physician, your being nothing fits you to have Christ made all in all to you; your emptiness is all He wants, that He may fill it with all the fulness of His grace. Take to begging, brother; that is the way to be rich towards God.

III. But now, thirdly, here is THE MENDICANT'S VERY NATURAL FEAR. He is afraid that the great King will despise his prayer, or will not regard it, and he is afraid of this, first, from the greatness and holiness of that God to whom he addresses himself. He is thrice holy; can He regard the cry of one who has been a drunkard, or a harlot? He is infinitely great and fills immensity; can He listen to the prayer of a poor little boy, or of a grey-headed old rebel, whose only inheritance is a place in the workhouse? Can He look on such an insignificant ephemera as I am, the creature of a day, whose non-existence would make no flaw in the universe, whose damnation would be no loss to Him? Can He look on worthless me? Infinite, and yet listen to my sigh; eternal and yet catch my tears! Can it be? Beloved, many are a long while in distress of soul, because they do not remember that there is a Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. God is thus glorious, but He is not far from any of us; for there is One who is God, and at the same time a man like ourselves, even Jesus, who has compassion on the ignorant, and on those that are out of the way. Cease ye then to fear, for the gulf is bridged. You may approach the Lord, for Jesus has paved the way.

The same fear takes another shape. Trembling souls are afraid that God can never look upon them in love, because their prayer itself is so unworthy of notice. "I should not wonder if God despised my prayer," says one, "for my fellow-men despise it. I should not like them to hear it, it is such a broken, disconnected affair, I could not expect my own parents to have patience with it, and when I get up from my knees I despise my own prayer, and hardly dare think I have prayed. I feel I have tried and failed. I have only groaned because I could not groan, and mourned because I could not mourn." Ah, yes; but the Lord looketh at the heart, and He does not regard the eloquence nor the style of prayer after the manner of man. The Pharisee's was a very fine prayer I dare say, and very well delivered; the poor publican's prayer was a very poor affair by the side of it, and rather undelivered than delivered, for he would not so much as lift his eyes towards heaven, but the Lord heard it and had mercy upon him. Go and groan before God, that is praying. Go and weep before Him, that is praying. You need not get the book down and turn up a collect. I do not know of one that would quite suit a sinner in utter destitution. Men seldom use book prayers when they come before God in real earnest. Forms will suffice for playing at praying, but when you come to real earnest work with God, you have to put your books away, and to plead with the Lord with the first words that fly forth from your soul like sparks from a piece of hot iron beaten with the hammer. When the heart boils and swells with grief, then prayers roll down from the soul like lava from Vesuvius because it cannot help running over, and burning its way. That is the way to pray. May God help us to pray out of our very souls, and then it matters not what formt he prayer takes, it is beautiful before the Most High.

"Yes," says one, "but I am afraid my prayer may be disregarded, because my wants are so great. If a mendicant in the street asks for a copper, he may get it; if he were even to venture to ask for silver, he might gain it; but if he asked for thousand-pound notes he might stand a long time in the street corner before he would find one who would supply him. Now, sir, my prayer is for great things—I want the Saviour's blood upon my conscience, I want the Holy Ghost Himself to renew my nature, I want the whole Godhead to come and bless me, I want heaven itself,

nothing short of that will satisfy me; and how can I hope that such a great prayer as mine will be answered." Ah, dear soul, you are dealing with a great God, and a great Saviour, and great promises; do not be afraid to ask great things, rather be afraid of limiting the Holy One of Israel, Open your mouth wide and He will fill it.

Ah, and I think I hear one exclaim, "He may well despise my prayer, for my faith is so weak. If I had more faith, I think then He would listen to me." Well, but the Lord has never said anywhere that He despises little faith. Can you find a passage of Scripture in which He says, "I will trample on the bruised reed, and I will quench the smoking flax?" If you have ever read a passage of Scripture like that, I never have; the whole run of the Bible goes the other way. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." It seems that the poor and the weak are the chief objects of His care, and are not, therefore, rejected. Suppose He bruised and crushed the mustard seed, where would be the tree that is to grow out of it? Suppose he despised the day of small things, where would the day of great things be? "Behold thy King cometh, meek and lowly, riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass"; and as He comes, the little children gather round Him, and they say, "Hosanna." See, He does not rebuke them; rather does He say, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength, because of Thine enemies." Now, your faith is like a little child; God will grant you full manhood yet, but even now He does not despise your feebleness; He looks upon it with favour, and He hears your prayer.

Now, somewhere in this place there is a young man in the same condition as that in which I was found some twenty-three years ago. He has learned to weep in secret before God, and pray for mercy, but he has not found it yet, and he is tempted to give it all up. Hearken, dear brother, to this word: "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." Cry on, and look away to Jesus, and you shall find all your destitute soul wants, and one of these days you who have learned to pray shall learn to praise and bless the prayer-answering God who did not suffer the soul of the destitute to perish. The Lord visit you at this moment and give you peace!

IV. Our last head is to be this, our text affords to the destitute beggar A MOST COMFORTABLE ASSURANCE. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute." Now, beloved, whatever is in Scripture we accept as infallible truth. We dare not doubt when God speaks; if He says it is so, it is so. Others may doubt the inspiration of Scripture, but we have not gone that length yet. Now, poor destitute sinner, if you believe the Scripture to be inspired, believe this passage—"He will regard the prayer of the destitute and will not despise their prayer." Now, there is something about this text I want you to notice, namely, that God, in order that destitute sinners should never doubt His willingness to hear their prayers, has left this on record, with a very special note appended to it. I will read you the note, which is in the eighteenth verse. "This shall be written for the generation to come, and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord." You see the Lord not only said that He would regard the prayer of the destitute, but he added, "This shall be written," because, when a poor soul is in doubt and fear, there is nothing like having it in black and white. God has said it, but, says He, they shall not merely go by their ears, they shall see with their eyes. "This shall be written." Look at it, there it stands before you, written by the pen of inspiration, no doubt about it. "This shall be written for the generation to come," that is, for you. It was not merely true in David's time, or in Hezekiah's time, but this shall be written for the generation to come; written for you and for your children, that God will hear the prayer of the destitute; blessed be His name for that. I recommend you, when next you kneel down to pray, to put your finger on this verse and say, "Lord, I have Thy word for it, nay more, I have Thy writing for it. Behold I put it to Thee,—Thou hast said, 'This shall be written,' O fulfil this written pledge to me." When a man brings my own hand-writing to me and says, "You promised me, and there is the writing," I cannot get away from it; and how shall the Lord draw back from what He has said, "This shall be written for the generation to come?" Oh, it must stand true. Be of good courage, poor seeking sinner, God will hear you.

Remember, too, that when the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, He used to choose for His associates the destitute. "This man receiveth sinners," said they, "and eateth with them." "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." He would sometimes sit in the house of the Pharisee, but while He was there His heart was after the poor woman that came behind Him and washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head, for His heart always was with needy sinners. Upon the self-righteous He looked with an eye of indignation. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees," said He, but to poor guilty sinners He always looked with eyes of tenderness; He was ready and glad to receive them; in fact, it was His life's work to seek and to save that which was lost. Do not be afraid to come then. Jesus has made a feast, and has not called in His rich friends nor acquaintances; but He has brought in the poor and lame, and halt and blind, for they cannot recompense Him, but will for ever love Him; and such are you. Come, and welcome; come, and welcome! Jesus cast out none when He was here; He will cast out none that come to Him now.

Remember, in the matter of praying, that God loves to hear sinners pray. We may be quite sure of that, because He teaches them how to pray. There are passages in Scripture where God even puts the words into sinners' mouths. He says, "Take with you words, and say unto Him, 'Receive us graciously, and love us freely, so will we render the calves of our lips.'" God must be very fond of prayer, when He teaches us how to pray. Do not be afraid, therefore, to pour out those broken sentences which God the Holy Spirit has taught you.

He has never despised a sinner's prayer yet. Search and look down the chronicles of His word, and see what sinner He rejected. Look round among your kinsfolk and acquaintance, and find out one who ever fled to Him for mercy and was repulsed. I appeal to those who are saved on earth, and they will tell you that it was infinite love and mercy that accepted them. If I could appeal to the white-robed hosts in heaven, they would all tell you that, like yourselves, they were destitute; they had to come *in forma pauperis* before the Lord, and He did not despise them, nor disregard their prayers.

I wish I could take a poor trembler by the hand and say, "Dear brother, come with me." Fain would I do it; I have a hope of heaven this morning, and I will tell you what it is. I am as destitute this day of all righteousness of my own as any one here can be. My eye is fixed upon the Lord Jesus on the accursed tree. There was He, my substitute, and I trust in Him, and in Him alone. Now, if you are enabled by the Spirit of God to look right away from yourself and your misery to Christ Jesus, the sinner's Saviour, you shall have this very morning the peace of God which passeth all understanding to keep your heart and mind, and you shall know that you are saved.

I am going to close with a remark upon another subject. You will have noticed, I dare say that the whole of this verse is connected with the building up of Zion. Hence there must be some connection between the two, and it is just this: the Church of God must never expect to see great revivals, nor to see the world converted to Christ, till she comes before the Lord as *destitute*. I am afraid that when we plead most with God, we still feel we are a very respectable community of Christians, with a large number of ministers, and a number of wealthy laymen, a large amount of chapel property, and a good deal of power and influence. Thou sayest, "I am rich and increased in goods." It may be that all this is the ensign of your poverty, and we may be naked, and poor, and miserable. But when we get right down, and feel we are nothing and nobody, and we could not save a soul if our lives depended upon it; that we are weak as water, and must come to God as utterly impotent apart from the power of the Spirit of God, then will the Lord appear in His glory, and His destitute church shall become rich in His riches, strong in His strength, and victorious in His might. We must be brought down. I see among the various denominations too much emulation as to their position; we stand in this position, and we in the other, and the voluntaries are doing such wonders. But, brethren, we are just a lot of poor unworthy sinners, who owe everything we have to the sovereign grace of God, and what we are to do for God must be accomplished, not by might nor by power, but by His Spirit. When we feel this, the building of Zion will come, and not till then. The Lord send it!

THE TENDER PITY OF THE LORD

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."—Psalm ciii. 13, 14.

DAVID sang of the compassionate pitifulness of our heavenly Father, who will not always chide, nor keep His anger for ever. He had proved in relation to himself that the Lord is not easily provoked, but is plenteous in mercy. Remembering how feeble and how frail we are, the Lord bears and forbears with His weak and sinful children, and is gentle towards them as a nurse with her child. Although our own observation has proved this to be true, and our experience every day goes to show how truthfully David sang, yet assuredly the clearest display of the patience and pity of God towards us may be seen in the life of Him in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Therefore, instead of speaking upon providential patience, I shall bid you gaze upon God in Christ Jesus, and see there how human weaknesses and follies are pitied of the Lord. With a text from the Old Testament, I purpose to take you straight away to the New, and the tenderness and pitifulness of the Father shall be illustrated by the meekness and lowliness of the Son towards His immediate disciples, the apostles. While the Holy Spirit shows you thus the pity of Jesus Christ towards His own personal attendants, you will see as in a glass His pity towards you.

I. At the outset let us attentively and admiringly observe THE DIVINE PATIENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS TOWARDS THE APOSTLES.

I shall begin on this point by reminding you of *their origin*. Who, and what were these, whom He received into intimate fellowship with Himself? They were not the high-born and powerful of the earth, for, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are chosen." Not a single nobleman was numbered with the apostles. They were not even educated persons who, if poor, might still wear a gentle heart beneath a peasant's garb. There was not a rabbi nor a philosopher among them. They were as uninstructed and as clownish as the rest of the peasantry of Palestine. He selected them from the populace; they were either fishermen or publicans; and these He made to be the first instruments of spreading abroad the gospel and establishing His kingdom. For our Lord Christ, who had been accustomed to the thrones and royalties of heaven, to stoop to be the familiar companion of any of the sons of men, would be wonderful condescension, but what shall I say when He elects the weak, and the poor, and the despised, to be His friends? He might have selected for His associates the choicest spirits, the advanced intellects, the educated minds; but, lo! He maketh foolish the wisdom of this world, and chooses the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are. I do not exaggerate when I speak of the clownishness of the apostles, their dulness and their ignorance. They were very honest and sincere, but they were far from being naturally quick of understanding. It was intentionally that our Lord made choice of them, on purpose to illustrate the sovereignty of election, and that no flesh should glory in His presence. He resolved that when He had filled them with the divine Spirit, and ordained them to be the chosen vessels to bear His name unto the Gentiles, none should ascribe their power to themselves, but all the glory should evidently belong unto the Lord alone. At the same time we must not forget that it must have caused the Lord Jesus much inconvenience and trouble to bear with such disciples. The refined

spirit cannot be in continual contact with the coarse without enduring pain. Some may call such pain sentimental, but in so doing, they only reveal their own ignorance, for, probably, no shocks are more severe, no wounds more smarting, than those inflicted upon the delicate, the pure, the holy, the refined, by association with the grovelling, the selfish, the sinful, the unspiritual. The glory of our Master's patience is this, that He did not betray even the slightest disgust or weariness of His poor friends. Though He might have said to them, as well as to the multitude, " O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? " yet He bore with them without repining, and only now and then gave them a rebuke. He never looked contemptuously upon them as His inferiors, though they were vastly so in all respects. He called them friends: He told them mysteries as if they could understand them, though often when He explained them to them they missed the inner meaning; He took them into His most retired haunts; He familiarised them with the garden and the Mount of Olives, where He was wont to seek His retirement; He would even stay His prayers to teach them how to pray—there was nothing that He would not do for them. Just such as they were He accepted them, and resolved to train them for His service. Having once loved them, He loved them unto the end. He never made them feel a dread of His superiority, or shudder at the distance between their character and His own. He kept no register of their faults, He never rehearsed the list of their shortcomings, but, on the contrary, His main rebuke was His own perfect example, and He ever treated them as His friends and brethren. Think of this, and you will see in Christ Jesus that " like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

Much forbearance He had with *their lack of understanding*. The apostles, before Pentecost, were very gross and unspiritual in judgment. He Himself had to say to them, " O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." Until the Holy Spirit came upon them, and made them quick of understanding, they were sorry dunces; dull scholars, though the best of Masters had become their teacher. They did not understand the object of His mission; they fancied that He came to be a king, and they expected to receive crowns and dignities, and even began to quarrel over the division of the spoil, disputing as to which of them should be the greatest peer in the kingdom which they expected Him to establish. He was thinking of suffering and death while they were dreaming of robes and coronets. The mother of Zebedee's children even asked for her sons that one might sit on His right hand and the other on His left in His kingdom, a gross misconception indeed of what that kingdom would be, and a piece of pride and selfishness that she should seek for her sons, probably with their acquiescence, a place above their fellow disciples. When He spake to them concerning His sufferings, though He used great plainness of speech, yet they could not understand Him. Take this passage in the ninth of Luke, at the forty-third verse: " While they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, He said unto His disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask Him of that saying." The thought that the Son of God, the King of Israel should, by-and-by, be proclaimed king upon a felon's cross could not by any means find place in their minds; they continued to cling tenaciously to the idea of earthly dominion. What strange ignorance was that which led them to think the Saviour referred to their having no bread when He said, " Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Think, too, of the dulness of Philip when the Lord was speaking concerning the Father, and He said, " Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us "; and Thomas was not much wiser when he said, " Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way? " There were many truths which Christ did not clearly teach to them before the descent of the Spirit, for the reason which He once gave: " I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Even when He made that simple statement, " A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father," they did not understand Him; and He said to them, " Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me "? The expression was so simple that they should have understood it, but their prejudices blinded their eyes. Nor was this confined to the early days of their fellowship with Him, for even after our Lord had risen from the tomb, those with whom He conversed on the road to Emmaus, who were probably by no means inferior to the rest, did not understand the references of the prophets to Christ, and were not prepared to see in His resurrection the manifest fulfilment of the words which had been spoken of old. Their eyes were holden in more senses than one. Many a master would have grown weary of such pupils, but infinite love brought to its succour infinite patience, and He continued still to teach them though they were so slow to learn. " Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

Reflect again, my brethren, upon the *unevangelical spirit* which these apostles often showed. On one occasion even John, as mild and gentle a spirit as any of them, asked to be permitted to call fire from heaven to destroy certain Samaritans who would not receive the Saviour because His face was set towards Jerusalem. Jesus the friend of sinners calling fire from heaven! This might suit Elias, but was not after the manner of the meek and lowly Prince of Peace. It would have been quite foreign to all His purposes, and contrary to His entire spirit; yet the two sons of thunder would hurl lightning on their Master's foes. He might well have spoken to them as bitterly as David did to the sons of Zeruiah, when in their hot rage they would have slain their leader's foolish foes; He might have said, " What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zebedee? " But He merely said, " Ye know not what spirit ye are of." Read the ninth chapter of Luke, which is full of the failings of the disciples, and notice how John and the rest forbad the man who was casting out devils in Jesus' name. With the true spirit of bigoted monopoly that will not tolerate anything outside the pale of orthodoxy, they said, " We saw one casting out devils in Thy name "; and instead of rejoicing that there were some beyond our company who were assisted by the Master's power, and were glorifying the Master's name, " we forbad him because

he followeth not with us." Their Lord, instead of angrily upbraiding their intolerance, gently chid them, with the sentence, "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." Remember, also, how the disciples put away the mothers of Israel when they brought their tender offspring to receive the Saviour's blessing; this showed a very unevangelical spirit. They would not have their Lord interrupted by the cries of babes, and thought the children too insignificant to be worthy of His consideration. But, though our Lord was much displeased with the disciples, yet He only said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." But, my brethren, it must have wanted great patience for our dear Lord and Master, who Himself would not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, to bear with these rough men who pushed the little ones on one side, who would gag the mouths of those who were doing good in their own way, and who would even call fire from heaven upon poor ignorant sinners. Admire much His patience with their impatience, and see how "Like as a father pitieth his children, so He pitied them," because He knew they feared Him in their hearts, and their faults were rather infirmities than rebellions.

Again, *their weakness of faith* must have been in itself a great provocation to Him, and yet He bore with it most meekly. When in the storm, on the lake, they ought not to have been afraid, because Jesus was with them, though asleep; but their alarm was so great that they must needs awaken Him, not thinking of His weariness which required rest in sleep; and they were so ungenerously unbelieving as to insinuate that He was unkindly thoughtless of their danger: "Master," said they, "carest Thou not that we perish?" Oh, what unbelief was here! He might well have been angry, but He rather rebuked the wind than them, and sweetly said, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" Not many days after, however, they found themselves in a like case, and after such a deliverance, they ought to have been confident, but again they were troubled. Let us not upbraid them, for it has been our case full often. Jesus came to them in the midst of the storm, walking on the sea, and they were afraid of Him, and thought it was a spirit, and they cried out. Their faith was so feeble—it was scarcely faith, but rather unbelief. Peter was a fair representative of them all when on that occasion He said, "If it be Thou, bid me come to Thee on the water." He had faith enough with venturous footstep to tread the wave, and to continue to do so until a more than usually boisterous gust made his heart tremble, and down he went. Jesus, as He caught him, tenderly said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?" No anger was in that fatherly rebuke. He spake as a mother might, when, after teaching her child to walk, she saw its little feet give way and saved it from a fall.

Take another instance of their unbelief. Our Lord had fed the multitude, if you remember, with five loaves and two fishes, and but a short time after, another vast crowd was in a similar hungry condition. Jesus declared His compassion to the apostles in much the same language as He had used previously: one would have thought that after seeing Him feed the five thousand so short a time before, they would have had no fear about the four thousand then to be fed, but would have said, "Lord, do as Thou didst before, here are our seven loaves and our few little fishes; if five loaves fed five thousand, surely thou canst feed four thousand with seven." Instead of that they said, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?" Alas! for such unbelief. How could they doubt when with all their eyes they had seen what the Master could do? How could they be so unbelieving as to ask, "Whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in this wilderness?" Surely the Saviour must have been sorely put to it to bear with this. Moreover, they lost by their unbelief a large amount of power which they might have exercised for good, and they exposed their Master's name to derision. When He came down from the mount of transfiguration, He found a company gathered at the mountain foot, who were glorying over the baffled disciples because they could not cast out a devil from a poor tormented child. There were the reviling multitude, and there the disconcerted disciples; the Lord Jesus immediately rectified the mischief by casting out the devil, and when alone with the disciples he answered their question, "Why could not we cast Him out?" How pityingly and encouragingly he replied, "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Now, where unbelief not only makes the person fearful, but causes him to be weak where he should be strong, and to expose his Master's name and fame to doubt and distrust, it is enough to provoke anger in the holiest; and yet provoked the Master was not, for He pitied His disciples as a father pitieth his children.

Again, I would remark that it was not only in the earlier period of his intercourse that they were unbelieving. There might have been some excuse at that time, but even at the close of His sojourn with them they still remained doubters. Take Thomas as a case in point, and hear him obstinately declare, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe." Yet our gentle Lord condescended to grant His incredulous disciple the tokens for which he had asked. The rest of the apostles do not seem to have been much stronger in faith, for when he appeared "they were terrified and affrighted," and were not comforted even when He said, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have." How gracious it was on His part, since they yet believed not, to eat before them all a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb, to prove that He was yet alive and in a real body! What, had they seen Him three years, had they beheld the miracles which He wrought, had they listened to His teaching, had they perceived the divinity which dwelt within Him, and yet when He had risen from the dead, did they refuse to believe the testimony of the holy women and of Peter and John? Did they disbelieve the evidence of the empty tomb? Oh, yes! for unbelief was in them all, and they might each have cried, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." Yet He bore with them and pitied them still.

Nor have I exhausted this matter. *Their emulations of each other* must very frequently have distressed the lowly mind of Jesus. Again and again we find them striving among themselves which should be the greatest. After James and John had so foolishly sought to sit on His right hand and on His left, the ten, it is said, had indignation against them,

proving that if they did not show it in the same manner, yet they were actuated by much the same spirit as the sons of Zebedee. We find them again contending which should be the greatest, when our Lord took a little child and set him in their midst, and said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." As much as to say, "You need not choose places in the kingdom, and dispute as to precedence, you cannot even enter there while you are moved by the spirit of ambition. You must be humble, and become like this child before you can understand that kingdom." Perhaps the worst case of the apostles' emulation is that recorded in Luke xxii. 24, when even after the blessed festival of love the apple of discord was thrown upon the table. Sad to think that at the Lord's Supper Satan should be so present. Extraordinary as it may seem, yet so it was. The question, "Lord, is it I?" was succeeded by the question which of them should be the greatest. Their Lord was about to die, Gethsemane's sweat of agony was almost gathering on His brow, His passion was close at hand, and yet His disciples were taken up with so contemptible a question as which of them should take precedence of the other. That dear rebuke of washing their feet was a sweet way of reproving them and revealing His own love.

I must not forget that on some occasions they showed *their pride* in a very wrong and even insulting manner. Peter, who was after all but a type of the rest, when our Lord had spoken of His death, took Him and began to rebuke Him! Yes, he rebuked his Master!!! His Lord then turned Himself and rebuked the devil rather than Peter, though Peter had become the foolish instrument of the devil, and He said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Nor was this the only occasion, for when He had warned him that he would deny Him that night, He was contradicted point blank by His rash follower, and his fellow disciples joined him in the contradiction. "Likewise also said all the disciples." They were told to pray that they might not enter into temptation, but they were proud enough to believe that their Master did not know them, and to think that no temptation could overcome them. Here was pride indeed, and yet though those poor things who had needed to be humbled in the dust, spoke so exceeding proudly and lifted up their horn on high, yet all He did was just to pity them and to pray for them, and bear with their ignorance and their ill-manners. Having loved them He pitied them, and remembered that they were but dust.

I will only mention one other matter, and that was His patience with *their infirmities*; I mean not only their sinless weaknesses, but those in which sin was in some degree present. Remember their weakness in the garden. He was in an agony, and He selected three of them to watch near to the scene of His passion, but when in the midst of His distress He came to them, as if He would have a word of comfort from them, He found them sleeping. Oh, the pathos of those words, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" and such an hour—an hour of such extremity! Where was their love that they could sleep while He was in agony? Yet how mild His language—"the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." Worse than that, no sooner was He taken, than not one of all the band, so valiant in their own opinion, was found standing at his Master's side. Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled; and the bravest of them all, in the hall where his Master was accused as a criminal, stood by the fire and warmed his hands, and said, "I know not the man," and then with oaths and cursing, even a third time declared, "I know not what thou sayest." Here was cowardly weakness indeed, at which the Saviour's resentment might well have been kindled, but He showed no anger, He only turned and looked on Peter, and it was such a look of mingled sorrow and pity, that the poor denier of his Lord went out and wept bitterly. When the Lord had risen from the dead, He did not upbraid Peter, but He sent a special love message to him, "Go, tell My disciples *and Peter*; and when Peter was with Him by the sea, the only rebuke, if rebuke it could be called, was the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" asked a third time in remembrance of the three times in which he had denied Him, and that three times he might have the privilege of saying, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Beloved friends, it is meet that I should add that the pain to our Lord arising from these faults must be estimated by His matchless character and by the end He had in view. Remember He was perfectly holy as man, and, moreover, He was God; and to have to bear with such poor creatures as these, was therefore the most wonderful condescension and pity. Engaged as He was in seeking *their* good, and not His own, it was the harder to endure, that they should be such stubborn materials, and so great a hindrance to Him. Moreover, remember that He did not merely bear with them but treated them as His friends. All things that He had heard of His Father He made known unto them; He admitted them into His most intimate acquaintanceship, and all the while almost His only rebuke to them was His own perfect example. He taught them humility by His humility; He taught them gentleness by His gentleness; He did not point out their defects in words, He did not dwell upon their errors, but He rather let them see their own spots by His purity, their own defects by His perfection. Oh, the marvellous tenderness of Christ, who so paternally pitied them that feared Him!

II. Let us think for a short time of THE REASONS OF THIS DIVINE PATIENCE in the case of our Lord.

Doubtless we must find the first reason in *what He is*. Our Lord was so greatly good that He could bear with poor frail humanity. When you and I cannot bear with other people it is because we are so weak ourselves. If you cannot bear with your imperfect brother, take it for certain that you are very imperfect yourself. Jesus was so free from selfishness that anything that they might do, which was injurious to the honour due to Him, did not afflict Him in the same way as our pride would afflict us. All the suffering He would feel would be grief that they should be so erring, that they should have learnt so slowly. He would not think of Himself, but would only think of them. Besides, He was so gentle, so tender! It was no exaggeration or egotism when He said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." I would to God we could copy His love and borrow His "meekness so divine."

He bore with them and pitied them because of *His relationship to them*. He had loved them as He has loved many of us, "from before the foundation of the world." He was their shepherd, and He pitied the diseases of His flock; He was their Saviour, and He lamented the sins from which He was about to

save them; He was their "brother born for adversity," and He stooped to be familiar with their frailties. He had determined to bring many sons unto glory, and therefore, for the joy that was set before Him, He endured all things for the elect's sake.

Another reason for His patience was *His intention to become perfect* as the Captain of our salvation, through suffering. You have perhaps enquired, "Why did not the Lord Jesus at once perfectly sanctify these apostles, and deliver them from sin? He might have done so." I grant you He might, and I have often wondered why He does not do the same with us. But I do not wonder when I recollect that it was needful that He should become a faithful High Priest, touched with a feeling of our infirmities by being tempted in all points, like as we are. Now, you and I have to bear with our imperfect brethren, and if our Lord had never endured the same, He could not in that point have shown fellowship with us. In order that He might be a complete High Priest, and know all the temptations of all His servants, He bears with the infirmities and sins of disciples whom He could have perfected at once if He had willed, but whom He did not choose to perfect because He desired to reveal His tender pity towards them, and to obtain by experience complete likeness to His brethren. Thus the High Priest of our profession became capable of sympathy with us in like condition, by having to bear with all the infirmities of His disciples.

Did He not also do this, my dear friends, that He might *honour the Holy Spirit*? If Jesus had perfected the apostles, they would not have seen so manifestly the glory of the Holy Ghost. Until the Holy Ghost was come, what poor creatures the eleven were! but when the Holy Ghost was given, what brave men, what heroes, how deeply instructed, how powerful in speech, how eminent in every virtue they became! It is the object of Jesus Christ to glorify the Spirit, even as it is the design of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ in our hearts.

Moreover, our Lord was considering *the future of the apostles*, and therefore bore with them instead of removing all their evil. He knew that after His decease they would think of these things; and I can well conceive that in their solitude, and when they met each other, they would either soliloquise or say to each other, "Do you not remember how our Lord spoke to us on such an occasion? I do remember the very words He used." "Yes," and said the other, blushing and with tears, "I do remember we did not understand Him." "And do you recollect the question Philip put to Him!" "Yes," said the other, "but do you know I did not confess it, but I was just going to say the very same thing, for I was quite as foolish as Philip." And then they would smile to themselves, and say, "How slow of understanding we were in those days!" "Yes," but the other would say, "Did you not notice that our blessed and ever dear Master never smiled contemptuously upon us, and never seemed wearied by our folly; He evidently looked at us as being little children, and He just explained Himself again and again, and when we did not comprehend He was still ready to explain once more. But, oh, how tenderly He dealt with us!" And then one of them would say, "How often have I lamented that I fled that night when He was seized. I wish I had gone with Him right up to the judgment-seat. I wish I had stood at the cross-foot or hung on another cross side by side with Him. But do you know when I met Him after His resurrection, I thought He would have said a word, but there was never even a hint about my cowardice; He received me with just the same tranquil love He had been wont to show before, and He sent me on an errand just as He had been wont to do, to show He could trust me still." Oh, what a dear and tender Lord He was! They did not know when He was alive how good He was, but when He was gone, and had given them the Spirit, they could see it all. Just as with a photograph, when it is first taken the image is not yet visible to the eye, it has to lie a little while in the bath, and to be washed before the artist brings it out, and so the picture of Christ on their hearts had to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, and then it was revealed to them, and as they looked on it, they said, "Never was there such a One. He was, and is, the chief among ten thousand, and our souls shall love Him even unto death." If it be so on earth it will be much more so in heaven, when we enter within the pearl-gate we shall see how Jesus loved us when we were on earth. "I remember well," saith one, "that trial which passed over me, and I said God hath forgotten me, He will be mindful of me no more, and all the while He was afflicting me in very faithfulness, and in love to my soul." Then will another saint bear testimony, "Though I was very often cold of heart and forgot Him, yet He said unto me, 'Return unto Me, I am married unto thee, saith the Lord.' And when I did return I do remember how gently He received me and let out the full flood of His love into my soul once again! So that He restored unto me the love of my espousals, and I rejoiced in His salvation." You see the Lord is thinking of our eternity. He does not sanctify us at once, for we should not know all the sin that is in us, and therefore should not know how much we owe to Him, but He leaves us these thirty, forty, fifty years in the wilderness, that we may see what is in our hearts and what is in His heart as He manifests it towards us in unfailing loving-kindness. Blessed be His name, that thus He pities us even as a father doth his children.

III. I shall now close, by indicating THE TEACHING TO BE DERIVED FROM THIS PATIENCE. Is it not this?—

First, if the Lord has thus had pity upon you as He had on His apostles, *do ye even so to others.* I know there is a tendency with us to feel so grieved with the inconsistencies of our fellow Christians as to lose patience. Moses, the most meek of men, yet lost his temper with Israel, and said, "Hear now, ye rebels, must I fetch you water out of this rock?" I do not wonder that He called them rebels, for they were such; but then God would not have Moses call them so, for they were God's children. Their Father may call them what names He pleases, but He will not have the servants take liberties with the children. Sometimes when we see the inconsistencies of God's people, we are apt to speak harshly, but our Lord sets us a different example. Jesus bore with imperfect people, ought not you and I to do the same. Jesus must have borne a great deal more than we ever have borne or ever shall have to bear, yet He was still pitiful, still kind and loving to them; let us follow in His steps. It ought to help us when we remember that *we were converted through imperfect preachers.* I am sure if any of you have been converted through my ministry, you have been converted through a very imperfect one. While I deeply regret my imperfections, yet in one sense I glory in my infirmities, because the power of God doth rest upon me. For

what are we! we cannot turn any to righteousness—the Lord alone can do that, but if by imperfect instruments you are blessed to the saving of your souls, you ought never again to be out of patience with imperfect people. Remember also that you are imperfect yourself. You can see great faults in others; but, my dear brother, be sure to look in the looking-glass every morning and you will see quite as many faults, or else your eyes are weak. If that looking-glass were to show you your own heart you would never dare look again, I fear you would even break the glass. Old John Berridge, as odd as he was good, had a number of pictures of different ministers round his room, and he had a looking-glass in a frame to match. He would often take his friend into the room and say, "That is Calvin, that is John Bunyan," and when he took him up to the looking-glass he would add, "'and that is the devil." "Why," the friend would say, "it is myself." "Ah," said he, "there is a devil in us all." Being so imperfect we ought not to condemn. Remember also that if we are not patient and forbearing, there is clear proof that we are more imperfect than we thought we were. Those who grow in grace grow in forbearance. He is but a mere babe in grace who is evermore saying, "I cannot put up with such conduct from my brother." My dear brother, you are bound even to wash the disciples' feet. If you knew yourself, and were like your Master, you would have the charity which hopeth all things and endureth all things.

Remember that your brethren and sisters in Christ, with whom you find so much fault, are God's elect for all that, and if *He* chose them, why do you reject them? They are bought with Christ's blood, and if He thought them worth so much, why do you think so little of them? Recollect, too, that with all their badness there are some good points in them in which they excel *you*. They do not know so much, but perhaps they act better. It may be that they are more faulty in pride, but perhaps they excel in generosity; or if perhaps one man is a little quick in temper, yet he is more zealous than you. Look at the bright side of your brother, and the black side of yourself, instead of reversing the order as many do. Remember there are points about every Christian from which you may learn a lesson. Look to their excellences, and imitate them. Think, too, that small as the faith of some of your brethren is, it will grow, and you do not know what it will grow to. Though they be now so sadly imperfect, yet if they are the Lord's people, think of what they will be one day. O brethren and sisters, shall we know them? Shall we know ourselves when we once get to heaven, and are made like our Lord? There, my brother, though you are a quarrelsome man, I will not quarrel with you; I am going to live in heaven with you, and I will keep out of your way till then. I will not find fault with you, my friend, if I can help it, because you will be one day without fault before the throne of God. If God will so soon remove your faults, why should I take note of them? I will not peevishly complain of the rough stone, for I see it is under the Great Artist's chisel, and I will tarry till I see the beauty which He brings out of it.

The drift of this lesson, is this—as your heavenly Father has pity on you, have pity on one another. He remembers that we are dust; remember this of others. You, who live in the same house, do not fall out with each other. You, who are members of the same church, do not criticize and judge each other so severely; or if you are severe upon the fault, be gentle towards the person who commits it, and seek not his destruction, but his good. Preacher, mind you learn your own lesson—be as tender towards those who sin as the Master was.

Another lesson, and I have done. In your own case, my dear friends, *have firm faith in the gentleness and forbearance of Christ.* You are conscious, this morning, that you have been slipping, and have fallen short or gone beyond the mark, and I know unbelief will whisper to you that you cannot expect to enjoy renewed fellowship with Christ, or to taste His love again. Oh think not so! Think of how gentle He was with the apostles, and remember He is the same still. Change of place has not changed His character. The exaltations of heaven have not removed from Him the tenderness of His heart; He will accept you still. My brother, I know that prayer of yours was not what it should be; try again; He will accept the prayer, despite the fault. I know, my dear friend, your ministry up till now has not been so earnest as it should have been, but do not give it up; preach again, preach with greater fervour and greater unction—He will bless you, He has not put you away. I know that with all of us there is nothing we have done but what we might weep a whole shower of tears over; but Jesus, the pitiful, knows our meaning; He will not look at the flaws, but at the jewel; He will cover our sins with the mantle of His love, He will accept the will for the deed. Let us try again. Let us trust in Him wholly, and devote ourselves unreservedly to His service. Let us be persuaded that as we accept from our children a poor fading nosegay on our birthday, and thank them as much as if it were pearls and diamonds because it shows their love, even so if our heart loves Jesus, He will receive our poor imperfect service for our love's sake. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust"; He knows we cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean; He in His infinite compassion will cover our transgressions and accept our heart's love. Be of good courage, then; be of good courage, my brethren, He will accept you still.

I should think this subject ought to attract many sinners to Him, and I pray it may, "for him that cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out." Oh that the Holy Spirit would lead many of you to fix your hope on Jesus, the gentle Lamb of God. Come and trust Him, O sinner. The Lord bless you. Amen.

LESSONS FROM NATURE

"Where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies."—Psalm civ. 17, 18.

THIS Psalm is all through a song of nature, the adoration of God in the great outward temple of the universe. Some in these modern times have thought it to be a mark of high spirituality never to observe nature; and I remember sorrowfully reading the expressions of a godly person, who, in sailing down one of the most famous rivers in the world, closed his eyes, lest the picturesque beauties of the scene should divert his mind from scriptural topics. This may be regarded by some as profound spirituality; to me it seems to savour of absurdity. There may be persons who think they have grown in grace when they have attained to this; it seems to me that they are growing out of their senses. To despise the creating work of God, what is it but, in a measure, to despise God Himself? "Whoso mocketh the poor despiseth his Maker." To despise the Maker, then, is evidently a sin; to think little of God under the aspect of the Creator is a crime. We should none of us think it a great honour to ourselves if our friends considered our productions to be unworthy of admiration, and rather injurious to their minds than improving. If when they passed our workmanship they turned their eyes away, lest they should suffer injury by looking at it, we should not regard them as very respectful to ourselves; surely the despising of that which is made is somewhat akin to the despising of the Maker Himself. David tells us that "The Lord shall rejoice in His works." If He rejoices in what He has made, shall not those who have communion with Him rejoice in His works also? "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of them that have pleasure therein." Despise not the work, lest thou despise the Worker.

This prejudice against the beauties of the material universe reminds me of the lingering love of Judaism, which acted like a spell upon Peter of old. When the sheet knit at the four corners descended before him, and the voice said, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat," he replied that he had not eaten anything that was common or unclean. He needed that the voice should speak to him from heaven again and again before he would fully learn the lesson, "What God hath cleansed that call not thou common." The Jew thinks this and that unclean, though Christ has cleansed it; and certain Christians appear to regard nature as unclean. The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, the glorious sunrise and sunset, the snow-clad Alps, the ancient forests, the mysterious glaciers, the boundless ocean, God hath cleansed them: call them not common. Here on this earth is Calvary where the Saviour died, and by His sacrifice, offered not within walls and roofs, He made this outer world a temple wherein everything doth speak of God's glory. If thou be unclean, all things will be unclean to thee; but if thou hast washed thy robe and made it white in the blood of the Lamb, and if the Holy Spirit hath overshadowed thee, then this world is but a nether heaven; it is but the lower chamber of which the upper story glows with the full splendour of God, where angels see Him face to face, and this lower story is not without glory, for in the person of Christ Jesus we have seen God, and have communion and fellowship with Him even now.

It appears to me that those who would forbear the study of nature, or shun the observation of its beauties, are conscious of the weakness of their own spirituality. When the hermits and monks shut themselves out from the temptations of life, foolish persons said, "These are strong in grace." Not so, they were so weak in grace that they were afraid to have their graces tried. They ran away from the battle like the cowards they were, and shut themselves up because they knew their swords were not of the true Jerusalem metal, and they were not men who could resist valiantly. Monasticism was the confession of a weakness which they endeavoured to cover with the vain show of humility, and the pretence of superior sanctity. If my graces are strong, I can look upon the outward world, and draw forth its good without feeling its evil, if evil there be; but if my religion is mainly fictitious, then hypocrisy dictates to me the affectation of unusual spirituality, or at any rate I have not grace enough to rise from a contemplation of the works of God to a nearer fellowship with God Himself. It cannot be that nature of itself debases me, or diverts me from God; I ought to suspect a deficiency in myself when I find that the Creator's handiworks have not a good effect upon my soul.

Moreover, rest assured brethren, that he who wrote the Bible, the second and clearest revelation of his divine mind, wrote also the first book, the book of nature; and who are we that we should derogate from the worth of the first because we esteem the second. Milton's "Paradise Regained" is certainly inferior to his "Paradise Lost," but the Eternal God had no inferior productions, all His works are master-pieces. There is no quarrel between nature and revelation, fools only think so: to wise men the one illustrates and establishes the other. Walking in the fields at eventide, as Isaac did, I see in the ripening harvest the same God of whom I read in the word that He covenanted that seed-time and harvest should not cease. Surveying the midnight skies, I remember Him who, while He calls the stars by their names, also bindeth up the broken in heart. Who will may neglect the volume of creation, or the volume of revelation, I shall delight in them both as long as I live.

Let us, then, follow David this morning, for when he wrote our text, he evidently travelled amongst the works of God, admiring and adoring. Let us go with him, and see if there be not something to be learned among the birds and storks, the wild goats and the conies.

I. Our first observation from our text shall be this: FOR EACH PLACE GOD HAS PREPARED A SUITABLE FORM OF LIFE. For the fir trees, the stork; for the high hills, the wild goat, or steinbock; for the rocks, the conies, or rabbits. Almost every part of God's world was meant to be the abode of some creature or another. On earth, a countless company wait upon the Lord for meat; and as for the sea,

it contains " creeping things innumerable, both small and great beasts." Among the trees which shade the brooks, the birds are singing; in the tall sombre pine, the silent storks are building their nests; on the lofty crags, virgin as yet to human foot, the chamois leaps from ledge to ledge; and away, where human voice was never heard, the marmot, the mouse, and the rabbit (whichever creature the Hebrew may mean) find their dwelling-place among the rocks. The teaching of this fact is clear. We shall find that for all parts of the spiritual universe God has provided suitable forms of divine life. Think out that thought a moment. *Each age has its saints.* The first age had its holy men, who walked with God: and when the golden age had gone, and men everywhere had polluted themselves, God had His Noah. In after days, when men had again multiplied upon the face of the earth, and sin abounded, there was Job in the land of Uz, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob dwelling in tents in the land which had been given to them by promise. On whatever period of the world's history you choose to place your finger you may rest assured that as God is there, so is there also some form of divine life extant; some of God's twice born creatures are to be found even in the most barren ages. If you come to a period like that of Ahab, when a lonely Elijah bitterly complains, " I, only I am left, and they seek my life to destroy it," you shall hear a still small voice that saith, " Yet have I reserved unto Myself seven thousand men that have not bowed the knee to Baal." God has still His elect remnant in the most wicked times to whom He has given a banner, because of the truth. When the light was almost gone from Israel, and formalism had eclipsed the sun of Judaism, there were still a Simeon and an Anna waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Times of fearful persecution, when to mention the name of Christ was to sentence yourself to death, have not been devoid of saints, but rather in the hottest times of oppression God has brought forth heroes equal to the emergency. The fiercer the trial the stronger the men. The Church of God, like the fabled Salamander, has lived and flourished amid the flames, and has seemed to feed upon the flames that threatened to devour her. As on the crags where it appears impossible for life to exist God places wild goats, so on the high crags of persecution He upholds men whose feet are like hind's feet, and who glory as they tread upon their high places. Oppression brings out the heavenly manhood of the saints and lets the devil see what strength God can put into the weakness of man. There have been times of heresy too—such as the age of rampant Arianism, but saints have outlived it. God has provided for such an emergency brave defenders of the faith. What a man was Athanasius, when standing upright and alone he said, " I know that Jesus Christ is very God, and if all the world believe the contrary, I, Athanasius, stand against the world." Sardis may have a name to live and be dead, but the Lord saith, " thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." Is not this an encouraging truth, for as it has been in the past it is in the present, and it will be in the future. Do not give way to gloomy forebodings as to the Church's future welfare. Whine not with those who deplore these evil days, and prognosticate overwhelming ills. We are told that we are passing through a crisis, but I recollect that it was a crisis twenty years ago, and our grandsires could tell us of a crisis every year of the last fifty. The fact is there is no such crisis as is talked of. *The crisis* is past, for Christ said, " Now is the crisis of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out." When Jesus went to Golgotha and bled and died, the crisis of the Church and of the world was over; the victory of truth and of Christ was secured beyond all hazard. Even if times should darken and the night should grow thicker and thicker, rest assured that He who has the conies for the rocks, and goats for the high hills, and finds for the forests the stork, will find for every age a suitable form of Christian life that shall bring glory to His name.

As it has been in every age, so is it in *every position* in which men are found. Go into all classes of society, and you shall find that the Christian religion, if received in truth, is equally well adapted for all conditions. Here and there upon the throne have been found those that have feared God, and have gone from a crown on earth to a crown in heaven. There can be no better qualification for swaying a kingdom than obedience to the King of kings. Go straight down from the palace to the poor-house, little enough of comfort there, but the richest consolation which can be found for the meanest pauper, will be brought by that hand which was nailed to the tree. He it is that can console the sorrows of poverty as well as sanctify the risks of wealth. Go ye where ye will amongst the busy, whose cares buzz around them, and you shall find no relief for aching heads like a contemplation of the love of Christ: or go amongst those who have leisure, and spend it in solitude, no meditation can be so sweet to while away their hours as the meditation which springs out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Glory be to God, no man need say, " My trade does not permit me to be a Christian "; if it be so, you have no business to follow that trade, for no lawful calling is without its saint. Up there among the precipices the wild goat finds safe footing, and so amid dignity and honour saints can survive, and in the dark rock-rifts of this sin-smitten city, as conies live among the rocks, so Christian men are useful and happy. Where the believer is persecuted on every side, he shall not be forsaken, and where, through the example of the wicked, his heart is grieved, he shall be preserved like righteous Lot. As God maintains life in every region, so doth He maintain spiritual life in every position and every calling. Have comfort in this you who are placed in circumstances unfavourable to grace.

Again, you shall find spiritual life *in every church* I know it is the notion of the bigot, that all the truly godly people belong to the denomination which he adorns. Orthodoxy is my doxy; heterodoxy is anybody else's doxy who does not agree with me. All the good people go to little Bethel, and nowhere else: they all worship at Zoar, and they sing out of such-and-such a selection, and as for those who cannot say Shibboleth, and lay a pretty good stress on the " h," but who pronounce it " Sibboleth "; let the fords of the Jordan be taken, and let them be put to death. True, it is not fashionable to roast them alive, but we will condemn their souls to everlasting perdition, which is the next best thing, and may not appear to be quite so uncharitable. Many suppose that because there is grievous error in a church concerning an ordinance or a doctrine, therefore no living children of God are there. Ah, dear brethren, this severe opinion arises from want of knowing better. A

mouse had lived in a box all its life, and one day crawled up to the edge of it, and looked round on what it could see. Now the box only stood in a lumber room, but the mouse was surprised at its vastness, and exclaimed: "How big the world is!" If some bigots would get out of their box, and only look a little way round them, they would find the realm of grace to be far wider than they dream. It is true that these pastures are a most proper place for sheep, but yet upon yonder hill-tops wild goats are pastured by the Great Shepherd. It is true that yonder plains covered with verdure are best fitted for cattle, but the Lord of all has His beasts in the forest, and His conies among the rocks. You may have to look a long while before you find these living things, but *He* sees them when you do not, and it is a deal more important to a cony for God to see it, than it is for a man to see it; and so it is an infinitely more weighty matter for a child of God for his Father to know that he is His child, than for his brother to know it. If my brother will not believe me to be a Christian, he cannot help being my brother; he may do what he will in his unkindness, but if I am one of God's children and he also is one, the tie of brotherhood cannot be broken between us. I love to think that the Lord has His hidden ones—even in churches that have sadly degenerated from the faith; and, although it is yours and mine to denounce error unsparingly, and with the iconoclastic hammer to go through the land and break the idols of all the churches in pieces as far as God gives us strength, yet there is not a lamb amongst Christ's flock that we would disdain to feed—there is not the least of all His people, however mistaken in judgment, whom our soul would not embrace in ardent love. God, in nature, has placed life in singular spots, and so has He put spiritual life into strange out-of-the-way places, and has His own chosen where least we should look for them.

Once more, there are to be found God's people in *every city*. Some of you are going away, it may be, to the ends of the earth, and this word may be comfortable to you. The Lord has an elect people everywhere. The wild goats are on the rocks, and the conies amongst the stones and the storks in the trees. Go you where you will, you shall find that God has a living people; or if you should be sent to a country where as yet there are no converted men or women, let not that discourage you, but rather say, "I am sent with the purpose of finding out God's elect, who as yet are hidden in sin. I am to be the instrument of finding out the Lord's own blood-bought but hidden ones here." When thou goest into a city that is given to idolatry, thou shalt hear it said to thee, "I have much people in this city"; go, therefore, and labour to find out the much people. Introduce the gospel, tell of the love of Jesus, and you shall soon find that your efforts are rewarded by the discovery of those who shall love your Saviour, and delight in the same truth which now charms your heart. Do not believe that there is a rock without its wild goat; do not think that there is a fir-forest without its stork; or that there are to be found trees by the brook without their birds. Expect to find where God dwells that there are some who are sojourners with Him, as all their fathers were.

I shall leave the first point, repeating the sentence, *for each place there is a form of life.*

II. Secondly, the text teaches us plainly that EACH CREATURE HAS ITS APPROPRIATE PLACE. Birds with their nests for the cedars of Lebanon, storks for the fir trees, wild goats for the high hills, and conies for the rocks. Each of these creatures looks most beautiful at home. Go into the Zoological Gardens, and see the poor animals there under artificial conditions, and you can little guess what they are at home. A lion in a cage is a very different creature from a lion in the wilderness. The stork looks wretched in his wire pen, and you would hardly know him as the same creature if you saw him on the house-tops or on the fir trees. Each creature looks best in its own place. Take that truth, now, and use it for yourself. Each man has by God a *providential position* appointed to him, and the position ordained for each Christian is that in which he looks best; it is the best for him and he is the best for that; and if you could change his position, and shift him to another, he would not be half as happy, nor half as useful, nor half so much himself. Put the stork on the high hills, put the wild goat on the fir trees—what monstrosities! Take my dear brother who has been a working-man this last twenty years, and always been a spiritually-minded man, and make him Lord Mayor of London, and you would spoil him altogether. Take a good hearer and set him preaching, and he would make a sorry appearance. A man out of place is not seen to advantage, you see the wrong side of him, the gracious side is hidden. The position in which God has placed me is the best for me. Let me remember this when I am grumbling and complaining. It may be I have got past that foolish discontent which is altogether selfish, but perhaps I repine because I think if I were in a different position, I could glorify God more. This species of discontent is very insinuating, but let us beware of it. It is foolish to cry, "if I were placed in a different position, I could do so much more for God!" You could not do so much as you can do now. I am sure the goat would not show the wisdom of God so well in a fir tree, as he would up on a high hill; and you would not display the grace of God so well anywhere else as you can do where you are. Ah, says the young Christian, "I am only an apprentice; if I were a master man, I think I could then glorify God." Sir, if you cannot magnify Him in your apprenticeship, you will not do so when you become a journeyman. "Oh, but my shop is so little, my trade brings me in such a small amount, I can give but little, and I have such few opportunities of doing good." Be slow to leave your calling till you have plain indications from providence that you ought to do so, for many a man in moving from his place has been as a bird that has wandered from her nest. God knows better than you what is best for you; bow your soul to His sovereign will. God appoints our position infinitely better than we could appoint it, even if we could have the choosing of it.

My beloved friends, it is not only that each form of life has its own best position as to providence, but it is so as to *experience*. God has not made two creatures precisely alike. You shall gather leaves from a tree, and you shall not find two veined in precisely the same way. In Christian experience it is the same. Wherever there is living Christian experience, it is different from everybody else's experience in some respect. In a family of children each child may be like its father, and yet each child shall be different from each other child; and amongst the children of God, though they all have the likeness of Christ in a measure, yet are they not all exactly

the one like the other. You read the other day the life of John Bunyan, and you said, "Oh, if I had experience like John Bunyan, than I should know I was a child of God." This was foolish. The biographies that are published in our magazines in many cases do some good, but more mischief, for there are Christian people who begin at once to say, "Have I felt precisely thus? Have I felt exactly that? If not, I am lost." Hast thou felt thyself a sinner and Christ a Saviour? Art thou emptied of self and dost thou look to Christ alone? Well, if no other soul hath trod the same path as thou hast done, thou art in a right path; and though thy experience may have eccentricities in it that differ from all others, it is right it should be so. God has not made the wild goat like the cony, nor has He made the stork like any other bird, but He has made each to fit the place it is to occupy, and He makes your experience to be suitable to the bringing out some point of His glory, which could not be brought out otherwise. Some are full of rejoicing; others are often depressed; a few keep the happy medium; many soar aloft, and then dive into the deeps again; let these varied experiences, as they are all equally clear phases of the same divine loving-kindness, be accepted, and let them be rejoiced in.

The same holds good as to *individuality of character*. Each creature has its appropriate place, and I believe that each constitution is meant, under the power of grace, to be suitable for a man's position. I might wish to be of a different temperament from what I am—I sometimes think so, but in wiser moments I would not wish to alter anything in myself but that which is sinful. Martin Luther might have wished that he had been as gentle as Melancthon, but then we might have had no reformation: Melancthon might certainly sometimes have wished that he had been as energetic as Martin Luther, but then Luther might have lacked his most tender comforter, if Melancthon had been as rough as he. Peter might have been improved if he had not been so rough, and John might possibly have been improved if he had been somewhat more firm; but after all, when God makes Peter he is best as Peter, and when he makes John he is best as John, and it is very foolish when Peter wants to be John, and when John pines to be Peter. Dear brethren, the practical matter is, be yourselves in your religion. Never attempt to counterfeit another's virtues, nor try to square your experience according to another man's feelings, nor endeavour to mould your character so that you may look as if you were like a certain good man whom you admire. No, ask the Lord, who made a new man of you, to let your manhood come out as He meant it, and whichever grace He meant to be prominent, let it be prominent. If you are meant to play the hero and rush into the thick of the battle, then let courage be developed; or if He designed you to lie in the hospital and suffer, then let patience have its perfect work; but ask the Lord to mould you after His own mind, that as He finds a stork for a fir tree, and a fir tree for a stork; a hill for a wild goat, and a wild goat for a hill; He will find a place for you, the man, and find for you, the man, the place that He has created for you. There His name shall be most glorified, and you shall be safest. Kick not against the pricks, but take kindly to the yoke, and serve your day and generation till your Master calls you home.

III. Now, briefly, a third point. It appears from the text that EVERY CREATURE THAT GOD HAS MADE IS PROVIDED WITH SHELTER. Birds fly to the trees, and the stork to the fir, the wild goat to the high hills, and the cony to the rocks. There is a shelter for every one of these creatures, great and small. Think a moment, then, if God has made each creature happy, and given a place of refuge to each creature, then, depend upon it, he has not left man's soul without a shelter. And here is an important truth, for every man is certainly in danger, and every thinking man knows it. My God, dost Thou shield and shelter the cony in the rock, and is there no rock for me to shelter in? Assuredly Thou hast not made man and left him without a refuge: when Thou givest to the rock-rabbit the cleft in which he may hide himself, there must be a shelter for man. This must certainly be true, because you and I, if we have observed our inner life, must fave felt conscious that nothing here below can fill an immortal soul. You have prospered in business, and have enjoyed good health; but for all that, in quiet moments of reflection, you feel a craving for something not to be found beneath the sun. Have you not felt yearnings after the Infinites—hungering, which bread cannot satisfy; thirstings which a river could not quench? And are you never conscious—I know I am as a man, I speak not as a Christian now—of cold shiverings of fear, which make the entire manhood to tremble? The mind looks forward and considers, "And shall I live for ever? When my body moulders, shall I continue? Am I a vessel launched upon the river of existence, and shall I be borne onward to a shoreless and mysterious sea? And what will be that sea, and will it be a calm, or tossed with storms?" Or, to change the figure, "I shall sleep, but in that sleep of death, what dreams may come?" Have you never felt all that, and said within yourself, "Oh that there were a place where I could hide myself, never to tremble more! Oh that I could grasp something that would satisfy my insatiable longings! Oh that I could get my foot upon a rock, and no longer feel that a quicksand is beneath me! Oh that I knew of truth sure and indisputable, and possessed a treasure that would enrich me for ever." Well, then, if you have such longings as these, surely there must be a provision to meet them. The stork has an instinct for building a nest of a certain sort; it is too large a nest to be placed on a bush, she needs a tree; there is a tree somewhere then, for God never made a stork for a tree but He made also a tree for the stork. Here is a wild goat; you put it down on a flat meadow, and it is not happy. Give it the greenest pasture, it looks up and pines. Rest assured that since those little feet are meant to traverse rocks and crags, there are rocks and crags that are meant for those feet to leap upon. A chamois argues an Alps, and the conclusion is verified by fact. Yonder little cony cannot live anywhere but among the stones; it delights to conceal itself in the fissures of the rock; then be assured there are rocks meant for conies. So for me, with my thirstings, my longings, my pinings, my mysterious instincts—there is a God somewhere, there is a heaven somewhere, there is an atonement somewhere, there is a fulness somewhere, to meet my emptiness. Man wants a shelter, there must be a shelter; let us show you what it is.

Beloved, there is a shelter for man from the sense of past guilt. It is because we are guilty that we are fearful: we have broken our Maker's law, and therefore we are afraid. But our Maker came from heaven to earth; Jesus, the Christ of God, came here, and was made man, and bore that we might never bear

His Father's righteous wrath, and whosoever believeth in Jesus shall find perfect rest in those dear wounds of His. Since Christ suffered for me, my guilt is gone, my punishment was endured by my Substitute, therefore do I hear the voice that saith, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people! Say unto them, that their warfare is accomplished; for they have received at the Lord's hand double for all their sins." And as for future fears, he who believes in Jesus finds a refuge from them in the Fatherhood of God. He who trusts Christ says: "Now I have no fear about the present, nor about the future. Let catastrophe follow catastrophe, let the world crash, and all the universe go to ruin; beneath the wings of the Eternal God, I must be safe. All things must work together for my good, for I love God, and have been called according to His purpose." What a blessed shelter this is! The little conies in their rock-clefts are perfectly at ease, and so we, when we enter fully into the truth of our adoption of God, are filled with unutterable peace. And as for the present, with its cares, and griefs, and heart-throbs, there is the Holy Ghost abiding in us, the Comforter, and we fly to Him, and receive consolations so rich and powerful, that this day we feel at peace in the midst of discomforts, and if perplexed we are not in despair. Brethren, there is a shelter in the atonement of Christ, in the Fatherhood of God, in the abiding presence of the Comforter—there is a shelter for man—would God that all of us had found it!

IV. And now just a moment of your attention will be wanted for the fourth observation, that FOR EACH CREATURE THE SHELTER IS APPROPRIATE. The tree for the bird; the fir tree, a particular and special tree, for the stork; a high hill for the steinbock or ibex, and the rocks for the hyrax or rabbit. Whatever creature it may be, each shall have his own suitable shelter. But you will reply to me, is there a shelter, then, for each individual man? Did you not say that there was only one shelter for manhood? If I did not say it, I certainly will say it now. There is only one shelter under heaven or in heaven for any man of woman born, but yet there is a shelter suitable for each. Christ Jesus suits all sorts of sinners, all sorts of sufferers. He is a Saviour as suitable for me as if He came to save me and no one else; but He is a Redeemer as remarkably suitable to every other of His redeemed ones. Note, then, that there is a refuge in Christ Jesus for those simple trustful natures that take the gospel at once and believe it. These are like the little birds that fly to the trees and build their nests and begin to sing. These are the commonest sort of Christians, but in some respects they are the best. They hear the gospel, believe it to be God's word, accept it, and begin to sing, Jesus Christ exactly suits them, He is a shelter for those chosen birds of the air, whom your heavenly Father daily feeds. But there are others of larger intellect, who require unusual support ere they can build their nest and be at ease. These, like the stork, need a special support, and they find it in the gospel. Since they are more weighty with doubt and perplexity, they need substantial verities to rest on; these find great fir-tree doctrines and cedar-like principles in the Bible, and they rest in them. Many of us this day are resting on the immutable things wherein it is impossible for God to lie. We rest upon the substitution of Christ, and repose in the completeness of the atonement. Some get hold of one great principle and some another in connection with the grace of God; and God has been pleased to reveal strong, immovable, eternal, immutable principles in His Word which are suitable for thoughtful and troubled minds to rest on. Moreover, we have in the Church of God persons of great reasoning powers: these love the craggy paths of thought, but when they come to Christ and trust in Him, though they are like wild goats and love the high places, they find in the Scriptures good ground for them. The doctrine of election, and all the mysteries of predestination, the deep and wonderful doctrines that are spoken of by the apostle Paul; where is the man of thought who will not be at home among these if he loves sublimity? If you have the turn of mind which delights to deal with the high things of God, which have been the perplexity of men and angels, you shall find yourself at home, and what is better, safe with the gospel. If you are in Christ, you shall have good, solid, safe material for the profoundest meditations. Perhaps, instead of being bold and daring and thoughtful, you are not comparable to the wild goat, but you are a very timid trembling little creature like the cony. If anyone claps his hands, away runs the cony; he fears always. But there is a shelter for conies; and so in the grace of God for very timid trembling people, there is a suitable refuge. Here is a delightful shelter for some of you to run into. "Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God." Here is another—"Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Many a poor trembler has hidden under that condescending word. If I cannot find shelter in one text, what a blessing it is the Bible is full of promises, and there are promises in the Bible which seem made for a certain form of mind, as if the Holy Ghost cast His thoughts and His words into all sorts of moulds to suit the habits of thought and mind of all whom He would bless. O trembling soul, though thou art half afraid to say that thou belongest to Jesus, yet come and rest in Him, hide in the rift of His side, and thou art safe.

V. Now we must close, and we do so with this observation, that EACH CREATURE USES ITS SHELTER, for the storks have made their nests in the fir trees, and the wild goats climb the high hills, and the conies hide among the rocks. I never heard of one of these creatures that neglected its shelter—they love their natural abodes; but I have heard of men who have neglected their God, I know women who have forgotten Christ. We say, "silly sheep." Ah, if the sheep knew all about us, they would wonder we should call them silly. The cony in danger which does not seek its rock is foolish; but the soul in danger which does not seek its Saviour is insane—insane, nay, if there can be a madness which is as much beyond madness, as madness is beyond sanity, then such is the raving lunacy of a man who neglects the Saviour. I have never heard of any of these creatures that they despise the shelter provided. The birds are satisfied with the trees, and the stork with the firs, and even the cony with its rock-hole; but, alas! there are men who despise Christ. God Himself becomes the shelter of sinners, and yet sinners despise their God. The Son of God opens His side and lays bare His heart that a soul may come and shelter there in the crimson cleft, and yet that soul for many a day refuses to accept the shelter. Oh, where are tears? Who shall give us fit expressions for our sorrow that men should be such monsters to themselves, and to their God? The ox knoweth its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but men know not God. The stork knows its fir tree, the wild goat its crag, and the cony knows its

cleft, but the sinner knows not his Christ. Ah, manhood, what has befallen thee? What strange wine of Gomorrah hast thou drank which has thus intoxicated thee!

One other thing, I never heard of a stork that when it met with a fir tree demurred as to its right to built its nest there, and I never heard of a cony yet that questioned whether it had a permit to run into the rock. Why these creatures would soon perish if they were always doubting and fearing as to whether they had a right to use providential provisions. The stork says to himself, "ah, here is a fir tree"; he consults with his mate—"Will this do for the nest in which we may rear our young?" "Aye," says she, and they gather the materials, and arrange them. There is never any deliberation, "May we build here?" but they bring their sticks and make their nest. So the wild goat on the crag does not say, "Have I a right to be here?" No, he must be somewhere, and there is a crag which exactly suits him; and he springs upon it. Yet though these dumb creatures know the provision of their God, the sinner does not recognise the provisions of his Saviour. He quibbles and questions, "May I?" and "I am afraid it is not for me," and "I think it cannot be meant for me; and I am afraid it is too good to be true." And yet nobody ever said to the stork, "Whosoever buildeth on this fir tree shall never have his nest pulled down." No inspired word has ever said to the cony, "Whosoever runs into this rock-cleft shall never be driven out of it"; if it had been so, it would make assurance doubly sure. And yet here is Christ provided for sinners, just the sort of a Saviour sinners need, and the encouragement is added, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out"; "Whosoever will let him come, and take the water of life freely." O dear brothers and sisters, do not be standing out against the generosity of a sin-pardoning God, who bids the sinner come and welcome. Come, believe in Jesus, and find salvation now. Oh that you would come, it is what God has provided for your wants. Come, take it, for He bids you come. "The Spirit and the bride say come, and whosoever will let him come and take the water of life freely." To believe is to trust Jesus, to trust His suffering, to trust His atonement, and rely upon Him alone for salvation. May God enable you to do it for Christ's sake. Amen.

THERE GO THE SHIPS

"There go the ships."—Psalm civ. 26.

I WAS walking the other day by the side of the sea, looking out upon the English Channel. It so happened that there was a bad wind for the vessels going down the channel, and they were lying in great numbers between the shore and the Goodwins. I should think I counted more than a hundred, all waiting for a change of wind. On a sudden the wind shifted to a more favourable quarter, and it was interesting to see with what rapidity all sails were spread, and the vessels began to disappear like birds on the wing. It was a sight such as one might not often see, but worth travelling a hundred miles to gaze upon, to see them all sail like a gallant squadron, and disappear southward on their voyages. "There go the ships," was the exclamation that naturally rose to one's lips. The Psalmist thought it worth his while to pen the fact which he too had noticed, though it is very questionable whether David had ever seen anything like the number of vessels which pass our coasts, certainly he had seen none to be compared with them for tonnage.

The first lesson which may be learned from the ships and the sea is this—*every part of the earth is made with some design.* The land, of course, yields "grass for the cattle and herb for the service of man"; but what about the broad acres of the sea? We cannot sow them, nor turn them into pasturage. The reaper fills not his arm from the briny furrows, they give neither seed for the sower nor bread for the eater, neither do herds of cattle cover them as they do the thousand hills of earth. Remorselessly swallowing up all that is cast upon it, the thankless ocean makes no return of fruit or flower. Is not the larger part of the world given up to waste? "No," says David, and so say we—"There go the ships." The sea benefits man by occasioning navigation, and yielding besides an enormous harvest of fishes of many kinds. Besides which, as the blood is needful for the body, so is it necessary for this world that there should be upon its surface a vast mass of water in perpetual motion. That measureless gathering together of the waters is an amazing instance of divine wisdom in its existence, its perpetual ebb and flow, and even in its form and quantity. In the ocean there is not a drop of water too much nor a drop too little. There is not a single mile of sea more than there ought to be, nor less than there should be. An exact balance and proportion is maintained, and we little know how the blooming of the tiny flower or the flourishing of the majestic cedar would be affected were the balance disturbed. Between the tiny drop of dew upon each blade of grass and the boundless main there is a relation and proportion such as only an infinite mind could have arranged. Remember also that the ocean's freshness tends to promote life and health among the sons of men. It is good that there is sea, or the land might devour its inhabitants by sickness. God has made nothing in vain. Ignorance gazes on the stormy deep and judges it to be a vast disorder, the mother of confusion and the nurse of storms; but better knowledge teaches us, what revelation had before proclaimed, namely, that in wisdom has the Lord made all things.

But does not the ocean grievously separate lovers and friends? Many a wife thinks of her husband on the far-off Pacific; many a mother casts an anxious thought towards her sailor boy; and both are half inclined to think it a mistake to place so vast a portion of the globe as a cruel dividing gulf between loving hearts. Others evidently thought so in years gone by, for among the figurative excellences of the new earth we are told that there shall be no more sea.

But what a mistake it is to think that the sea is a divider: it is the great uniter of the races of men, for "there go the ships." It is the highway of nations, by which they reach each other far more readily than they could have done had no sea existed, and arid deserts or towering mountains had intervened. This is one instance in which we do not understand God's designs, for we judge them upon the surface. As the sea apparently divides, but really unites, nations, so often in providence things look one way, but go another. We say, "All these things are against me," when all things are working together for our good. We judge that to be a curse which, in the deep intent of God, is a rich blessing; and we write that down among the ills of life, which, in God's esteem, is reckoned to be amongst its choicest mercies. Judge not according to the sight of the eyes, or the changeful feelings of the heart, but unstaggeringly believe in the infallible goodness of our great Father in heaven. As the child mistakes God's design in the sea, so will you also mistake His design in providence, if you set up yourself as the measurer of the Infinite.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

Our subject, however, shall not be the uses of the sea, but this one simple matter—"There go the ships."

I. And, first, WE SEE THAT THE SHIPS GO. "There go the ships." *The ships are made to go.* The ship is not made to lie for ever upon the stocks, or to be shut up in the docks. It is generally looked upon as an old hulk of little service when it has to lie up in ordinary, and rot in the river. But a ship is made to go, and, as you see that it goes, remember that you also were made to go. Activity in Christian work is the result and design of grace in the soul. How I wish we could launch some of you. You are, we trust, converted, but as yet serve but slender uses, very quiet, sluggish, and motionless you lie on the stocks by the month together, and we have nearly as much trouble to launch you as Brunel had with the *Great Eastern.* I have tried hard to knock away your blocks, and remove your dogshores and grease your ways, but you need hydraulic rams to stir you. When will you feel that you must go, and learn to "walk the water as a thing of life." Oh for a grand launch! Hundreds are lying high and dry, and to them I would give the motto, "launch out into the deep," The ships go, when will you go too?

The ships in going at last disappear from view. The vessel flies before the wind, and very speedily it is gone: and such is our destiny ere long. Our life is gone as the swift ships. We think ourselves stationary, but we are always moving on. As we sit in these pews so quietly the angel of time is bearing us between his wings at a speed more rapid than we guess. Every single tick of the clock is but a vibration of his mighty wings, and he bears us on, and on, and on, and never stays to rest either by day or night. Swift as the arrow from the bow we are always speeding towards the target. How short time is? How very short our life is! Let each one say, "How short *my* life is!" No man knows how near he is to his grave. Perhaps if he could see it, it is just before him: I almost wish he could see it, for a yawning grave might make some men start to reason and to thought. That yawning grave is there, though they perceive it not.

"A point of time, a moment's space,
May land me in yon heavenly place,
Or shut me up in hell."

"There go the ships," and there go you also; you are never in one stay. You are always flying, swift as the eagle, or, to come back to the text, as the swift ship, yet "all men think all men mortal but themselves." The oldest man here probably thinks he will outlive some of the younger ones. The man who is soonest to die may be the very man who has the least thought of death of us all; and he that is nearest to his departure is, perhaps, the man who least thinks of it. Just as in the ship all were awake and every man praying to his God except Jonah, for whom the storm was raging, so does it often happen that in a congregation every man may be aroused and made to think of his latter end except the one man, the marked man, who will never see to-morrow's sun. As you see the ships, think of your mortality!

The ships as they go are going upon business. Some few ships go hither and thither upon pleasure, but for the most part the ships have something serious to do. They have a charter, and they are bound for a certain port and this teaches us how we should go on the voyage of life with a fixed, earnest, weighty purpose. May I ask each one of you, Have you something to do, and is it worth doing? You are sailing, but are you sailing like a mere pleasure yacht, whose port is everywhere, which scuds and flies before every fitful wind, and is a mere butterfly with no serious work before it? You may be as heavily laden and dingy as a collier, there may be nothing of beauty or swiftness about you, but after all, the main thing is the practical result of your voyage. Dear friend, what are you doing? What have you been doing? And what do you contemplate doing? I should like every young man here just to look at himself. Here you are, young man; you certainly were not sent into this world merely to wear a coat, and to stand so many feet in your stockings; you must have been sent here with some intention. A noble creature like man—and man is a noble creature as compared with the animal creation—is surely made for something. What were *you* made for? Not merely to enjoy yourself. That cannot be. You certainly are not "a butterfly born in a bower," neither were you made to be creation's blot and blank. Neither can you have been created to do mischief. It were an evil thing for you to be a mere serpent in the world, to creep in the grass and wound the traveller. No, you must be made for something. What is that something? Are you answering your end? For God's glory we were made. Nothing short of this is worthy of immortal beings. Have we sought that glory? Are we seeking it now? If not, I commend to your consideration this thought, that as the ships go on their business so ought men to live with a fixed and worthy purpose. I would say this, not only to young men, but with greater earnestness still to men who may have wasted forty years. Oh, how could I dare to stand before this congregation to-night and have to say, "Friends, I have had no object; I have lived in this world for myself alone, I have had no grand purpose before me?" I should be utterly ashamed if that were the fact. And if any man is obliged to feel that his purpose was such that he

dares not avow it, or that he has only existed to make so much money, or gain a position in life, or to enjoy himself, but he has never purposed to serve his God, I would say to him, Wake up, wake up, I pray you, to a noble purpose, worthy of a man. May God, the ever-blessed Spirit, set this before you in the light of eternity, and in the light of Jesus' dying love, and may you be aroused to solemn, earnest purpose and pursuit. "There go the ships," but not idly: they go upon business.

These ships, however, whatever their errand be, *sail upon a changeful sea.* To-day the sea is smooth like glass: the ship, however, makes very small headway. To-morrow there is a breeze, which fills out the sail, and the ship goes merrily before it. Perhaps, before night comes on, the breeze increases to a gale, and then rushes from a gale into a hurricane. Let the mariner see to it when the storm-winds are out, for the ship need be staunch to meet the tempest. Mark how in the tempestuous hour the sea mingles with the clouds, and the clouds with the sea. See how the ship mounts up to heaven on the crest of the wave, and then dives into the abyss in the furrow between the enormous billows, until the mariners reel to and fro and stagger like drunken men. Anon they have weathered the storm, and perhaps to-morrow it will be calm again. "There go the ships" on an element which is a proverb for fickleness, for we say, "false as the smooth, deceitful sea." "*They* go," say you, "upon the sea, but I dwell upon the solid earth." Ah, good sir, there is not much to choose. There is nothing stable beneath yon waxing and waning moon. We say "*terra firma*," but where, where is *terra firma*? What man is he who has found out the rock immovable? Certainly not he who looks to this world for it. He has it not who thinks he has, for many plunge from riches into poverty, from honour to disgrace, from power to servitude. Who says "My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved?" He speaks as the foolish speak. It is a voyage, sir, and even with Christ on board it is a voyage in which storms will occur, a voyage in which you may have to say, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" Expect changes, then. Do not hold anything on earth too firmly. Trust in God and be on the watch, for who knoweth what may be on the morrow? "There go the ships."

II. But now having spoken upon that, our second point is, HOW GO THE SHIPS? What makes them go? For there are lessons here for Christian men. We leave our steamships out of the question, as they were not known in David's day, and therefore not intended. But how go the ships? Well, *they must go according to the wind.* They cannot make headway without favouring gales. And if our port be heaven, there is no getting there except by the blessed Spirit's blowing upon us. He bloweth where He listeth, and we need that He should breathe upon us. We never steer out of the port of destruction upon our venturesome voyage till the heavenly wind drives us out to sea; and when we are out upon the ocean of spiritual life we make no progress unless we have His favouring breath. We are dependent upon the Spirit of God, even more than the mariners upon the breeze. Let us all know this, and therefore cry,

> "Celestial breeze, no longer stay,
> But fill my sails and speed my way."

It is not possible to insist too much on the humbling truth, "Without Me ye can do nothing": it helps to check self-confidence, and it exalts the Holy Ghost. Unless we honour Him, He will not honour us, and therefore let us cheerfully acknowledge our absolute dependence upon Him.

But still the mariner does not go by the wind without exertion on his own part, for the sails must be spread and managed so that the wind may be utilised. One man will go many knots, while another with the same breeze goes but few, for there is a good deal of tacking about wanted sometimes, to use the little wind, or the cross wind, which may prevail, Sometimes all the sails must be spread, and at other times only a part. Management is required. If some were spread they might take the wind out of others, and so the ship might lose instead of gaining. There is a deal of work on board a ship. I believe that some people have a notion that the ship goes of itself, and that the sailors have nothing to do but sit down and enjoy themselves; but if you have ever been to sea as an able-bodied seaman, you have discovered that for an easy life you must not be one of a ship's crew. And so, mark you, we are dependent upon the Spirit of God, but He puts us into motion and action; and if Christian men sit down and say, "Oh, the Spirit of God will do the work," you will find the Spirit of God will do nothing of the sort. The only operation which He will be likely to perform will be to convince you that you are a sluggard, and that you will come to poverty. The Spirit of God makes men earnest, fervent, living, and intense. He "works in us to will and to do His own good pleasure." We have sails to manage to catch the favouring breeze, and we shall want all the strength we can obtain if we are to make good headway in the voyage of life. Some professors say "God will save His own people." I am afraid He will never save *them.* They expect there will come good times when a great number of the elect will be gathered in, but they fold their arms and do nothing at all to promote the spread of the gospel. When they see others a little busy, they say, "Ah, mere excitement!" and so on, and they tell us God will have His own, to which I generally reply that I believe He will, but I do not believe He will have *them*, because if they were His own they would not talk in that fashion, for those who are God's own people have a zeal for God and a love for souls. Do you not remember what God said to David? "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees then shalt thou bestir thyself." Not "Then shalt thou sit still, and say God will do it." When David heard the angels coming over the tops of the trees to fight the Philistines, and when he heard their soft tread amongst the leaves, like the rustling of the wind, then he was to bestir himself: and so, when God's Spirit comes to work in the Church, the Christian must bestir himself, and not sit still. "There go the ships." They go with the wind, but they are the scene of great industry, or else the wind would whistle through the yards, and the ship would make no voyages. Thus, brethren, we see dependence and energy united; faith sweetly showing itself in good works.

"There go the ships." How do they go? Well, *they have to be guided and steered by the helm.* The helm is a little thing, but yet it rules the vessel. As the helm is turned so is the vessel guided. Look ye well to it, Christian men, that your motives and purposes are always right. Your love is the helm of the vessel; where your affection is your thoughts and actions tend. If you love the world you will

drift with the world, but if the love of the Father be in you, then will your vessel go towards God and towards divine things. Oh, see to it that Christ has His hand on the tiller, and that He guides you towards the haven of perfect peace.

The ship being guided by the helm, *he who manages the helm seeks direction from charts and lights.* "There go the ships," but they do not go of themselves, without management and wisdom. Thought is exercised, and knowledge and experience. There is an eye on deck which at night looks out for yonder revolving light, or the coloured ray of the lightship just ahead there, and the thoughtful brain says, "I must steer south-west of such a light," or "to the north of such a light, or I shall be upon the sands." Besides mere outlooks upon the sea, that anxious eye also busies itself with the chart, scans the stars, and takes observations of the moon. The captain's mind is exercised to learn exactly where the vessel is, and where she is going, lest the good ship unawares should come to mischief. And so, dear brethren, if we are to get to heaven, we must study well the Scriptures, we must look well to every warning and guiding light of the Spirit's kindling, and ask for direction from above; for as the ships go not at haphazard, so neither will any Christian find his way to heaven unless he watch and pray and look up daily, saying, "Guide me in a plain path, O God."

The voyage of a ship on the main ocean seems to me to be an admirable picture of the life of faith. The sailor does not see a road before him, or any landmark or seamark, yet is sure of his course. He relies upon fixed lights in heaven, for far out he can see no beacon or light on the sea. His calculations, based on the laws of the heavenly bodies, are sure guides on a wild wilderness where no keel ever leaves a furrow to mark the way. The late Captain Basil Hall, one of the most scientific officers in the navy, tells the following interesting incident. He once sailed from San Blas, on the west coast of Mexico; and after a voyage of eight thousand miles, occupying eighty-nine days, he arrived off Rio de Janeiro, having in this interval passed through the Pacific Ocean, rounded Cape Horn, and crossed the South Atlantic, without making land or seeing a single sail except an American whaler. When within a week's sail of Rio, he set seriously about determining by lunar observations the position of his ship, and then steered his course by those common principles of navigation which may be safely employed for short distances between one known station and another. Having arrived within what he considered from his computations fifteen or twenty miles of the coast, he hove to, at four o'clock in the morning, to await the break of day, and then bore up, proceeding cautiously, on account of a thick fog. As this cleared away, the crew had the satisfaction of seeing the great Sugar Loaf Rock, which stands on one side of the harbour's mouth, so nearly right ahead, that they had not to alter their course above a point, in order to hit the entrance of the port. This was the first land they had seen for nearly three months, after crossing so many seas, and being set backwards and forwards by innumerable currents and foul winds. The effect upon all on board was electric, and giving way to their admiration, the sailors greeted the commander with a hearty cheer. And what a cheer will we give when after many a year's sailing by faith we at last see the pearly gates right straight ahead, and enter into the fair havens without needing to shift a point. Glory be to the Captain of our salvation, it will be all well with us when the fog of this life's care shall lift, and we shall see in the light of heaven.

Once more, how go the ships? They not only go according to the wind, guided by the helm and the chart, but some ships will go better than others, *according to their build.* With the same amount of wind one vessel makes more way than another. Now it is a blessed thing when the grace of God gives a Christian a good build. There are some church members who are so queerly shaped that somehow they never seem to cut the water, and even the Holy Spirit does not make much of them. They will get into harbour at last, but they will need a world of tugging. The snail did get into the ark: I often wonder how he did it, he must have got up very early that morning. However, the snail got in as well as the greyhound, and so there are many Christian people who will get to heaven, but heaven alone knows how, for they are such a queer sort of people that they seem to make no progress in the divine life. I would sooner live in heaven with them for ever than be fifteen minutes with them here below. God seems to shape some Christian minds in a more perfect model than others, so that, having simplicity of character, warmth of heart, zealous temperaments, and generous spirits, when the wind of the Spirit comes they cut through the foam.

Now, I suspect that some good people have by degrees become like the *Great Eastern* a short time since, namely, foul under water. They cannot go, because they are covered with barnacles. A ship is greatly impeded in its voyage if it carries a quantity of barnacles on her bottom. I know lots of Christian people—I could point them out to-night, but I will not—who are covered with barnacles. They cannot go, because of some secret inconsistency, or love of the things of this world rather than the love of God. They want laying up and cleaning a bit, so as to get some of the barnacles off. It is a rough process, but it is one to which some of God's vessels have to be exposed. What headway they would make towards heaven if that which hindereth were removed. Sometimes when a man is on a bed of sickness, he is losing his barnacles; and sometimes, when a man has been rich and wealthy, and he has lost all he had, it takes off the barnacles. When we have lost friends we love, and whom we have made idols of, we have been sorry to lose them, but it has cleaned off our barnacles; and when we have got out to sea there has been an ease about the going, and we have scarcely known how it was, but God knew that He had made us more fit for His service by the trials of life to which He exposed us.

That is how the ships go. There are many mysteries about them, and there are many in us. God makes us go by the gales of His Spirit. Oh, that we may be trim for going, buoyant, and swift to be moved, and so may we make a grand voyage to heaven with Christ Jesus at the helm.

III. Thirdly and briefly. When I saw these ships go I happened to be near a station of Lloyd's, and I noticed that they ran up flags as the vessels went by, to which the vessels replied. I suppose they were *asking questions*—to know their names and what their cargo was, and where they were going, and so on. Now I am going to act as Lloyd's to-night, and put up the flags and ask you something about yourselves. The third point will then be—the ships go, LET US SIGNAL THEM.

And, first, *who is your owner?* "There go the ships," but who is your owner? You do not reply, but I think I can make a guess. There are some hypocrites about, who make fine pretensions, but they are not holy living people, they even dare to come to the Lord's table, and yet they drink of the cup of devils. They will sing pious hymns with us, and then sing lascivious ditties with their familiars. I would say to such a man,—you are a rotten vessel, you do not belong to King Jesus. Every timber is staunch in His vessels. They are not all what we should like them to be, and as I have said already they too often are covered with barnacles, but still they are all sincere. The Lord builds His vessels with sound timber, and unless we are sincere, true, and right, Christ is not our owner, but Satan is. The painted hypocrite is known through the disguise he wears.

There is another vessel over there, a fine vessel too. Look, she is newly-painted, and looks spick and span. You can see nothing amiss with her. What white sails, and do you notice the many flags? Take the glass and read the vessel's name, and you will see in bold letters, "Self-righteousness." Ah, I know that the owner is not the Lord Jesus Christ, for all the ships that belong to Him carry the red cross flag, and cannot endure the flaunting rag of self-righteousness. All God's people own that they must be saved by sovereign grace, and anything like righteousness of their own they pump overboard as so much leakage and bilge-water. I see another vessel over yonder, with her sails all spread, and every bit of her colours flying. There, there, what a blaze she makes! How proud she seems as she scuds over the water. That vessel is "The Pride," from the port of Self-Conceit, Captain Ignorance. I do not know where she is oftenest to be seen, but sometimes she crosses this bit of water. I should not wonder if she is in sight here now, and you may be sure she does not belong to our Lord Jesus. Whether it is pride of money, or person, or rank, or talent, it cometh of evil, and Jesus Christ does not own it. You must get rid of all pride if you belong to Him. God grant us to be humble in heart. I could mention some more vessels that I see here to-night, but I will not. I will rather beg each man to ask himself, "Can I put my hand on my heart and say, 'I am not my own, I am bought with a price?' Did Jesus buy me with His precious blood, and do I own that there is not a timber, spar, rope, or bolt in me but what belongs to Him?" Blessed be His name, some of us can say there is not a hair of our head or a drop of our blood but what belongs to Him. Thine are we, Thou Son of David, and all that we have.

I hope there are vessels here which are owned by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let them never be ashamed to confess their Owner. A vessel on proper business is never ashamed to answer signals. If there should be a smuggler or pirate in the offing the crews would not be likely to answer signals, but those who are on honest business are ready to reply. And so, brethren, be ye ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; never show in your actions that you are ashamed of Jesus, but ever let the broad flag be flying in whatever waters you are—"Christ is mine, and I am His. For Him I live, His reproach would I bear, and His honour would I maintain."

Our next inquiry is, *what is your cargo?* "There go the ships," but what do they carry? You cannot tell from looking at them far out at sea, except that you can be pretty sure that some of them do not carry much. Look at that showy brig! You can tell by the look of her that she has not much on board; from the fact of her floating so high it is clear that her cargo is light. Big men, very important individuals, very high-floating people are common, but there is nothing in them. If they had more on board they would sink deeper in the water. As we said this morning, the more grace a man has the lower he lies before God. Well, brethren, what cargo have you got? I am afraid some of you who lie down in the water are not kept down by any very precious cargo, but I fear you are in ballast. I have gone aboard some Christians; I thought there was a good deal in them, but I have not been able to find it. They have a deal of trouble, and they always tell you about it. There is a good old soul I call in to see sometimes: I begin to converse with her, and her conversation is always about rheumatism: nothing else: you cannot get beyond rheumatism: that good sister is in ballast. There is another friend of mine, a farmer, if you talk with him, it is always about the badness of the times: that brother is in ballast too. There are many tradesmen who, though they are Christians, cannot be made to talk of anything but the present dullness of business. I wish they could get that ballast out, and fill up with something better, for it is not worth carrying. You must have it sometimes, I suppose; but it is infinitely better to carry a load of praises, prayers, good wishes, holy doctrines, charitable actions, and generous encouragements.

Some ships, I think, carry a cargo of *powder*. You cannot go very near them without feeling you are in danger, they are so very apt to misjudge and take offence. I wish that such persons were made to carry a red flag, that we might give them a wide berth.

It is well to be loaded with good things. Young people, study the Word of God, ask to be taught by experience, and, wherever you go, seek to carry the precious commodities which God has made dear to your own soul, that others may be enriched thereby. It is an interesting sight to see those immense ships loaded with passengers for the colonies. I cannot help praying as I look at them, "God grant that no harm may come to them, but may they safely reach their desired haven." When I look at some of our brethren whom God is blessing, so that they have a cargo of blessed souls on board, consisting of hundreds who have been brought to Jesus by them, I would to God we had many more. Thank God, I have sometimes had my decks crowded with passengers who have from my ministry received the gospel. The Lord has brought them on board, and O, I trust before I die He will give me thousands more who will have to thank God that they heard the gospel from these lips. May we be emigrant vessels bearing souls away into the glory-land where the days of their mourning shall be ended. Of course, we can only be humble instruments, but still, what honour God puts upon His instruments when He makes use of them for this object. "There go the ships." Not ships of war are we, with guns to carry death, but missionary vessels carrying tidings of peace and glad news to the utmost ends of the earth.

Our last signal asks the question—*where go the ships?* Where go the ships? Oh, yes, they went merrily down the Channel the other day, but where

are they now? In a year's time who will report all the good vessels which just now passed by our coast? I am looking out upon all of you, anxious to know what port you are making for. Some of you are bound for the port of peace. Swiftly may the winds convey you over the waters, and safely may you voyage under the convoy of the Lord Jesus. I will try and keep pace with you. I hope that you will sail in company with others of my Master's vessels, but if you have to sail alone over a sea in which you cannot see another sail, may God, the Blessed One, protect and guard you. Bound for the port of peace, with Christ on board, insured for glory, bound for life eternal, let us bless the name of the Lord.

But alas, alas, many ships which bid fair for the desired haven are lost on the rocks. Some soul-destroying sin causes their swift destruction. Others equally fair to look upon are lost on the sands. They seemed bound for heaven, but they were not the Lord's. The sands are very dangerous, but they are only a mass of little atoms, soft and yielding, yet as many ships are lost on the sands as on the rocks. Even so there are ways and habits of evil which are deceptive—there is nothing very bad about them apparently; nothing heartbreaking, like rocks, but oh, the multitudes of souls that have been sucked in by sandy temptations. Dear brother, I hope you are not going that way. God grant you grace to avoid little sins, and I am sure you will keep off the rocks of great sin. In any case may we turn out to be the Lord's own, and so be kept to the end. Woe unto us if we should prove to be mere adventurers, and perish in our presumption.

Among the ships that go to sea there are some that *founder*. One does not know how, but they are never heard of more. They were sighted on such a day, but never more shall we hear any tidings of them. How is that? I have known some of the members of this church go down in mid-ocean. I never thought it could have happened, but they have gone. I can only imagine how it was. They seemed seaworthy vessels, but they were doubtless rotten through and through. O, brethren, may God keep you from foundering, as some do by some mysterious sin, which seems as if it clasped the soul and dragged it down to the deeps of hell.

Some vessels have I known, too, that have become *derelict*—waifs and strays upon the sea—men that were the hope of churches, but who have abandoned themselves to reckless living. They used to worship with the people of God, and seemed to be very earnest and zealous; and now, perhaps, at this very moment they are passing through the gin palace door, or spending this evening in vices which we dare not mention. Oh, it is dreadful. Many start on their voyage, and look as if they were Christ's own vessels, and yet for some strange, unreasonable reason they give all up, and they will be met with, in years to come, drifting about, rudderless, captainless, crewless, dangerous to others, and miserable to themselves. God save you from this, young man! And you, my friend, though you have been a member of this church for twenty years, God save you from despairing, and sinning furiously; for there sometimes come over men strange moments of insanity in which they reverse the whole of their lives, lay violent hands upon an excellent character, and become castaways. The grace of God will save the truly regenerate from this: but, alas, how many high professors never were regenerate at all!

Where will some of the vessels I see before me go? It is a fine fleet I am looking upon. Brothers and sisters, I hope all of us will be found in that great harbour in heaven which can accommodate all His Majesty's fleet. Oh, it will be a great day when we all arrive. Will you give me a hail when you get into port? Will you know me? I shall look out for some of you. I cannot help believing that we shall know each other. We have been in rough waters together these twenty years, and we have had some glorious weather too, have we not? We have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep: I hope we shall keep together till we reach that blessed haven, where our fellowship will be eternal. How we will glorify Him who gets us there, even Jesus, the Lord High Admiral of the seas. Christ shall never hear the last of it if I get to heaven. *I will* sing, yea, I will sing praises unto His name. I remember preaching once, when half of my congregation quarrelled with me when I had done preaching, for I had said—

> "Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing,
> While heaven's resounding mansions ring
> With shouts of sovereign grace."

As I came downstairs I met one who said, "You will not sing loudest, for I owe more to grace than you do"; and I found that all the Lord's people said the same. Well, we will have it out when we get to heaven: we will try this contention among the birds of Paradise, and see which of us can sing the most loudly to the praise of redeeming grace. Till then let us trust the Lord Jesus and obey His orders, for He is our Captain, and it is our duty to do His bidding.

But it would be a dreadful supposition—and yet mayhap, it may be worse than a supposition—that some of you will have to cast anchor for ever in the Dead Sea, whose waves are fire, where every vessel is a prison, where every passenger feels a hell. What must it be to be in hell an hour! I wish some of you could think it over. What must it be to be shut up in despair for one single day! If you have the tooth-ache a few minutes how wretched you are, and how anxious to get rid of it; but what must it be to be in hell even it were for a time,—even it were *but* for a time. Oh, if it came to an end, still would I say, by all the humanities that are in my soul, I charge you, brother, do not risk the wrath of God; go not down to the pit. Pull down that black flag, man: pull it down and cast off your old owner. Ask Christ to be your owner. Run up the red flag of the cross and give yourself to Jesus, for if you do not your voyage must lead to the gulf of black despair, where you will suffer for ever the result of your sin. God have mercy upon us, and may we never have to pass through the straits of judgment into the gulf of damnation. May it never be said, "There goes one of the ships that the Tabernacle pilot signalled; it is gone to destruction." May it rather be said, of all of us, all in full sail together, as we go towards heaven, "There go the ships": not one of them is drifting to the gulf of destruction. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and all is well with you. Reject Him, and all is ill with you. May He by His word enable you to make a right choice to-night, for His love's sake. Amen.

A VISIT FROM THE LORD

"O visit me with Thy salvation."—Psalm cvi. 4.

THIS is the prayer of a man who understood the art of praise. He begins this Psalm with a Hallelujah. "Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good." Now, mark, there is no prayer that is purer, more spiritual, more heavenly, than the prayer which comes out of a heart full of praise. How often have I said that prayer is the breathing in of the air of heaven, and praise is the breathing of it out again. Prayer and praise make up the best life of the Christian man, and He is not yet thoroughly in spiritual health who is all for prayer and not at all for praise; but he is the soundly healthy Christian who has these two things rightly balanced. Such a man one moment cries, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever"; and then, directly afterwards, prays, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people." Is it not possible, my dear brother, that you have lost some of your power in prayer because you have somewhat neglected praise? If we do not bless God for the mercies we have received, how can we go and ask Him for more? If we have already been heard in our prayers, and yet have failed to acknowledge our obligation to the Giver, do we not come to prayer with a very bad grace? Might not God say to us, "You did not thank Me the last time I granted your request; why should I answer you this time?" Let us, therefore, each one take care that our prayer is the petition of one who can and who does praise the Lord.

Next, observe that this prayer was offered by one who knew the blessedness of the saints. In the third verse, he says, "Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times." I introduce this remark because, to a large extent, the prayer of the text is the prayer of a sinner,—the prayer of one who felt that he did not bear the character of a saint so fully as he ought to have done. And, beloved, if we were more saintly, we should have much more power in prayer, and we should be much more happy. If we walked with God more closely, and kept judgment, and did righteousness at all times, we should be saved from many of those trials and afflictions and downcastings which now fall to our lot. The Psalmist tells us about what troubles the children of Israel had in the wilderness; but those troubles resulted from their sin. They need not have had to endure half what they suffered, if they had only been right with God. And so, in the later days of their history, they would never have been captives to their enemies if they had not first been captives to their sins. If they had walked as God would have had them walk, their peace would have been like a river, one of them would have chased a thousand, and two would have put ten thousand to flight. There will be, practically, hardly any limit to the blessedness which a child of God may enjoy even in this life if he will but walk carefully with his God. So, dear friends, if you and I feel that we have wandered, and if our prayer has to be presented "out of the depths," yet I trust that we have not forgotten that there is a peace, a rest, a joy, which God bestows upon those who walk uprightly, those who live more carefully than we have done, and keep nearer to Him than some of His erring children do.

Now, coming to the text, I want you to notice the prayer itself. I have nothing new to say, but I shall try just to utter some very simple truths suggested by the Psalmist's prayer: "O visit me with Thy salvation."

I. The first thought is, that the Psalmist here prays for SALVATION.

What a wonderful word that word "salvation" is! Well might Dr. Watts say,—

> "Salvation! let the echo fly
> The spacious earth around,"—

for there is something in it to be heard by all who dwell on this spacious earth. Salvation is the one thing which all men need; and when it is given to them, it conveys to them innumerable mercies for time and for eternity. Indeed, everything good is wrapped up in that word salvation. As we read this Psalm, you probably noticed how the Psalmist sings in it concerning salvation. He says, first, that *God saved the people out of Egypt.* There they were, a nation of captives and bondslaves; and He began to work with a high hand and an outstretched arm to bring them out of their captivity; and though they did not understand His wonders, yet, nevertheless, He saved them. That is a salvation in which you and I also delight,—salvation by the sprinkled blood,—salvation by the Paschal Lamb,—salvation by the right hand of God and His stretched-out arm,—a salvation which reveals His faithfulness, His mercy, and His power. Let us bless God if we know experimentally what this salvation means; and if we do not, let this be the prayer of each one of us, "O visit me with Thy salvation."

One of the worst results of the Fall is that men who are spiritually dead do not pray for life; but if there be one here who is sufficiently under the influence of the Holy Spirit to know that he needs spiritual life, he may begin at once to pray, "O visit me with Thy salvation." If you have not yet felt the burden of sin, if you do not yet savingly know the Sin-bearer, if you are still a bondslave to your sin, you have indeed need to pray this prayer. If you know that you are not what you ought to be, and that, living and dying as you now are, you will perish everlastingly, then with all your heart, and with as much desire as there may be in you, do breathe the prayer to God, "O visit me with Thy salvation."

Oh poor heart, as soon as you begin to pray, you begin to live. You may have very little power in prayer; in fact, your prayer may be no better than the first feeble cry of a newborn child; but it is a sign of life, and the Lord hears even a groan; and the tear that falls without a sound is liquid music to Jehovah, for He knows what it means. May I not hope that somebody here, if he cannot pray spiritually, will yet pray as do the young ravens who, in their nests, when they are hungry, cry, and the Lord hears them, and relieves their hunger?

If you think that your prayer is no better than the cry of a poor bird, or the roaring of a wild beast, yet still do cry, do pray. One trick of the devil is to try to stop you from praying; he will tell you that you will not be heard. But I can assure you that the cry of misery, the sob of inward grief, is certain to be heard by the tender and gracious God whom we worship. Somewhere in this building, methinks, there must be some heart that has been hitherto giddy, thoughtless, careless, that will now begin to pray, "O visit me with thy salvation."

Further on in the psalm, the writer sings of *a second salvation when the people were delivered at the Red Sea.* Its waves rolled before them, and they could not tell how they were to escape from Pharaoh who was close behind with all the chariots and horsemen of Egypt pursuing them. Ah, poor timid Israelites! they could almost hear the whips of their taskmasters; and they probably feared that something worse would come upon them, and that they would feel their oppressors' swords, and that their blood would soon be shed. They were in a state of great anxiety and trouble, yet we read just now, "Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake. He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up: and He saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy."

Perhaps I am addressing some who are so fully conscious of their sin that they are driven almost to despair by it. Instead of believing that this awakened conscience of theirs is an evidence of God's grace, they are afraid that it is a sign of condemnation. The weight of their sin crushes them; they hardly dare hope that there may be a way of escape for them; but, poor soul, if this is your sad state, I do trust that you will be able to pray, "'O visit me with Thy salvation.' O God, the Red Sea rolls in front of me, the rocks frown upon me on either hand, and my sins pursue me, and seek to slay me. 'O visit me with Thy salvation.' Come, and dry up this Red Sea of iniquity. Come, and destroy these adversaries of mine, and let me have to sing with the Psalmist, 'And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left.' 'O visit me with Thy salvation.'" You know how it was with Israel,—I always delight to dwell upon it,—how the Lord brought again the waters of the Red Sea, and Pharaoh and all his hosts were swallowed up. And then Miriam took her timbrel, and all the women went forth after her, and sang unto the Lord who had triumphed gloriously, and thrown the horses and their riders into the sea; and this was one of the most jubilant notes of their song, "The depths have covered them; there is not one of them left." So it was, beloved, when you and I, having cried to God for mercy, at last found it through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Then we saw our sins cast into the depths of the sea, and we were ready to dance for joy as we said, "The depths have covered them; there is not one of them left." Our experience ought to be an encouragement to others. Come, despairing soul, you that are like a mouse in a hole, and hardly dare to pop up your head to look out; never mind about coming out. Stop where you are, and there breathe the prayer, "O visit me with Thy salvation"; and you shall yet come out into light and liberty, and you shall joy and rejoice in God.

It may be that you and I, dear friends, have gone further on than this. We have been saved from our natural ruin, and saved from the power of despair wrought in us by conviction; and *now we are fighting with our uprising corruptions.* Our inbred sin is like the deep that lieth under, and perhaps, lately, the fountains of the great deep have been broken up within us. We cannot sin without being grieved and troubled by it; it is a vexation even to hear the report of it. Oh, that we could live without sinning at all! Well, now, beloved, if you are struggling against it, let this be your prayer to the Most High, "O visit me with Thy salvation." The Lord is able at once to come into your heart, and to put an end to your temptation whatever it may be. Is it unbelief? He can strengthen your faith. Is it covetousness? He can deliver you from that abomination, and give you a contented spirit. Is it anger? Oh, how sweetly can He come, and fill you with love! Whatever may be the evil against which you are fighting, He can help you to overthrow it, and you shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved you. I earnestly commend this prayer to every struggling believer, to everyone who feels the two natures within him striving for the mastery, and who is sometimes in doubt whether the house of David or the house of Saul will get the victory. Doubt not, my brother; the Lord is with the true seed. He that quickened you will keep the new life in you; it cannot die, for it is born of God, and you shall yet overcome sin and death and hell. Only forget not to breathe the cry from your very soul, "O visit me with Thy salvation," and you shall prove what a salvation it is to be saved from the power of sin.

Our text may also be used in another sense, for salvation means *deliverance from grievous affliction,* just as, in this Psalm, when the children of Israel were brought into great distress by their enemies, then God came, and saved them from their foes. So, at this time, dear friend, you may be in great distress. It may be temporal distress, or mental distress, or spiritual distress. Whether you are suffering in body, or in mind, or in heart, God knows how to deliver you. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." "He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." If you should ever get so low in spirit that you can only compare yourself to Jonah when the whale went down to the very bottom of the sea, and he felt that the earth with her bars was about him for ever, and he was at the very foundations of the everlasting hills, yet even then the God who brought up Jonah from the depths can bring you up. See how the wheel turns; that spoke which was lowest just now has become the highest. Mark how the stars which shall to-night descend, and shall not be seen all day long, shall yet, when night comes round again, climb once more to their zenith, and occupy their appointed places. You are not doomed to be down for ever, you shall yet mount up again; and you may say to the adversary, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise." "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring My people again from the depths of the sea." To every tried and troubled one, then, I suggest the prayer of our text, "O visit me with Thy salvation," for it points out the way of deliverance for them whatever their trouble may be, and it specially concerns the all-important matter of salvation.

II. Now let us think for a few minutes upon the second thing which is very manifest in the text, and that is, VISITATION: "O visit me with Thy salvation."

You have read in the newspapers of men having "died by the visitation of God." Sometimes, that has been the verdict of the jury at the close of an inquest; but here is a man who lived by the visitation of God! And, truly, it is a most blessed thing to know that the very best and truest way of living is to live by being visited by God,—visited by His salvation. I admire the wording of this prayer. It does not say, "O save me." That would be a very proper petition. It does not say, "O send me salvation." That, under some aspects, would be proper enough; but the petition is, "Lord, come Thyself, and bring the salvation that I need, by Thyself coming to me. 'O visit me with Thy salvation.'" What a blessed prayer this is! "O visit me. Lord, visit me." It takes some faith to pray it, for humility prompts us to say, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof." Yet faith, and a childlike spirit, teach us to pray, "Lord, visit me. I hear that Thou dost visit Thy people; Lord, visit me. I have heard one of them say that Thou didst come under his roof, and stay with him all through the night, and make him unspeakably glad. 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people; O visit me,'—aye, even me,—'with Thy salvation.' Though the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, for Thou art so great, yet I know that Thou dost dwell in every humble and contrite heart; Lord, come and visit me, and dwell within me." I think this is indeed a blessed prayer.

Mark the *condescension* which the Psalmist feels that the Lord will thus manifest. "'O visit me with Thy salvation.' Lord, I cannot be saved unless Thou wilt visit me. Visit me not as a saved one, but 'visit me with Thy salvation.' I am lost until Thou dost come to me. O come, Lord, and visit me as a Saviour. Come and visit me as a Physician, for I am sick. Pay me a visit of mercy, a visit of grace and tenderness. O Thou great and glorious Lord, I beseech Thee, come and visit me. By the remembrance of Bethlehem's manger, the horned oxen, and the straw, and the stable, so ill fitted for Thy reception, come and visit me. And, as the angels sang when Thou didst thus descend to the lowliest of lowliness, so shall my heart sing yet more sweetly if Thou wilt visit me,—even me. It will be great condescension on Thy part, but 'O visit me with Thy salvation.'"

And it will be *compassion*, too. "'O visit me.' I am a prisoner; yet come, Lord, and visit me. I am lame and very weak. Lord, I have not a leg to carry me to Thy house; so, come to my house, Lord. 'O visit me.' My heart is heavy, and sorely burdened; my very wishes lag, my prayers limp, my desires halt. O come and visit me. If I cannot come to Thee, yet come Thou to me, my God." It seems to me that this is a sweet, sweet prayer for one who is under a sense of inability, and whose strength is utterly gone. "O visit me with Thy salvation." In it I see condescension and compassion.

But there is more in it even than that, there is also *communion*: "O visit me with Thy salvation." This means more than a complimentary call such as ladies and gentlemen make when they spend half a day in going round to their friends distributing little bits of cardboard. I believe it is a wonderful token of friendship to do that; but you and I do not move in that artificial region. When we visit anyone, we mean it, and we do not make calls of mere ceremony or custom; but a visit from a beloved friend,—oh, what a joy it is! Occasionally, I have the opportunity of meeting dear friends who have been asking me to pay them a visit, and I can see, by the very way that they receive me, that they are almost as happy as the black men were when Mungo Park went to them. They said that they began to date their existence from the day when the white man came that way. Most of you must have some friends who love you so much that, when they see you at their house, they do not want to know when you are going, but if they could, they would make you always stop there. Dr. Watts went to see Sir Thomas Abney, at Abney Park, to spend a week; but that week lasted through all the rest of his life, for he never went away from there, and he lies buried in Abney Park, and Sir Thomas is buried there also, so that even in death the friends are not divided from one another. They never meant to part after they once came together. That is the kind of visit we want from the Lord, so let us breathe this prayer now, "O Lord, come and visit me; but do not merely pay me a brief visit, but come to stay with me."

"That is a bold request," says one, "to ask God to come and abide with us." Listen, listen, listen. There was a certain church,—you know the name of it,—Laodicea, of which Christ said that it made Him sick; but what did He say next? "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." That passage is not a call from Christ to sinners, as it is often used; it may, perhaps, be so used by way of illustration. But that is not its first meaning; it is this. Here are some people of God who have fallen so low in grace that they are neither cold nor hot, and Christ prescribes this remedy for their lukewarmness,—that He should come, and sup with them,—that He should come and pay them a visit. Now, if our blessed Lord was willing to visit the Laodiceans who were neither cold nor hot, I am sure that He will come to us who are cold, and He will come to us who are hot; He would rather come to such than to the lukewarm. Let us, then, each one breathe the prayer, "Come, Lord, and tarry not; come now, and visit me with Thy salvation." And when He does come, brethren, let us do as Sir Thomas Abney did with Dr. Watts, let us get Him to protract His visit. He will make as though He would go further, as He did when at Emmaus, but our wisdom will be to say, as the two disciples did, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And when He says, "No, I must go," we must not take His "No" for an answer, but we must do as they did, "They constrained Him." He will go, if you will let Him, but you must not let Him go. Perhaps He will say, "Let Me go, for the day breaketh"; but you must follow Jacob's example, and say, "I will not let Thee go," and you need not add, "except Thou bless me," but you may say, "I will not let Thee go at all; I mean to hold to Thee on and on and on, by day and night; Thou shalt not leave me." You will be indeed blessed if you can pray the prayer of our text in this sense: "O visit me with Thy salvation."

III. Now, with great brevity, I turn to a third

thing in my text, and that is, PERSONALITY: "O visit *me* with Thy salvation." We ought to pray for one another; we must pray for the peace and prosperity of the whole Church of Christ; but there are times when it will be well that all our desire should run in this direction, and that we should cry to the Lord, "O visit *me* with Thy salvation."

This petition of the Psalmist shows *great necessity*. It is as if he had said, "Lord, I need Thee more than any others do; therefore, do visit me. Unless Thou dost come to me, I shall be a wretch undone for ever. 'O visit me with Thy salvation.'" It is always unwise to make your necessity appear little. It is so great that you never can exaggerate it; take care that you do not set it in a diminished form. When you come before God, do not try to make yourself out to be a little sinner. You are not likely to make yourself appear more guilty than you are; but your highest wisdom is to state your case to the Lord in all its blackness and its badness, and then to cry to Him, "O visit *me* with Thy salvation."

It seems to me that this personality of the prayer also betokens *great unworthiness*, as if the Psalmist felt that the Lord might go and visit others, and perhaps find some reason for so doing; but, as for him, he must cry, and cry mightily, too, or else he would be passed by, for he felt himself so unworthy: "O Lord, visit me; visit me to save me. If ever a soul needed saving, I am that one. If ever there was a sinner near despair, I am that sinner. Lord, come and visit me with Thy salvation."

The prayer also reveals *great concentration of desire*: "O visit me with Thy salvation." It seems to me as if the Psalmist put all his thoughts, and all his desires, yea, and his very life into that prayer. Let us imitate him in this earnestness and concentration. Where are you, my dear friend?—for I feel certain that there is somebody present who can pray this prayer: "O visit *me*." If you are growing old, well may you say, "O visit *me*." If you are feeling ill,—if the doctor tells you that there is something amiss with that heart of yours,—you may well pray, "O visit *me*." Or do you feel yourself very weak and feeble in spirit? Well, then, do not hesitate to make your prayer to-night a personal one; there is nothing selfish in crying, with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." If anybody says that it is selfish to pray for yourself so much, just ask him what he would do if he were drowning? Does anybody say that it is selfish for him to strike out and try to swim, or selfish to seize the lifebuoy that is thrown to him? If you were in a fire, and likely to be burned to death, would anybody call you selfish because you looked out for the fire-escape, and climbed on to it as soon as it touched your window? And when your very soul is in danger, it is a hallowed selfishness to seek first its salvation. If your own soul be lost, what can you do for the salvation of other people? If you perish, what benefit can you be to your fellow-men? Truly, this is a holy charity which ought to begin at home, and I do not believe that any man does really care for the souls of others who does not first and foremost care about his own soul. If you do not pray, "O visit me with Thy salvation," I am sure that you do not pray, "O visit my wife with Thy salvation. O visit my children with Thy salvation." Therefore, keep to this personal prayer till it is answered, and when it is, then pray for all others as earnestly as you have prayed for yourself.

IV. And now to finish, notice one thing more in this text, and that is, A SPECIALITY: "O visit me with *Thy* salvation,"—the kind of salvation he has been describing in this Psalm, the salvation wrought by omnipotent grace, the salvation of enduring love.

Dear friends, I have heard of a good many so-called salvations in my time. I heard, some time ago, of a woman who said that she had been saved already six times, and it had not done her much good. She had been to different revival meetings, and joined various societies that make a great row, and call it salvation, and in that way she had been "saved" six times, and she did not know that she was any better. No; and you may be "saved" in such a fashion as that six thousand times, and be none the better, for that is not God's salvation.

The Psalmist prayed, "O visit me with Thy salvation," and by that he meant *real salvation*, a radical change, a thorough work of grace. God's salvation includes a perfect cleansing in the precious blood of Jesus, a supernatural work in renewing the heart, a resurrection work in raising the dead, and giving a new life. So, when you pray, "O visit me with *Thy* salvation," you ask the Lord to give you real salvation, not a sham.

This salvation is also *complete salvation*. It saves the man from the love of sin. It not merely saves him from getting drunk, from lying, and from thieving, and from uncleanness; but it saves him within as well as without. It is a thorough renewal,—a work of grace that takes effect upon every part of his nature. God grant that you and I may never be content with a salvation which is not the work of divine grace! You remember that it is said of Mr. Rowland Hill that he was met, somewhere about the New Cut, by a drunken man who reeled up to him, and said, "Well, Mr. Hill, I am glad to see you, sir. I am one of your converts." "Yes," replied the good minister, "you may be one of my converts; if you had been one of the Lord's converts you would not be drunk." There are too many of *our* converts about; we may find them everywhere except in heaven; but woe unto the man who is content with being the convert of his fellow-man! What we want is a visitation from God Himself, and therefore we pray, with the Psalmist, "O visit me with *Thy* salvation."

Lastly, and chiefly, God's salvation is *eternal salvation*. We hear, in various quarters, from time to time, about a salvation that is only temporary. I have been told, again and again, of men who are said to have been children of God one day, and children of the devil the next. Now, I believe that a temporary salvation is a trumpery salvation, and that it is neither worth preaching nor receiving; but God's salvation is both worth preaching and receiving, because it is everlasting salvation. A good old divine was once asked whether he believed in the final perseverance of the saints. "Well," said he, "I do not know much about that matter, but I firmly believe in the final perseverance of God, that where He has begun a good work He will carry it on until it is complete." To my mind, that truth includes the final perseverance of the saints; they persevere in the way of salvation because God keeps them in it. Does the Holy Spirit renew the heart of a man, and then is His work after all undone, so that the man goes back again to his unregenerate state? What is to become of him then? "Oh!" says someone,

"he may be born again." What! a man to be born again, and again, and again? Is there anything in the Bible to warrant such teaching as that? I believe not. If the Holy Spirit's work in renewing the heart could ever be undone, then this text would come in: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance"—for God's greatest work has been already wrought upon them, and if it could fail, nothing more could be done for them. "But, beloved," says the apostle, after making this solemn declaration, "we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." So, dear friends, if the Lord saves you, you are saved for ever. If He has wrought within you a work of grace, it will assuredly end in glory.

"All needful grace will God bestow,
And crown that grace with glory too;
He gives us all things, and withholds
No real good from upright souls."

"Lord, visit me with Thy salvation." Others may have their own salvation of any sort or kind that they please, but do Thou visit me with *Thy* salvation; do Thou take my case in hand, then the work will be done, well done, and done for ever. Pray thus, dear friend, for yourself; "O visit *me* with *Thy* salvation," and He will do so. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." God lead you all to accept His great salvation even now, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

WHY ARE MEN SAVED

"Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake."—Psalm cvi. 8.

IN looking upon the works of God in creation, there are two questions which at once occur to the thoughtful mind, and which must be answered before we can procure a clue to the philosophy and science of creation itself. The first one is the question of authorship: Who made all these things? And the next question is that of design: For what purpose were all these things created? The first question, "Who made all these things?" is one which is easily answered by a man who has an honest conscience and a sane mind; for when he lifts his eyes up yonder to read the stars, he will see those stars spell out in golden letters this word—*God;* and when he looks below upon the waves, if his ears are honestly opened, he will hear each wave proclaiming, *God.* If he looks to the summits of the mountains, they will not speak, but with a dignified answer of silence they seem to say,

"The hand that made us is Divine."

If we listen to the rippling of the freshet at the mountain side, to the tumbling of the avalanche, to the lowing of the cattle, to the singing of the birds to every voice and sound of nature, we shall hear this answer to the question, "God is our Maker; He hath made us, and not we ourselves."

The next question, as to design—Why were these things made?—is not so easy to answer, apart from Scripture; but when we look at Scripture we discover this fact—that as the answer to the first question is God, so the answer to the second question is the same. Why were these things made? The answer is, for God's glory, for His honour, and for His pleasure. No other answer can be consistent with reason. Whatever other replies men may propound, no other can be really sound. If they will for one moment consider that there was a time when God had no creatures—when He dwelt alone, the mighty Maker of ages, glorious in an uncreated solitude, divine in His eternal loneliness—"I am and there is none beside Me"—can any one answer this question—Why did God make creatures to exist?—in any other way than by answering it thus: "He made them for His own pleasure and for His own glory." You may say He made them for His creatures; but we answer, there were then no creatures to make them for. We admit that the answer may be a sound one *now.* God makes the harvest for His creatures; He hangs the sun in the firmament to bless His creatures with light and sunshine; He bids the moon walk in her course by night, to cheer the darkness of His creatures upon earth. But the first answer, going back to the origin of all things, can be nothing else than this: "For His pleasure they are and were created." "He made all things for Himself and by Himself."

Now, this which holds good in the works of creation, holds equally good in the works of salvation. Lift up your eyes on high; higher than those stars which glimmer on the floor of heaven; look up, where spirits in white, clearer than light, shine like stars in their magnificence; look there, where the redeemed with their choral symphonies "circle the throne of God rejoicing," and put this question: "Who saved those glorified beings, and for what purpose where they saved." We tell you that the same answer must be given as we have previously given to the former question—"*He* saved them—He saved them for His name's sake." The text is an answer to the two great questions concerning salvation: Who saved men, and why are they saved? "He saved them for His name's sake."

Into this subject I shall endeavour to look this morning. May God make it profitable to each of us, and may we be found among the number who shall be saved "for His name's sake." Treating the text verbally—and that is the way most will understand—here are four things. First, *a glorious Saviour*—"*He* saved them"; secondly, *a favoured people*—"He saved *them*"; thirdly *a divine reason why He saved them*—"for His name's sake"; and fourthly, *an obstruction conquered,* in the word "nevertheless," implying that there was some difficulty that was removed. "Nevertheless He saved them for His

name's sake." A Saviour; the saved; the reason; the obstruction removed.

I. First, then, here is A GLORIOUS SAVIOUR—"*He* saved them." Who is to be understood by that pronoun "He"? Possibly many of my hearers may answer, "Why, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of men." Right, my friends; but not all the truth. Jesus Christ is the Saviour; but not more so than God the Father, or God the Holy Ghost. Some persons who are ignorant of the system of divine truth think of God the Father as being a great Being full of wrath, and anger, and justice, but having no love, they think of God the Spirit perhaps as a mere influence proceeding from the Father and the Son. Now, nothing can be more incorrect than such opinions. It is true the Son redeems me, but then the Father gave the Son to die for me, and the Father chose me in the everlasting election of His grace. The Father blots out my sin; the Father accepts me and adopts me into His family through Christ. The Son could not save without the Father any more than the Father without the Son; and as for the Holy Spirit, if the Son redeems, know ye not that the Holy Ghost regenerates? It is He that makes us new creatures in Christ, who begets us again unto a lively hope, who purifies our soul, who sanctifies our spirit, and who, at last, presents us spotless and faultless before the throne of the Most High, accepted in the Beloved. When thou sayest, "Saviour," remember there is a Trinity in that word—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, this Saviour being three persons under one name. Thou canst not be saved by the Son without the Father, nor by the Father without the Son, nor by Father and Son without the Spirit. But as They are one in creation, so are They one in salvation, working together in one God for our salvation, and unto that God be glory everlasting, world without end, Amen.

But, note here, how this divine Being claims salvation wholly to Himself. "Nevertheless HE saved them." But, Moses, where art thou? Didst not thou save them, Moses? Thou didst stretch the rod over the sea, and it clave in halves; thou didst lift up thy prayer to heaven, and the frogs came, and the flies swarmed, and the water was turned into blood, and the hail smote the land of Egypt. Wast not thou their saviour, Moses? And thou Aaron, thou didst offer the bullocks which God accepted; thou didst lead them, with Moses, through the wilderness. Wast not thou their saviour? They answer, "Nay, we were the instruments, but *He* saved them. God made use of us, but unto His name be all the glory, and none unto ourselves." But, Israel, thou wast a strong and mighty people; didst not thou save thyself? Perhaps it was by thine own holiness that the Red Sea was dried up; perhaps the parted floods were frighted at the piety of the saints that stood upon their margin; perhaps it was Israel that delivered itself. Nay, nay, saith God's Word; *He* saved them; they did not save themselves, nor did their fellow-men redeem them. And yet, mark you, there are some who dispute this point, who think that men save themselves, or, at least, that priests and preachers can help to do it. We say that the preacher, under God, may be the instrument of arresting man's attention, of warning him and arousing him; but the preacher is nothing; God is everything. The most mighty eloquence that ever distilled from the lips of seraphic preacher is nothing apart from God's Holy Spirit. Neither Paul, nor Apollos, nor Cephas, are anything: God gave the increase and God must have all the glory. There are some we meet with here and there who say, "I am Mr. So-and-so's convert; I am a convert of the Rev. Dr. this or that." Well, if you are, sir, I cannot give you much hope of heaven. Only God's converts go there; not proselytes of man, but the redeemed of the Lord. Oh, it is very little to convert a man to our own opinions; it is something to be the means of converting him to the Lord our God. I had a letter some time ago from a good Baptist minister in Ireland, who very much wanted me to come over to Ireland, as he said, to represent the Baptist interest, because it was low there, and perhaps it might lead the people to think a little more of Baptists. I told him I would not go across the street merely to do that, much less would I cross the Irish Channel. I should not think of going to Ireland for that; but if I might go there to make Christians, under God, and be the means of bringing men to Christ, I would leave it to them what they should be afterwards, and trust to God's Holy Spirit to direct and guide them as to what denomination they should consider nearest akin to God's truth. Brethren, I might make all of you Baptists, perhaps, and yet you would be none the better for it; I might convert you all in that way, but such a conversion would be that you would be washed to greater stains, converted into hypocrites, and not into saints. I have seen something of wholesale conversion. Great revivalists have risen up; they have preached thundering sermons that have made men's knees knock together. "What a wonderful man!" people have said. "He has converted so many under one sermon." But look for his converts in a month, and where will they be? You will see some of them in the alehouse, you will hear others of them swear, you will find many of them rogues, and cheats, because they were not God's converts, but only man's. Brethren, if the work be done at all, it must be done of God, for if God do not convert there is nothing done that shall last, and nothing that shall be of any avail for eternity.

But some reply, "Well, sir, but men convert themselves." Yes, they do, and a fine conversion it is. Very frequently they convert themselves. But then that which man did, man undoes. He who converts himself one day, unconverts himself the next; he tieth a knot which his own fingers can loosen. Remember this—you may convert yourselves a dozen times over, but "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and "cannot see the kingdom of God." It is only "that which is born of the Spirit" that "is Spirit," and is therefore able to be gathered at last into the spirit-realm, where only spiritual things can be found before the throne of the Most High. We must reserve this prerogative wholly to God. If any man state that God is not Creator, we call him infidel; if any man entrench upon this doctrine, that God is the absolute Maker of all things, we hiss him down in a moment; but he is an infidel of the worst kind, because more specious, who puts God out of the mercy throne, instead of putting Him out of the creation throne, and who tells men that they may convert themselves, whereas God doth it all. "*He*" only, the great Jehovah—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—"He saved them for His name's sake.

Thus have I endeavoured to set out clearly the first truth of the divine and glorious Saviour.

II. Now, secondly, THE FAVOURED PERSONS—"He saved *them*." Who are they? You will reply, "They were the most respectable people that could be found in the world; they were a very prayerful, loving, holy, and deserving people; and, therefore, because they were good He saved them." Very well, that is your opinion, I will tell you what Moses says,—"Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitudes of Thy mercies; but provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red Sea. Nevertheless He saved them." Look at the seventh verse, and you will have their character. In the first place, they were a stupid people—"Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt." In the next place, they were an ungrateful people—"they remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies." In the third place, they were a provoking people—"they provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red Sea." Ah, these are the people whom free grace saves, these are the men and these the women whom the God of all grace condescends to take to His bosom and to make anew.

Note, first, *that they were a stupid people*. God sends His gospel not always to the wise and prudent, but unto fools;

> "He takes the fool and makes him know
> The wonders of His dying love."

Do not suppose, my hearer, because you are very unlettered and can scarcely read—do not imagine, because you have always been brought up in extreme ignorance, and have scarcely learnt to spell your name, that therefore you cannot be saved. God's grace can save you, and then enlighten you. A brother minister once told me a story of a man who was known in a certain village as a simpleton, and was always considered to be soft in the head; no one thought he could ever understand anything. But one day he came to hear the gospel preached. He had been a drunken fellow, having wit enough to be wicked, which is a very common kind of wit. The Lord was pleased to bless the word to his soul, so that he became a changed character; and what was the marvel of all was, his religion gave him a something which began to develop his latent faculties. He found he had a something to live for, and he began to try what he could do. In the first place he wanted to read his Bible, that he might read his Saviour's name; and after much hammering and spelling away, at last he was able to read a chapter. Then he was asked to pray at a prayer-meeting; here was an exercise of his vocal powers. Five or six words made up his prayer, and down he sat abashed. But by continually praying in his own family at home, he came to pray like the rest of the brethren, and he went on till he became a preacher, and, singularly enough, he had a fluency—a depth of understanding and a power of thought, such as are seldom found among ministers who only occasionally occupy pulpits. Strange it was, that grace should even tend to develop his natural powers, giving him an object, setting him devoutly and firmly upon it, and so bringing out all his resources that they were fully shown. Ah, ignorant ones, ye need not despair. He saved them; not for *their* sakes—there was nothing in them why they should be saved. He saved them, not for their wisdom's sake; but, ignorant though they were, understanding not the meaning of His miracles, "He saved them for His name's sake."

Note, again, *they were a very ungrateful people*, and yet He saved them. He delivered them times without number, and worked for them mighty miracles; but they still rebelled. Ah, that is like you, my hearer. You have had many deliverances from the borders of the grave; God has given you house and food day after day, and provided for you, and kept you to this hour; but how ungrateful you have been! As Isaiah said, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but My people doth not know, Israel doth not consider." How many there are of this character, who have favours from God, the history of which they could not give in a year; but yet what have they ever done for Him? They would not keep a horse that did not work for them, nor as much as a dog that would not notice them. But here is God; He has kept them day by day, and they have done a great deal against Him, but they have done nothing for Him. He has put the bread into their very mouths, nurtured them, and sustained their strength, and they have spent their strength in defying Him, in cursing His name and breaking His Sabbath. "Nevertheless He saved them." Some of this sort have been saved. I hope I have some here now who will be saved by conquering grace, made new men by the mighty power of God's Spirit. "Nevertheless He saved them." When there was nothing to recommend them, but every reason why they should be cast away for their ingratitude, "Nevertheless He saved them."

And note, once more, *they were a provoking people*—"They provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red Sea." Ah! how many people there are in this world that are a provoking people to God! If God were like man, who among us would be here to-day? If we are provoked once or twice, up goes the hand. With some men their passion stirs at the very first offence; others, who are somewhat more placid will bear offence after offence, till at last they say, "there is an end to everything, and I can bear that no longer; you must stay it, or else I must stay you!" Ah! if God had that temper, where should we be? Well might He say, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts; I am God, I change not, or else ye sons of Jacob had been consumed." They are a provoking people, "nevertheless He saved them." Have you provoked Him? Take heart, if you repent, God has promised to save you; and what is more, He may this morning give you repentance, and even give you remission of sins, for He saves provoking people for His name's sake. I hear one of my hearers say,—"Well, sir, that is encouraging sin with a vengeance!" Is it, indeed, sir! Why? "Because you are talking to the very worst of men, and you are saying that they may yet be saved." Pray, sirs, when I spoke to the worst of men, did I speak to *you* or not? You say, "No; I am one of the most respectable and best of men." Well then, sir, I have no need to preach to you, for you think you do not need mercy. "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." But these poor people, whom you say I am encouraging in sin, need to be spoken to. I will leave you. Good morning to you! You keep to your own gospel, and I wonder whether you will find your way to heaven by it. Nay, I do not wonder, I know you will not, unless you are brought as a poor sinner to take Christ at His word, and be saved for His name's sake. But I say farewell to you, and I will keep on in my course. But why did you say I encourage men in sin? I encourage them

to turn from it. I did not say He saved the provoking people, and then let them still provoke Him as they had done before; I did not say He saved the wicked people, and then let them sin as they did before. But you know the meaning of the word "saved"; I explained it the other morning. The word "saved" does not mean merely taking men to heaven; it means more—it means saving them from their sin; it means giving them a new heart, new spirits, new lives; it means making them into new men. Is there anything licentious in saying that Christ takes the worst of men to make them into saints? If there be, I cannot see it. I only wish He would take the worst of this congregation and make them into the saints of the living God, and then there would be far less licentiousness. Sinner, I comfort thee; not in thy sin, but in thy repentance. Sinner, the saints of heaven were once as bad as thou hast been. Art thou a drunkard, a swearer, an unclean person? "Such were some of them; but they have been washed—but they have been sanctified." Is thy robe black? Ask them whether their robes were ever black? They will tell you, "Yes, we have washed our robes." If they had not been black, they would not have wanted washing, "We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Then sinner, if they were black, and were saved, why not thyself?

> "Are not His mercies rich and free?
> Then say, my soul, why not for thee?
> Our Jesus died upon the tree,
> Then why, my soul, why not for thee?"

Take heart, penitents, God will have mercy on you. "Nevertheless, He saved them for His name's sake."

III. Now we come to the third point—THE REASON OF SALVATION: "He saved them for His name's sake." There is no other reason why God should save a man, but for His name's sake; there is nothing in a sinner which can entitle him to salvation, or recommend him to mercy; it must be God's own heart which must dictate the motive why men are to be saved. One person says, "God will save me, because I am so upright." Sir, He will do no such thing. Says another, "God will save me because I am so talented." Sir, He will not. *Your talent!* Why thou drivelling, self-conceited idiot, thy talent is nothing compared with that of the angel that once stood before the throne, and sinned, and who now is cast into the bottomless pit for ever! If He would save men for their talent, He would have saved Satan; for he had talents enough. As for thy morality and goodness, it is but filthy rags, and He will never save thee for aught thou doest. None of us would ever be saved, if God expected anything of us: we must be saved purely and solely for reasons connected with Himself, and lying in His own bosom. Blessed be His name, He saves us for "His name's sake." What does that mean? I think it means this: the name of God is His person, His attributes, and His nature. For His nature's sake, for His very attributes sake, He saved men; and, perhaps, we may include this also: "My name is in Him"—that is, in Christ; He saves us for the sake of Christ, who is the name of God. And what does that mean? I think it means this:

He saved them, first, that He might manifest His nature. God was all love, and He wanted to manifest it; He did show it when He made the sun, the moon, and the stars, and scattered flowers o'er the green and laughing earth. He did show His love when He made the air balmy to the body, and the sunshine cheering to the eye. He gives us warmth even in winter, by the clothing and by the fuel which He has stored in the bowels of the earth; but He wanted to reveal Himself still more. "How can I show them that I love them with all My infinite heart? I will give my Son to die to save the very worst of them, and so I will manifest My nature." And God has done it; He has manifested His power, His justice, His love, His faithfulness, and His truth; He has manifested His whole self on the great platform of salvation. It was, so to speak, the balcony on which God stepped to show Himself to man—the balcony of salvation—here it is He manifests Himself, by saving men's souls.

He did it, again, to vindicate His name. Some say God is cruel; they wickedly call Him tyrant. "Ah!" says God, "but I will save the worst of sinners, and vindicate My name; I will blot out the stigma; I will remove the slur: they shall not be able to say that, unless they be filthy liars, for I will be abundantly merciful. I will take away this stain, and they shall see that My great name is a name of love." And said He, again, "I will do this for My name's sake; that is, to make these people love My name. I know if I take the best of men, and save them, they will love My name; but if I take the worst of men, oh, how they will love Me! If I go and take some of the offscouring of the earth, and make them My children, oh, how they will love Me! Then they will cleave to My name; they will think it more sweet than music; it will be more precious to them than the spikenard of the Eastern merchants; they will value it as gold, yea, as much fine gold. The man who loves Me best, is the man who has most sins forgiven: he owes much, therefore he will love much." This is the reason why God often selects the worst of men to make them His. Saith an old writer, "All the carvings of heaven were made out of knots; the temple of God, the King of heaven, is a cedar one, but the cedars were all knotty trees before He cut them down." He chose the worst, that He might display His workmanship and His skill, to make unto Himself a name; as it is written, "It shall be unto Me for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Now, dear hearers, of whatever class you are, here is something I have to offer well worthy of your consideration, namely—that if saved, we are saved for the sake of God, for His name's sake, and not for our own.

Now this puts all men on a level with regard to salvation. Suppose that in coming into this garden, the rule had been that every one should have made mention of my name as the key of admittance; the law is, that no man is to be admitted for his rank or title, but only by the use of a certain name. Up comes a lord; he makes use of the name and comes in; up comes a beggar, all in patches; he makes use of the name—the law says it is only the use of the name that will admit you—he makes use of it and he enters, for there is no distinction. So, my lady, if you come, with all your morality, you must make use of His name: if you come, poor filthy inhabitant of a cellar or a garret, and make use of His name, the doors will fly wide open, for there is salvation for every one who makes mention of the name of Christ, and for none other. This pulls down the pride of the moralist,

abases the self exaltation of the self-righteous, and puts us all, as guilty sinners, on an equal footing before God, to receive mercy at His hands, "For His name's sake," and for that reason alone.

IV. I have detained you too long; let me close by noticing the OBSTACLES REMOVED in the word "nevertheless." I shall do that in somewhat of an interesting form, by way of parable.

Once on a time, Mercy sat upon her snow-white throne, surrounded by the troops of love. A sinner was brought before her, whom Mercy designed to save. The herald blew the trumpet, and after three blasts thereof, with a loud voice, he said—"O heaven, and earth, and hell, I summon you this day to come before the throne of Mercy, to tell why this sinner should not be saved." There stood the sinner, trembling with fear; he knew that there were multitudes of opponents, who would press into the hall of Mercy, and with eyes full of wrath would say, "He must not, and he shall not escape; he must be lost!" The trumpet was blown, and Mercy sat placidly on her throne, until there stepped in one with a fiery countenance; his head was covered with light; he spoke in a voice like thunder, and out of his eyes flashed lightning! "Who art thou?" said Mercy. He replied, "I am Law; the law of God." "And what hast thou to say?" "I have this to say," and he lifted up a stony tablet, written on both sides; "these ten commands this wretch has broken. My demand is blood; for it is written, 'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' Die he, or justice must." The wretch trembles, his knees knock together, the marrow of his bones melts within him, as if they were ice dissolved by fire, and he shakes with very fright. Already he thought he saw the thunderbolt launched at him, he saw the lightning penetrate into his soul, hell yawned before him in imagination, and he thought himself cast away for ever. But Mercy smiled, and said, "Law, I will answer thee. This wretch deserves to die; justice demands that he should perish—I award thee thy claim." And oh! how the sinner trembles. "But there is One yonder who has come with me to-day, my King, my Lord; His name is Jesus; He will tell you how the debt can be paid, and the sinner can go free." Then Jesus spake, and said, "O Mercy, I will do thy bidding. Take Me Law; put Me in a garden; make Me sweat drops of blood; then nail Me to a tree; scourge My back before you put Me to death; hang Me on the cross; let blood run from My hands and feet; let Me descend into the grave; let Me pay all the sinner oweth; I will die in his stead." And the Law went out and scourged the Saviour, nailed Him to the cross, and coming back with his face all bright with satisfaction, stood again at the throne of Mercy, and Mercy said, "Law, what hast thou now to say?" "Nothing," said he, "fair angel, nothing." "What! not one of these commands against him?" "No, not one. Jesus, his substitute, has kept them all—has paid the penalty for his disobedience; and now, instead of his condemnation, I demand as a debt of justice that he be acquitted." "Stand thou here," said Mercy, "sit on my throne; I and thou together will now send forth another summons." The trumpet rang again. "Come hither, all ye who have aught to say against this sinner, why he should not be acquitted"; and up comes another—one who often troubled the sinner, one who had a voice not so loud as that of the Law, but still piercing and thrilling—a voice whose whispers were like the cutting of a dagger. "Who art thou?" says Mercy. "I am Conscience; this sinner must be punished; he has done so much against the law of God that he must be punished; I demand it; and I will give him no rest till he is punished, nor even then, for I will follow him even to the grave, and persecute him after death with pangs unutterable." "Nay," said Mercy, "hear me," and while he paused for a moment, she took a bunch of hyssop and sprinkled Conscience with the blood, saying, "Hear me, Conscience, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin,' Now hast thou ought to say,?" "No," said Conscience, "nothing."

"Covered is his unrighteousness;
From condemnation he is free."

Henceforth I will not grieve him; I will be a good conscience unto him, through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." The trumpet rang a third time, and growling from the innermost vaults, up there came a grim black fiend, with hate in his eyes, and hellish majesty on his brows. He is asked, "Hast thou anything against that sinner?" "Yes," said he, "I have; he has made a league with hell, and a covenant with the grave, and here it is signed with his own hand. He asked God to destroy his soul in a drunken fit, and vowed he would never turn to God; see, here is his covenant with hell!" "Let us look at it," said Mercy; and it was handed up, whilst the grim fiend looked at the sinner, and pierced him through with his black looks. "Ah! but," said Mercy, "this man had no right to sign the deed; a man must not sign away another's property. This man was bought and paid for long beforehand; he is not his own; the covenant with death is disannulled, and the league with hell is rent in pieces. Go thy way Satan," "Nay," said he, howling again, "I have something else to say: that man was always my friend; he listened ever to my insinuations; he scoffed at the gospel; he scorned the Majesty of heaven; is he to be pardoned, whilst I repair to my hellish den, for ever to bear the penalty of guilt?" Said Mercy, "Avaunt, thou fiend; these things he did in the days of his unregeneracy; but this word 'nevertheless' blots them out. Go thou to thy hell; take this for another lash upon thyself—the sinner shall be pardoned, but thou—never, treacherous fiend!" And then Mercy, smilingly turning to the sinner, said, "Sinner, the trumpet must be blown for the last time!" Again it was blown, and no one answered. Then stood the sinner up, and Mercy said, "Sinner ask thyself the question—ask thou of heaven, of earth, of hell—whether any can condemn thee?" And the sinner stood up, and with a bold loud voice said, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" And he looked into hell, and Satan lay there, biting his iron bonds; and he looked on earth, and earth was silent; and in the majesty of faith the sinner did even climb to heaven itself, and he said, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? God?" And the answer came, "No; He justifieth." "Christ?" Sweetly it was whispered, "No; He died." Then turning round, the sinner joyfully exclaimed, "Who shall separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And the once condemned sinner came back to Mercy; prostrate at her feet he lay, and vowed henceforth to be hers for ever, if she would keep him to the end, and make him what she would desire him to be.

Then no longer did the trumpet ring, but angels rejoiced, and heaven was glad, for the sinner was saved.

Thus, you see, I have what is called, dramatized the thing; but I don't care what it is called; it is a way of arresting the ear, when nothing else will. "Nevertheless"; there is the obstruction taken away! Sinner, whatever be the "nevertheless," it shall never the less abate the Saviour's love; not the less shall it ever make it, but it shall remain the same.

"Come, guilty soul, and flee away
To Christ and heal thy wounds;
This is the glorious gospel day,
Wherein free grace abounds.
Come to Jesus, sinner, come."

On thy knee weep out a sorrowful confession; look to His cross, and see the Substitute; believe, and live. Ye almost demons, ye that have gone farthest in sin, now, Jesus says, "If you know your need of Me, turn unto Me, and I will have mercy upon you: and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF HIS COVENANT

"Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry: And He remembered for them His covenant, and repented according to the multitude of His mercies."—Psalm cvi. 44, 45.

THIS Psalm deserves to be read very carefully. It mentions many of the afflictions of God's ancient people, but it clearly sets forth that their afflictions were the distinct result of their rebellions and sins. It is not so with all the afflictions of God's people. It is written, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten"; and again, "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Yet it is often so to this day, that the servants of God smart because of disobedience. They are chastened for their sin; as it is written, "You only have I known of all the people of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." Sin in a child of God cannot go unchastened. The rod of chastisement is included in the covenant; and if we are in the covenant, the Lord will keep His promise. "If his children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes."

The miseries of Israel of old were distinctly the result of their sins. They lived under a dispensation in which there was a visible reward for obedience, and a prompt temporal punishment for disobedience. Therefore one might suppose that if the people fell into affliction wilfully, and through their own fault, the Lord might see fit to leave them in it. Did they not procure it unto themselves? Yet such is the abundant compassion of our God, that as soon as ever these people, smarting under the result of their sin, began to cry to Him, "He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry." He might have justly said, "Go to the gods that ye have set up; tell your sorrows to the calves that you have made; ask succour at the hands of the dead whom you have consulted, or of the cruel deities to whom you have sacrificed your sons and your daughters"; but instead of thus meeting them in righteous wrath, He is tender and full of compassion to them. I will read you the words again, for they are inexpressibly sweet: "Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry." There is something very powerful about the cry of a child to its own parent; and God, the tenderest of all Fathers, cannot bear to hear His children cry.

"Such pity as a father hath
Unto his children dear,
Like pity shows the Lord to such
As worship Him in fear."

If there be any here who are brought low and sore distressed through their own wrong-doing, let them nevertheless cry unto the Lord. Though it be because of your transgressions and your iniquities that you are afflicted, yet you may cry unto the Lord in your trouble, and He will save you out of your distresses. Turn unto the hand that wounds you, and that hand will bind you up. Turn unto the Lord in repentance, and He will turn unto you in loving-kindness.

What was the secret reason why God thus dealt with His people, and heard their cry when they were in affliction through their sin? The secret reason was, that "He remembered for them His covenant." If He looked upon His people in their sin and their sorrow, He could not see anything in them why He should have pity upon them. What they endured they richly deserved, and He knew that if He took away His rod from them, they would go and commit the same wickedness again. They were not to be driven by judgment nor drawn by mercies. Though they humbled themselves for one moment they would soon be proud again. The Lord could see nothing hopeful about them, nothing in their future any more than in their past which should plead for mercy. Why should they be smitten any more? Or why should gentleness be further wasted on them? Was it not high time to say, "They are given to their idols, let them alone, that we may see what their end will be"? One divine reason prevented the infliction of justice,—this, and this alone, sufficed: "He remembered for them His covenant." If He could not see anything in the erring people, or hope for anything from them, He looked to another source for a motive and an argument for mercy: He looked to the covenant which He had made of old with their father Abraham, when He said, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and in thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Because He had once permitted that promise to go out of His mouth, He would not withdraw it; and when He heard their cry, He regarded their affliction. Is it not a great wonder that God not only is willing to give mercy, should there be a manifest reason for it, but that He Himself finds and makes the reason? When there is no motive for grace discoverable to our anxious eye, there is a fountain of self-created mercy in the Lord's own heart, and this He causes to overflow and fill a channel of His own making. Though there is

nothing in the creature, there is everything in the covenant. If the Lord can find no plea in the character of the offender, He discovers an argument in Himself: He remembers His own covenant, and for His own name's sake He deals in mercy with the guilty.

Now, observe, that in the text it does not say "He remembered *their* covenant." They stood at the foot of Sinai and said, "All these things which Thou hast commanded we will do": they willingly, eagerly, hastily, loudly entered into a covenant with God, before whose terrible thunders they trembled. But that covenant they soon broke. Within a few days they had departed from the living God, and fallen down before the image of an ox which eateth grass. The Lord doth not dwell upon the matter, since it would be to their destruction. He forgets their falseness and treachery and casts them behind His back. But what He does remember is *His* covenant: "Nevertheless He remembered for them His covenant." This proves that the covenant referred to must have been one of pure grace. Do you not see this? These people were in affliction through sin. If that covenant had only been a covenant of works in which they were to be rewarded for doing good, and punished for evil doing, the more the Lord remembered that covenant, the more He would have been bound to punish them for their offences; but a covenant which led Him to cease from punishing the guilty must have been one of grace only. Is it not so? A covenant was made long before that of Sinai, a covenant of grace, which is called in Scripture "the everlasting covenant." This was made known to man in that first promise which was given to him at the gates of Paradise; and it was afterwards revealed more clearly in the Lord's covenant with Noah, and in His gracious promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Lord said to Abraham, "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." This same covenant, after being made more fully known in promises to Moses and other saintly men, was stated anew in the Lord's dealings with His servant David, whom He exalted as one chosen out of the people: "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn unto David My servant, thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations." Since then the Lord has given us promises, by His prophets and apostles, and specially in the Person and ministry of His only begotten Son. All these various forms of manifestation relate to one and the same everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, which God had made with men in the Person of His dear Son. It was that covenant which God thought upon; and when He remembered it, He was able to deal with them upon terms of grace, and even to change His hand, and no longer to crush them with afflictions; for He "repented according to the multitude of His mercies."

Dear brethren, I want to show this morning how this remembrance of the covenant on God's part is the great ground of hope to all of us who are in covenant with God. Indeed the Lord's mindfulness of His covenant is the ground of hope to every one of you, whether as yet you have embraced the gospel promise or not. Inasmuch as God must, according to His law, look upon you with anger, on account of your sin, He hath devised a way by which He can have regard unto the voice of your cry. Remembering His covenant, He can pass by your transgressions, and receive you, as His returning children, into the bosom of His love.

I. The first head of our discourse will be this:— Then THE COVENANT EXISTS. God cannot remember, to any practical purpose, that which does not exist. Had the covenant been repealed or abrogated, it could not have availed for God to remember it, except to strike the people into a more complete and settled despair. In love He remembered the covenant as an abiding thing, according to the word, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips."

Beloved, *the covenant is in its own nature everlasting.* Dying David said, "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." The covenant is everlasting in its beginning; for it was made "or ever the earth was" between the first divine Person of the sacred Trinity and the Second, on the behalf of His chosen. It is everlasting also as to its duration; for all things are still governed under this covenant, and shall be, world without end. "And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant." "Thus saith the Lord; if ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant." Sooner shall the covenant with the earth concerning seed-time and harvest be broken, than this covenant of grace. By everything that is permanent in the universe, and by everything that is permanent in the Godhead, we are made to know that the covenant of grace is a fixed and settled thing, and abides to-day as it ever has done; for there is no variableness nor turning with Him from whom every good gift comes down. The promises in Christ Jesus are Yea and Amen, to the glory of God by us. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail, much less shall the covenant of divine grace be disannulled. Thus saith the Lord: "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." God in remembering His covenant falls back upon everlasting and immutable things.

Well may the covenant of grace be everlasting, for *it was made with deliberation and foresight.* If two persons enter into a contract, and one afterwards wishes to escape from it, he may plead that he made the agreement in great haste, or under compulsion, or through being misinformed and over-persuaded; on either of these grounds he may make demurs to the fulfilment of the covenant, and thus may attempt to justify his failure to keep his word. Now, on God's part, nothing of the kind can ever be urged; for He made the covenant Himself, on His own suggestion, according to the good pleasure of His will. It was a free covenant, entered into through the love of His own heart, according to the wise counsel of His infinite mind. He made it knowing all that would happen in time or in eternity. When He made the promise that, whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus shall have everlasting life, He knew that those who believed in Christ Jesus would, nevertheless, be fallible creatures, and would commit

mistakes and sins: He made the promise well knowing what believers would be. When He chose Abraham to be His friend, He knew what failures there would be in Abraham and in his seed. He made His choice deliberately, knowing the end from the beginning, and foreseeing all the provocations which He would endure for forty years in the wilderness, and how they would anger Him when they came to their own land. His choice of His redeemed was made deliberately, and the promises made to them were given forth in the full foresight of all our unbelief, and lukewarmness, and backsliding, and selfishness, and folly. The Lord is not deceived in the subjects of His grace. Hear how He puts it in the forty-eighth of Isaiah, verse four: "Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass"; and again, verse eight: "I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb." Man's love is blind, but the Lord's love sees all things.

> "He saw me ruined in the fall,
> Yet loved me notwithstanding all."

He knew as well in that day when He called me by His grace what I should be as He knows to-day. Every fault and folly stood clear before His vision, and yet, notwithstanding all, He determined to give faith, and through faith, to give eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dear friends, every promise in the Bible is a part of the covenant. The covenant that now stands between the believer and his God is on this wise, that you take Him to be your God, and He takes you to be His people; He gives His promises to you, and you rely upon them; He will bless you in this life, and perfect you in the world to come. The tenor of the covenant is not according to your deservings, but according to the greatness of the Lord's love. In making this covenant, it is clear that God knew from the beginning what He was doing; He made no mistake, and said no more than He intended to fulfil. He deliberately said, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people"; and in the day wherein we believed in Him He guaranteed to us that we should never perish, neither should any pluck us out of His hand. This covenant was made with such judicious deliberation and infallible foresight, that there is no conceivable reason why it should be revoked. God is not a man that He should lie or repent.

Moreover—and this is a point to which every child of God delights to turn his eye—*that covenant was sealed and ratified in the most solemn manner.* When God made a covenant with Abraham, there was a slaying of sacrifices and a dividing of their bodies, and the Lord under the image of a burning lamp passed between the pieces: in this solemn sacrificial manner was the covenant established. But when the Lord made a covenant with us, the seal He gave was much more precious. He took from His bosom His Only-begotten Son, and He gave Him to be a covenant to the people. He died to make the eternal covenant sure. Paul speaks of "the blood of the everlasting covenant"; and when we come to the communion-table we hear our Lord say, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." Jesus has gone into heaven bearing with Him the blood of sprinkling. Can God deny His promise to His bleeding Son? Can He run back from the promise which He has made to the Only-begotten in His death? "By this knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities." Can these promises fail? Impossible! The very thought would be blasphemous. A covenant which has been made in so solemn a manner, by the death of our great Surety and Sacrifice, can never be repealed, neglected, or changed.

My dear brethren, we may rest fully sure that this covenant will stand, because *the divine glory is wrapped up in it.* Why did God promise to save men through faith in Christ Jesus? Why? That He might manifest to angels, and principalities, and powers, the splendour of His love and the riches of His grace. He has selected for this reason the very worst of men, that in them He might show forth all long-suffering, and display the magnificence of His pardoning love. He selected beings that were depraved, and subject to grievous temptations, that, by regenerating them by His Spirit, and sustaining them by His grace, He might display the greatness of His power. We are witnesses to time and to eternity of the glory of the Lord. Are not these His own words,—"This people have I formed for Myself: they shall shew forth My praise"? The manifestation of the glorious love of God is the design of the covenant: that where sin abounded grace might much more abound. He intends to show to all the ages His truth, His faithfulness, His patience, His tenderness, and His power. He designs to set heaven and earth wondering, until the whole universe breaks forth into the song: "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy."

God is more glorified in the covenant of grace than in creation, or in providence: in fact, creation and providence are but the temporary scaffold of the great house which God is building, even the God who inhabiteth the praises of Israel. The Lord cannot break His word, nor forego His designs, nor forget His promises. Think not so. The crown jewels of God are staked and pawned upon the carrying out of the covenant of grace.

Furthermore, *it is not possible for God to break a covenant.* When you and I stand and tremble before a divine promise for fear it should not be fulfilled, we cast a slur upon the truth, faithfulness, and immutability of God. Has He ever changed? Has He ever been false? Has He ever lifted His hand and sworn by Himself, because He could swear by no greater, and by two immutable things wherein it was impossible for God to lie has He given us strong consolation; and yet has He failed us? Far from it. Brethren, there has been nothing in the past to cast suspicion upon the veracity of Jehovah. Wherefore, then, should we doubt Him or distrust His covenant? My text gives us an instance of a great strain that was put upon the covenant. These people whom God had chosen to be His heritage provoked Him constantly. I cannot imagine a greater extent of sin than that which is pictured in this one-hundred-and-sixth Psalm. The chosen seed were degraded below other nations: they had forsaken their own God to go after alien deities. Was it ever known in any other case that a nation changed her gods? Yet Israel departed from the one living and true God, wilfully and wantonly

times without number; and God, instead of breaking His covenant because of their treachery, had pity upon them. When He found them in the throes of their grief as the result of their sin, He turned His eye upon His covenant, and because of that covenant He delivered them: from which I gather that the covenant purpose of God to save His own people shall stand fast, come what may. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." They that trust in the Lord, notwithstanding all the enormous weight of their sin, shall find Him faithful to His word of pardon. He will keep His word to sinners who put their trust in Him, and they shall be saved. Oh, glorious fact, the covenant still exists!

II. But, secondly, THIS COVENANT IS TOO OFTEN FORGOTTEN BY US. The children of Israel had quite forgotten the covenant of their God. Elijah said, "They have forsaken Thy covenant." Starting aside like a deceitful bow which fails the archer in the day of battle, they had been false to their God, and useless for those great purposes for which He had chosen and ordained them. Have we not failed in like manner?

Are not God's people at this day chargeable with forgetting the covenant by their *unspiritual carelessness?* Hast thou thought of thyself, my brother, as a covenanted one, as one with whom God has entered into solemn compact, saying, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward: I am God Almighty: walk before Me, and be thou perfect"? Have you realised your position as in covenant with God? When you have been staggered with its wonderful condescension and blessedness, as I have often been, have you not soon forgotten your great obligation, and thought only of earthly things? Have you not doubted your God because you have forgotten His covenant? When heaven and earth were rejoicing, Zion said, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Under such a slanderous charge, the Lord is fain to speak with plaintive earnestness, and ask, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me." Let it be realised by us, and not passed over in a wicked carelessness, that as many as believe in Christ Jesus are in covenant with God, and He has promised not to turn away from doing them good. This cannot be better described than as a marriage covenant; even as it is written in the book of the prophet Hosea: "And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." O my brother believer, as the man puts the ring on the woman's finger, and the words are said, and she is his, and he is hers, so hath God, by giving thee faith, put the ring on thy finger once for all, and thou art His, and He is thine, and He saith to thee to-day, "Thou shalt not be for another man; so will I also be for thee." Our response should be: "Other lords have had dominion over us, but now we are the Lord's alone." O, you covenanted ones, angels look at you with wonder, they regard you as the favourites of heaven, and yet you forget this, and live as if there were no covenant between God and you.

Sometimes, too—and in the case of Israel it was so—we get away from that covenant by *wanton sin*, or by negligent omission of most delightful duty. I need not go into the story of Israel again. You see in this Psalm how they transgressed. They took no notice of the covenant they had made with God; but violated all His precepts. May I ask whether we have not been guilty of this same sin? May not each man bury his face in his hands as he confesses, "My God, Thou knowest how often I have acted as if I were not in covenant with Thee. I have lived as if I were my own master, instead of yielding myself wholly to Thy service. I have sometimes acted as a man of the world would have done, and not as one that belonged to Christ"? Be ashamed and be confounded for all this; and then wonder and admire that still that covenant stands, and the Lord has not recalled His gracious promises. He saith, "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant." This ought to yield in our hearts a harvest of repentance. It should bind us to God with intense affection that should tend towards perpetual sanctification from this day and onward.

These people had forgotten their God for another reason, namely, in *the depth of their sorrow*. A great sorrow stuns men, and makes them forget the best sources of consolation. A little blow will cause great pain; but I have frequently heard in reports of assaults that far more serious blows have occasioned no pain whatever, because they have destroyed consciousness. So do extreme distresses rob men of their wits, and cause them to forget the means of relief. Under the chastening rod, the smart is remembered, and the healing promise is forgotten. The people of Israel, when they were under the afflicting visitations of God, failed to remember His covenant from the crushing effect of their sorrow and despair. Is it so with any one of us? I may be addressing at this moment an ear which has grown dull through grief, a heart that is forgetful because of heaviness. Do not men even forget to eat bread in the hour of dire calamity? Ah, my brother! your affliction seems more present to you than even God Himself: the black sorrow that lowers over you eclipses all the lamps of heaven and earth. May I be my Master's messenger to you, to remind you that still He is in covenant with you; and though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion? He hath said, "All things work together for good to them that love God"; and He will keep His word. He has also said, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Depend upon it He will preserve you. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee; He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Remember, "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men"; but in love He corrects and chastens. Wherefore, brush those tears away, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, and be of good courage, for the Lord will strengthen thine heart.

"What cheering words are these!
Their sweetness who can tell?
In time, and to eternal days,
'Tis with the righteous, well."

Oh that you could learn to sing in the dark like the nightingale, and praise God out of the midst of the furnace like the three holy children! Oh that you may cry out with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"! This is what you should do, and it may help you to do it if you will remember the covenant, which God has not forgotten. O soul, why dost thou forget the covenant? Fall back upon it, and sing with Habakkuk, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." According to the covenant, God is to be everything to you. The covenant does not stipulate that you shall not lose your friends, nor does it promise that you shall not lose your property, nor that you shall have no sickness: the covenant is that God will be everything to you: take care that you use Him as such. "These things have I spoken unto you," said our Lord, "that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." If you have received the tribulation, be not satisfied till you have enjoyed the peace in Jesus which is equally promised. Alas! God's people forget this covenant: we have said enough upon this.

III. Though we forget the covenant, yet GOD REMEMBERS HIS COVENANT: "He remembered for them His covenant." What meaneth this word? Beloved, of course the covenant is always on the mind of God; for the infinitely wise God cannot forget anything. But the text means that He stands to His covenant; He remembers it so as to cause it to abide. Even though these people had so grievously provoked Him, He remembers His covenant so as to find in it a reason for pardoning their sin, and dealing with them in a way of mercy. He meets the flood of their sins with the flood of His faithfulness;—"Nevertheless He remembered for them His covenant." He remembers it practically, that is, He puts it into effect; and in this case He did so by repenting "according to the multitude of His mercies." He had formerly smitten them, but now He puts the rod away. He made His people to be pitied of all them that carried them away captive. He came to their relief and succour. And this is just what God will do with you, my afflicted friend, if you turn to Him with cries and tears, and a humble, penitent faith. He will remember for you His covenant by acting in a covenant way towards you, according to that word in the book of Zechariah, "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water."

O friend, God must remember His covenant; for He can never forget what the making of that covenant has cost Him. It cost Him nothing to make the heavens and the earth: He spake and it was done. It costs Him nothing to rule the nations: in the serenity of His omnipotence the Lord sitteth upon the floods, the Lord sitteth King for ever. But to make the covenant with man, and to carry it out, cost Him His innermost Self; it cost Him His Only-begotten: the eternal Son, the Well-beloved, must die the death of the cross that the covenant may be established. Covenant-making was no trifle with God. I have heard people speak sneeringly of the covenant; indeed, no one of note preaches upon it now; but yet it is the grandest of themes. It is a wondrous fact Godwards; for it cost Him His dear Son's heart's blood. "It pleased the Father to bruise Him, He hath put Him to grief," that this covenant might be fulfilled and eternally settled.

See how readily God turns to this covenant. You can be sure that He delights in it; for no sooner do His children cry than He at once remembers for them His covenant. It was only a cry forced from them by misery; but instead of upbraiding them for the past, and shutting out their cry, He straightway remembered His covenant. When a man is easily reminded of a thing, it shows that it is agreeable to him to think of it. We are sure that God's heart is much wrapped up in the covenant of grace, since the feeble cries of His children remind Him of it.

I think, however, the reason why God remembers His covenant most of all is because He remembers with whom He made it. A certain man had lived abroad for a while, and there he found a friend with whom for years he enjoyed delightful fellowship. In due time he returned to England, to carry on a business; but he never forgot his friend. He had promised, and entered into brotherly covenant, that he would help his friend's family, and so, in due season, he received into his employment the young son of his old friend; and he was minded to instruct him, and help him, and promote his interests. He had given his friend his right hand, and said, "Trust your boy with me; I will see him through." The youth comes to London, and enters the service of his father's friend, with every prospect bright before him; but, alas! he proves unworthy; he falls into all sorts of vices and follies, and grieves his friend—his father's friend. His employer says, "I shall be glad to get rid of this fellow: he is a burden to me. I cannot advance him, he is unworthy of my favour." See how loath he is to deal severely with him, for his father's sake! He calls him into his private room, and pleads and reasons with him. He says, "I have borne more with you than with anyone else upon my establishment. Remember, it is for your father's sake. Had it not been for my promise to your father, I should have dismissed you long ago." One day he cries, "I really must dismiss him: he must go." But he thinks of the father, and of their days of fond familiarity with each other, and he cannot bear to deal hardly with the son of such a man, and therefore he says, "I will try him again; I will still bear with him, for my promise sake, which I made to his father." Now I am sure it was so with God and the seed of Abraham. These people had revolted and rebelled continually; but the Lord remembered Abraham His friend. A memory rose before the divine mind of the faithful man lifting the knife to slay his only son Isaac in obedience to the Most High. As the Lord saw that act of believing obedience He seemed to say, "I will have pity on his offspring still: they are the most undeserving and provoking people that ever breathed; but I have entered into a covenant with Abraham My friend, and therefore I will have pity upon them." The fact is, with regard to the great God and you and me, that He would often say, "I must destroy them"; but then He thinks of His dear Son upon the cross, He hears ringing through the midnight of that great day of sorrow, "My God, My God, why

hast Thou forsaken Me?" and the great heart of God is moved to pity us because of the death of His Son. There is merit enough in Jesus to remove all the demerit of our sins.

The great God was not thinking of a dead man when He thought of Abraham. Our Saviour tells us, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Abraham is with God, and God looked at Abraham, His living friend, and restrained His indignation when Abraham's children provoked Him. Jesus also lives; He hath gone up on high, He sitteth at the right hand of God; and when the Lord has looked at us and grown weary of our sins, He turns His eye upon the perfections of His dear Son, and He is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; for He hath magnified the law and made it honourable. Thus the Lord turns back to the covenant made with Jesus; He hears our cry, and remembers for us His covenant. Oh, the grace of this! Because of Him with whom the covenant of grace is made, who is for ever the Father's delight, and the joy of His soul, the Father hath compassion upon us. Does it not make you pray, "Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of Thine Anointed"? Or, to quote our hymn, do we not say—

> "Him and then the sinner see,
> Look through Jesus' wounds on me"?

The person of the Lord Jesus is the substance and seal of the covenant of grace, and God remembers it because He remembers *Him*.

IV. I will finish with this last point, which I am sure you will feel to be of the utmost importance. If God remembers for us His covenant, LET US REMEMBER IT. You that are the Lord's covenanted ones, think of the sacred promise, and begin to enjoy it, and live upon it practically. What is the covenant? Here is one form of it: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." That is an early and condensed shape of it; that is to say, the Lord God Almighty gives Himself up to be our portion, and we are to yield ourselves to Him, to walk before Him in perfect obedience. This also is the covenant: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Come, beloved, make God your God. This meaneth—make God your everything. Say not, "I am poor." Not so, for God is yours, and so all things are yours. Say not, "I am weak." Not so, God Almighty is yours: when you are weak, then you are strong. "But I have no wisdom." Is not the Lord Jesus made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification? He that hath God hath everything. Wilt thou belittle thy God and limit the Holy One of Israel? Come, find thine all in God. This is thy part of the covenant, to accept God as being to thee what He says He is. He has made Himself to be thine all in all; accept Him as such. Did not David say, "He is all my salvation, and all my desire." This is the portion and heritage of the children of God. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm; but blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Cast yourself upon the covenant, and find rest therein. Sing in your heart of hearts:—

> "He that hath made my heaven secure
> Will here all good provide;
> Since Christ is rich, can I be poor?
> What can I want beside?"

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." Oh, the blessed result of standing to the covenant and letting God be our all in all!

In this covenant it is incumbent that we rest alone in our God. You have not taken God to be your God, if you cannot be content with Him alone. Abraham forsook everything for God. He went to a country he had never seen, followed a path that had never been mapped out, and God said to him, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield." He was in the midst of enemies who would have destroyed him but for the mysterious protection which surrounded him like a shield. The Lord's word had gone forth, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." Abraham had no shield but his God, and yet no man in the world dwelt in greater safety. God said to him, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward"; and so He was. Abraham once lamented that he had no seed, and that the steward of his house was his only heir; but the Lord who had promised him a seed yet said to him, "I am thy exceeding great reward." Not the seed, but his God, must be his joy and crown; and Abraham felt it was so, and therefore stood ready to surrender that seed, if the Lord commanded. That is what the Lord would have you do, beloved. Look not to what is seen with the eye; listen not to what is heard with the ear; live thou in the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High, in the place where faith takes the place of sense. Endure as seeing Him who is invisible. Penetrate into the substance which is unseen, and pass by the shadow which is all that sense can discern. Live on the living God; and then thou knowest the secret of the covenant; thy soul shall dwell at ease, and thy seed shall inherit the earth. Thy soul shalt be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and thou shalt praise the Lord with joyful lips.

Remember, lastly, in order to look to this covenant well, that you must give yourselves wholly up to God. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Live only to glorify God. Have no other aim or object but your God. Brother, if God give thee much, glorify Him with it by thy generous consecration; if He take it away, glorify Him by thy patience under loss. Wherever thou art, be thou ever aiming to love thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and thy neighbour as thyself, and verily it shall be well with thee, and blessed shalt thou be, for God will remember for thee His covenant.

I wish that the unconverted here would desire to be concerned in this covenant. If you do so, the very desire is the gift of divine grace. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou hast entered into covenant with God. He that hath faith in the Lord Jesus is a child of the father of the faithful, and therefore He is concerned in the covenant which God made with Abraham and His spiritual seed. O Lord, of these poor stony hearts raise up children unto Abraham, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

SONG FOR THE FREE, AND HOPE FOR THE BOUND

" He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men ! For He hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder."—Psalm cvii. 14—16.

MY anxious, prayerful desire this morning is, that some who have been in the condition described in the text may come out of it into full redemption. They have been too long in prison; and now the silver trumpet sounds—liberty to the captives. Jesus has come into the world to break the gate of brass, and to cut the bars of iron in sunder. Oh, that my prayer might be heard for those who are in bondage ! I trust that some of those who are now immured in the dungeon of despondency will say " Amen " to my prayer; and if they are praying inside, and we are praying outside, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself comes to open the prison doors, then there will be a Jubilee before long.

This passage, of course, literally alludes to prisoners held in durance by their fellow-men. What a sad world man has made this earth ! With superfluity of naughtiness man has multiplied his Bastilles ! As if there were not misery enough to the free, he invents cells and chains ! One's blood boils when standing in those living graves in which tyrants have buried their victims out of sight and hearing ! Could the most fierce of wild beasts display such cruelty to their kind as men have shown to men ? By the horrors of such imprisonments one must estimate the joy of being set free. To God it is a glory that, in the order of His providence, He often provides a way of escape for the oppressed. Cruel dynasties have been overthrown, tyrants have been hurled from their thrones, and then enlargement has come to those who were straitly shut up. Liberated ones should indeed " praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men."

But the various scenes in this Psalm were intended to describe spiritual conditions. The second verse is a key to the whole song: " Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." The deliverance here intended is one which is brought to us by redemption, and comes by the way of the great sacrifice upon Calvary. We are redeemed with the precious blood of Him who surrendered His own liberty for our sakes, and consented to be bound and crucified that He might set us free. My grateful heart seems to hear Him saying again, as He did in the garden of Gethsemane, " If ye seek Me, let these go their way." His consenting to be bound brought freedom to all those who put their trust in Him.

I shall endeavour, as God shall help me, to speak of the text spiritually, and we will consider it under the heading of three questions: first, *Who are the favoured men of whom the text speaks ?* Secondly, *How has this remarkable deliverance been wrought ?* Thirdly, *What shall be done about it ?* The text tells us how to act. " Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness ! "

I. First, let us ask: WHO ARE THESE FAVOURED MEN ?

These favoured persons were guilty men, as you will see by the context—" Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High." Hear this, ye sinful ones, and take heart ! God has wrought great wonders for a people whom it seemed impossible for Him to notice. If they came into prison through rebellion, you would expect Him to leave them there. Yet rebels are set free by an act of immeasurable grace. The Redeemer has received gifts for men, " yea, for the rebellious also." These men were despisers of God's word; was there a gospel of freedom for them ? Yes. It is for them that Jehovah, in abounding grace, has wrought miracles of mercy.

The persons described by the Psalmist were guilty of overt acts: they were in actual rebellion against the commands of the Most High. Their rebellion was not a single hasty act; their entire lives were a continuance of their wicked revolt. From their childhood they went astray; in their youth they provoked the Lord; and in their manhood they disobeyed Him more and more. They were in open opposition to their Creator, Benefactor, and Lord. I have no doubt that I am speaking to many who must own that they have been actual and wilful transgressors against the Lord of love. They have turned unto Him the back, and not the face: they have not been servants, but rebels.

The persons here spoken of were as evil in their hearts as in their lives, for they " contemned the counsel of the Most High." Perhaps they intellectually rejected the teaching of Holy Scripture, and scorned to receive what the Lord revealed. They refused to yield their understandings to infallible teaching; but judged their own thoughts to be better than the thoughts of God. The counsel of the Most High, though marked by the sublimity of Him from whom it came, appeared to them to be less high than their own soaring theories; and therefore they despised it. To some men any doctrine is more acceptable than that of Scripture. They gladly hear what doubters say, but they will not hear what God the Lord shall speak. His counsel of instruction, His counsel of command, His counsel of promise—His whole counsel they cast away from them, and they take counsel of their own conceit.

Now this actual and mental sin, when it is brought home to a man's awakened conscience, fills him with dismay. Because he has transgressed with hand and heart, the convinced sinner is in sore dismay. O my hearer, are you in distress this day through your own fault ? Do you wonder that you are in trouble ? Did you expect to go in the way of evil, and yet to be happy ? Did you never hear those words, " There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked " ? Know you not that they are " like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt " ? Now that you find yourself taken in the thorns of your own folly, are you at all surprised ? The Scripture saith, " Hast thou not procured this unto

thyself?" Are not these the wages of sin? Thank God you have not yet received more than the earnest-money of that terrible wage: but, depend upon it, sin is a hard paymaster. Sin and sorrow are wedded in the very nature of things, and there is no dividing them. They that sow iniquity shall reap the same. Turn as it may, the river of wickedness at last falls into the sea of wrath. He that sins must smart unless a Saviour can be found to be his Surety, and to smart for him.

So, then, these people who were set free were by nature guilty men, who could not have deserved the divine interposition. Hear this, ye consciously guilty, you that are condemning yourselves, and confessing your faults! This is good news for you, even for you. The Lord sets free the men whose own hands have forged their manacles. This is free grace indeed! These marvels of delivering love were performed, not for the innocent in their misfortune, but for the guilty in their rebellion. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

Go a little further, and you will notice that *these persons were doomed men*, for they "sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death." It means that they were in the condemned cell, waiting for execution. No light could come to them, for their condemnation was clear; no escape could be hoped for, not a ray of hope came from any direction. In a short time they must be taken out to execution, so that the shadow of their death fell with its damp, dread, deadening influence upon their spirits. Do I address any such this morning? Ah, my friend, I can sympathize with you as you sit here, and feel that you are doomed! I, too, have felt that sentence of death within me. I knew myself to be "condemned already," because I had not believed on the Son of God. I recollect how those words "condemned already" rang in my ears, as I should think the bell of St. Sepulchre's used to sound in the ears of the condemned in Newgate, warning them that the time was come to go out upon the scaffold. When the shadow of eternal wrath falls upon the heart, nothing worse can be imagined; for the conscience bears sure witness that God is just when He judges, condemns, and punishes. When a man feels the shadow of death upon him, infidel arguments are silenced, self-conceited defences are banished, and the heart consents to the justice of the law which declares, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." My brethren, who remember being in this state of conscious condemnation, will join me in praying for those who are now in that condition, for they need our pity and love. O my hearers, condemned in your own consciences, take heart, and hope; for you are the sort of people whom Jehovah in His grace delights to set free! Those doomed ones were the men of whom our text sings, "He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death." It is your condemned condition which needs free mercy; and, behold, the Lord meets your need in His boundless grace! To the doomed the Lord God in Christ Jesus will give free pardon this morning. I speak with great confidence, for my trust is in the God of love. The Lord is going to hear prayer for you, sinners. You shall be brought under the black cloud which now threatens you with overwhelming tempest; you shall come forth from the condemned cell, not to execution, but to absolution. Blessed be the name of the Lord, He passeth by transgression, and doth it justly through the atonement of His Son!

But next, *these persons were bound men*; for they "sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron." Their afflictions were like iron, hard and cold, and such they could not break from. The iron entered into their souls; the rust fretted the flesh, and poisoned the blood. They were bound in a double sense: affliction within, and iron without. It is a terrible thing when a man feels that he is lost, and that he cannot get away from destruction. An evil habit has got him within its iron grasp, and will not relax its hold. Even though he would, he cannot loose himself from the thraldom of his sin. He has become a slave, and there is no escape for him. "O my God!" he cries, "what can I do?" The more he strains, the faster the iron seems to hold him. His attempts to be free from evil only prove to him how much enslaved he is. What an awful compound is described in the text—"affliction and iron"! The bondage is mental and physical too. The enslaved spirit and the depraved flesh act and react upon each other, and hold the poor struggling creature as in an iron net. He cannot break off his sins, he cannot rise to a better life. I know that some of you who are here at this time are in this case. You long to be delivered, but you are unable to cut the cords which hold you. You are greatly troubled day after day, and cannot rest; and yet you get no further. You are striving to find peace, but peace does not come; you are labouring after emancipation from evil habits; but the habits hold you still! Friend thus bound, to you I have to tell the glad news that Jesus Christ has come on purpose that He might proclaim the opening of the prisons to them that are bound. "He hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." God is able to liberate men from every bond of sin over which they mourn. Wouldst thou be free? He will open the door. There is no habit so inveterate, there is no passion so ferocious, but God can deliver you from it. If you will but trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, His grace is a hammer that can break your chains. Let Jesus say, "Loose him, and let him go," and not even devils can detain you. Christ's warrant runs over the whole universe; and, if He makes you free, you will be free indeed.

To advance another step, *these persons were weary men*; for we read of them, "He brought down their heart with labour." This does not happen to all in the same degree, but to some of us this labour, was exceedingly grinding and exhausting. Our hearts were lofty, and needed bringing down; and the Lord used means to do it. With some, temporal circumstances go wrong: where everything used to prosper, everything appears to be under a blight. From abundance they descend to want. Perhaps the health also begins to give way, and from being strong and hearty men they become sickly and feeble. How often this tames proud spirits! If it be not outward sorrow, it is within that they labour, till their heart is brought low. They cannot rest, and yet they try all earthly remedies for ease: they go to the theatre, they sport with gay companions, they laugh, they dance, they plunge into vice; but they cannot shake off the burden of their sin, it will not be removed. As the giraffe, when the lion has leaped upon him, bears his enemy upon his shoulders, and cannot dislodge him even though he rushes across the wilderness like the wind, so the sinner is being devoured by his sin while he madly labours to shake it off. While the unconverted seek to rest

themselves, they do but increase their weariness. They labour, aye, labour as in the very fire; but it is labour in vain. In vain do they hasten to every religious service, and attend to every sacred ceremony. In vain do they try to mourn; how can they put feeling into a heart of stone? If they could, they would make their tears for ever flow, and their prayers for ever rise; but, to their horror, they accomplish nothing. The whip of the law sounds, and they must get to their tasks again; but the more they do, the more they are undone. Like one that, having fallen into a slough, sinks all the deeper into the mire through every struggle that he makes, so do they fall lower and lower by their efforts to rise. I understand those awful strugglings of yours, so desperate and yet so unavailing. God is bringing down your heart with labour; but have you not had enough of this? Do you not remember that love-word, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? Sweet promise; will you not believe it, and avail yourselves of it? Will you not come to Jesus, and take the rest which He gives? How I wish you would come this very day! I beseech the Holy Spirit to turn you to Jesus. The Lord has come forth with power to draw you, and to bring you away from your weariness unto the sweet rest which remains for the people of God. Poor doves, fly no further; return to your Noah! These of whom we speak at this time were as weary men as ever *you* can be, but Jesus gave them rest; why should He not give rest to *you?* Though bad, and banned, and bound, and burdened, there is yet hope; for the Lord can set you free.

Again, *these persons were downcast men*—"they fell down, and there was none to help." "We cannot go on any longer," say they, "it is useless to exert ourselves. We cannot escape God's wrath, and yet we cannot bear it. We are at our wits' end. There is no use in our trying to be better. We must give it up in despair." "They fell down"; this shows that they were quite spent. The captive has been grinding at the mill till he cannot go another round; even the lash cannot make him take another step—he falls in faintness, as though life had gone. So have we known men forced to acknowledge that they are "without strength." This was always true, but they did not always feel it. Now they have come to this, that, if heaven could be had for one more effort, and hell escaped for one more good work, yet they could not do it. They fall down, and there they lie, a heap of helplessness, dead in trespasses and sins. Where is now the boasted power of their free-will? Now it is to you who have fallen down, even to you, that the word of this salvation is sent. The Lord Jesus delights to lift up those that lie at His feet. He is a great overturner: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." He that flies aloft on the eagle's wings of pride shall be brought low by the shafts of vengeance; but he that humbles himself to the dust shall be lifted up. He that has fallen down, and lies in the dust at the feet of Jesus, lies on the doorstep of eternal life. The Lord will give power to the weak, and increase strength to those who have no might. I rejoice when I hear any one of you own to his weakness, since the Lord Jesus will show forth His power in you.

In fact, *these persons were helpless men:* "They fell down, and there was none to help." What a word that is—"None to help"! The proverb says, "God helps those that help themselves." There is a sort of truth in it; but I venture to cover it with a far greater truth: "God helps those that cannot help themselves." When there is none to help thee, then God will help thee. "There was none to help"—no priest, no minister, not even a praying wife, or a praying mother, could now do anything; the man felt that human helpers were of no avail. His bed was shorter than that he should stretch himself upon it, and his covering was narrower than that he should wrap himself up in it. Now he saw that there was no balm in Gilead, there was no physician there; and he looked to a higher place than Gilead for balm and medicine. The balm for such a wound as his must come from heaven, for on earth there was "none to help." This is a fitting epitaph to be placed over the grave of self-righteousness. This also is the death-knell of priest-craft, birthright membership, and sacramentarianism. The conscience sees that there is "none to help." Is this your case? Then you are the men in whom God will work the marvels of His grace, and bring you out where you shall walk in light and peace.

There was only one good point about these people—*they did at last take to praying:* "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble." It was not much of a prayer to hear; it was too shrill to be musical; it was too painful to be pleasant. "They cried," like one in sore anguish: they cried, like a child that has lost its mother; "they cried," like some poor wounded animal in great pain. Do you tell me that you cry, but that your cry is a very poor one? I know it, and I am glad to hear you say so, for the less you think of your cry the more God will think of it. Do you value yourself according to your prayers? Then your prayers have no value in them. When you think that your prayers are only broken words, and hideous moans, and wretched desires, then you begin to form a right estimate of them, and thus you are on true ground, where the Lord of truth can meet you. "They cried." Was it any credit to them to cry? Why, no, it was what they were forced to do! They would not have cried to the Lord even then if they could have done anything else. They cried when their hearts had been brought so low that they fell down. It is a good fall when a man falls on his knees. O my dear hearer, whatever else you do, or do not do, are you crying to God in secret for His grace? Then, as surely as the Lord liveth, you shall come out into liberty. A praying man shall never be sent to perdition. There is that about prayer which makes it a token for good, a pledge of blessings on the road, a door of hope in dark hours. Where is the man that cries? Where is the man that prays? That is the man of whom it shall be said, and of others like him, "The Lord brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder."

May the Lord bless the description which I have given, so that some of you may see yourselves as in a looking-glass, and be encouraged to hope that the Lord will save you as He has saved others like you! If you do see yourself in the text, take home the comfort of it, and make use of it. Do not look at it, and say, "This belongs to somebody else." You bondaged brother, you self-despairing sinner, you are the man for whom Christ went up to the cross! If you saw a letter directed to yourself, would you not open it? I should think so. The other day a

poor woman had a little help sent to her, by a friend, in a letter. She was in great distress, and she went to that very friend begging for a few shillings. "Why," said the other, "I sent you money yesterday, by an order in a letter!" "Dear, dear!" said the poor woman, "that must be the letter which I put behind the looking-glass!" Just so; and there are lots of people who put God's letters behind the looking-glass, and fail to make use of the promise which is meant for them. Come, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, come and taste my Master's love, yea, take of it freely, and be filled with heavenly rest!

II. Secondly, may God's Spirit go with us while we answer the question: HOW HAS THIS DELIVERANCE BEEN WROUGHT? You that have been set free should tell how you were emancipated. Let me tell my story first. It was the gladdest news I ever heard when it was told me that Jesus died in my stead. I sat down in my misery, hopeless of salvation, ready to perish, till they told me that there was One who loved me, and for love of me was content to yield His life for my deliverance. Wonder of wonders, He had actually borne the death-penalty for me! They said that the Lord of glory had become man to save men, and that if I trusted Him I might know assuredly that He had suffered in my stead, and so had blotted out my sins. I marvelled much as I heard this; but I felt that no one could have invented news so strange. It surpassed all fiction that the offended God should Himself take my nature, and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ should pay my debts, and suffer for my sins, and put those sins away. I heard the blessed tidings—there was some comfort even in hearing it—but I believed it, and clutched at it as for life. Then did I begin to live. I believe that truth to-day: all my hope lies there. If any of you wonder that I show fight for the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, you may cease to wonder. Would not any one of you stand up for his wife and children? This truth is more to me than wife and children, it is everything to me. I am a damned man to all eternity if Christ did not die for me. I will put it no more softly than that. If my Redeemer has not borne my sins in His own body on the tree, then I shall have to bear them in my own body in the place of endless misery. I have no shade of a hope anywhere but in the sacrifice of Jesus; I cannot, therefore, give up this truth: I had sooner give up my life. I heard that the Son of God had suffered in my stead that I might go free: I believed it, and I said to myself, "Then I have no business to be sitting here in darkness and in the shadow of death." I shook myself from my lethargy, I arose, and went out of my prison; and as I moved to go out, a light shone round about me, and my fetters fell clanking to the ground. What glorious musical instruments they were! The very things that had galled me so long now brought me joy. I found that the iron gate, which I thought could never be unlocked, opened to me of its own accord. I could not believe that it was true, it seemed too wonderful; I thought I must be dreaming. I very soon knew of a surety that it was I myself. The cold night air blew down the street of my daily care, and I said, "Oh, yes, I am still on earth, and it is true, and I am free from despair, and delivered from the curse!" This is how I came out to liberty: I believed in Jesus my Redeemer. To-day, my dear brothers and sisters here, hundreds of them, would each one tell the story in a different way, but it would come to the same thing.

Follow me while we go a little into Scriptural detail, and learn from David how the Lord sets free the captives.

First, our deliverance was wrought *by the Lord Himself.* Listen: "HE brought them out of darkness." Write that "HE" in capital letters, Mr. Printer. Have you in the house any specially large letters? If so, set up that word in the most prominent type you have:—"HE brought them out of darkness." Read also the sixteenth verse:—"He hath broken the gates of brass." Did the Lord send an angel to liberate us? No; HE came Himself in the person of His dear Son. When the Lord Jesus Christ had paid our enormous debt, did He leave us to accept our quittance entirely of our own free will, apart from His grace? Ah, no! the Holy Spirit came, and made us willing in the day of His power! "HE," "HE," "HE" wrought all the work *for* us, and all our works *in* us. "HE brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death." "Oh that men would praise the Lord, for HE hath broken the gates of brass." It is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. There is no salvation worth the having which has not the hand of the Godhead in it. It needs Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to save a soul. None but the Trinity can deliver a captive soul from the chains of sin and death and hell. Jehovah Himself saves us.

Next, *the Lord did it alone*—"He hath broken the gates of brass." Nobody else was there to aid in liberating the prisoners. When our Lord Jesus trod the winepress, He was alone. When the Spirit of God came to work in us eternal life, He wrought alone. Instruments are condescendingly used to convey the word of life, but the life of the word is wholly of God. As to the divine Father, is it not true "of His own will begat He us by the word of truth"? He is the Author of our spiritual life, and He alone. None can share the work of our salvation with Him, and none can divide the glory. Ho, you that are captives, are you looking for some man to help you? Remember, I pray you, that there is "none to help." "Salvation is of the Lord." Remember that verse, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else"; that is to say, there is none else in the work of salvation except God. O soul, if thou hast to do with Christ Jesus, thou must have Him at the beginning, thou must have Him in the middle, thou must have Him in the end, and thou must have Him to fill up every nook and corner from the first to the last. He *alone* hath done it.

Note, too, that what He did was done *by the Lord's own goodness;* for the Psalmist says, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness!" His goodness took the form of mercy; as it is said in the first verse of this Psalm, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever!" It must have been mercy, because those whom it blessed were as undeserving as they were miserable. They were guilty, guilty in action, and guilty in thought; they had rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High; yet He came, and set them free. You and I are always wanting to know before we give alms to beggars, "Are they deserving people?" God gives the alms of His grace only to the undeserving. We respond to those who have a claim

upon us; God remembers those who have no claim whatever upon Him. "Ah," says one, "but the people did cry!" I know they did; but they did not even do that till He first of all brought down their heart with labour. Prayer is a gift from God as well as an appeal to God. Even prayer for mercy is not a cause, but a result. Grace is at the back of prayer, and at the base of prayer. These prisoners would not have prayed if God had not wrought upon them, and driven and drawn them to pray.

"No sinner can be
Beforehand with Thee;
Thy grace is most sovereign,
Most rich, and most free."

So it has been with others, and therefore have I hope that it will be so with you, my beloved hearers. In the greatness of His goodness I trust my Lord will come and save you. It is not *your* goodness, but *His* goodness, which is the cause of hope: not your merit, but His mercy is His motive for blessing you. How greatly do I rejoice to remember that the Lord delighteth in mercy! It is His joy to pardon sin, and pass by the transgressions of the remnant of His people.

Note, once again, that while we are describing this great deliverance, we cannot help seeing that *the Lord effected it most completely.* What did He do? Did He bring them out of darkness? That was to give them *light.* Yes; but a man that is chained is only a little better off for getting light, for then He can see His chains all the more. Notice what follows—"and out of the shadow of death"; so the Lord gave them *life* as well as light. That "shadow of death" is gone, it can no longer brood over their darkened spirits. Yes, but when a man has light and life, if he is still in bondage, his life may make him feel his bondage the more vividly, and his light may make him long the more for liberty. But it is added, "and He brake their bands in sunder," which means *liberty.* The Lord gave light, life, and liberty—these three things. God does nothing by halves. He does not begin to save, and then say, "I have done enough for you. I must stop midway." Dear heart, if the Lord comes to your prison, He will not merely light a lamp in your dungeon, though that were something: He will not merely revive your spirit, and give you more life, though that were something; but He will break your chains, and bring you out into the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free. He will finish His emancipating work. Do it, Lord; do it now! Help men to believe in Jesus at this moment!

There is one more point which I want you to notice very carefully. When the Lord does this, *He does this everlastingly.* He "brake their bands in sunder." When a man was set free from prison in the old times when they used iron chains, the smith came, and took the chains off, and then they were hung up upon the walls. Have you never been in ancient prisons, and seen the fetters and manacles hanging up ready for use; aye, for use upon those who have already worn such jewellery before, if they should come that way, again? This is not the case here; for He "brake their bands in sunder." Note this right well, O child of God, you were once shut up as with gates of brass, and bars of iron, and the devil thinks that one of these days he will get you behind those gates again! But he never will, for the Lord "hath broken the gates of brass." All the powers of darkness cannot shut us up with broken gates! Satan thinks he will imprison us again; but the bars of iron are cut in sunder. The means of our captivity are no longer available. My mind carries me to a certain scene, and my eye almost beholds it. Behold Samson, the hero of Israel, shut in within the walls of Gaza. The Philistines boast, "Now will he be our captive." He slept till midnight, and then he arose. He found that he was shut up within the city, and so he went to the gate. That gate was barred and locked; but what mattered it? Israel's champion bowed his great shoulders down to the gate: he took hold of both the posts, gave a tremendous heave, and in an instant tore up the whole construction from the earth in which it had been firmly placed. "He lifted the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron." See in this thing a symbol of what our Lord Jesus Christ did when He arose from the dead. He carried away all that which held us captive—posts, and bar, and all. "He led captivity captive."

When our Lord had led us forth from our prison, He said to Himself, "They shall never be shut up again. for now I will make sure work of it," and therefore He brake the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder. How then can any child of God be shut up within the Gaza of sin again? How shall we be condemned when the Lord hath put away our sin for ever? No, the liberty received is everlasting liberty; we shall not see bondage any more. O, dear souls, I do want you to lay hold on this! You doomed and guilty men, you downcast and wearied men, there is everlasting salvation for you: not that which will save you to-day, and will let you go back to your bondage to-morrow; but that which will make you the Lord's free men for ever! If thou believest that Jesus is the Christ, if thou believest in Him to save thee, thou shalt be saved. It is not said half-saved, but *saved.* "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." That cannot admit that we should go to hell. Jesus says, "I give unto My sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." "He hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." Lord, help some poor souls to sing this song to-day, and receive at this moment everlasting salvation!

III. I close with a practical question: WHAT IS TO BE DONE ABOUT THIS? If such people as we have described have been brought into liberty, what is to be done about it? I do not want to tell you what to do, I would have you do it by instinct. Fain would I, like Miriam, take a timbrel, and go first, and bid all the sons and daughters of Israel follow me in this song: "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously. He hath brought out His captives, and set His people free." It naturally suggests itself to the liberated spirit to magnify the Lord. So the Psalmist put it, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness."

First, then, if the Lord has set any of you free—*record it.* See how David wrote it down. Write it in your diary; write it so that friends may read it. Say, "The Lord hath done great things for us."

When you have recorded it, then *praise God.* Praise God with all your heart. Praise God every one of you. Praise God every day. When you have praised God yourselves, then entreat others to join with you. The oratorio of God's praise needs a full choir. I remember, years ago, a bill connected with

a religious service of a very pretentious character, and on this bill is promised that the Hallelujah Chorus should be sung before the sermon. The friend who led the singing for me at that time came in to me, and asked if I could spare him. "See here," said he, "a person has come from the service which has been advertised to say that they have nobody to sing the Hallelujah Chorus. The minister wants me to go down and do it." I answered, "Yes; by all means go. If you can sing the Hallelujah Chorus alone, don't throw yourself away on me." Then we smiled, and at last broke out into a laugh; it was too much for our gravity. Surely for a man to think that he can sufficiently praise God alone is much like attempting to sing the Hallelujah Chorus as a solo. The Psalmist therefore utters that great "Oh!" "Oh that men would praise the Lord!" I do not think he said "men," for the word "men" is in italics: the translators are accountable for it. He means: Oh that angels, oh that cherubim and seraphim would praise the Lord! Oh that all creatures that have breath would praise the Lord for His goodness! Even that would not be enough, but let the mountains and the hills break forth before Him into singing, and let all the trees of the wood clap their hands. Let the sea roar and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein. With a great "Oh!" with a mighty sigh over the holy business, which was far too great for himself, David felt moved to call upon all others to praise the Lord.

I close with that; my brothers, my sisters, you that have been saved, praise God! Praise Him with the blessings He has lavished on you. I described them in three ways. With your *light* praise Him: the more you know, the more you see, the more you understand, turn it all into praise. Next, with your *life* praise Him—with your physical life, with your mental life, with your spiritual life; with life of every sort even unto eternal life praise the Lord. *Liberty* has been given us; let our freedom praise Him. Be like that man who was made straight, who went out of the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. God has made you free, feel free to praise Him; and if men will not give you leave to praise, take French leave; yea, take heavenly leave, and praise God anywhere and everywhere. Hark! how they sing the songs of Bacchus and of Venus in the streets, and even wake us up in the night: why may not we sing God's praises in the same public fashion? We must praise Him! We will praise Him! We do praise Him! We shall praise Him for ever and ever!

Praise Him with the heart He has changed, with the lips He has loosed, with the lives He has spared. A little while ago you could not speak a cheerful word, but now you can rejoice in God. Let those lips from which He has taken the muzzle of dumb despair, be opened in His praise. Praise Him with all the talents He has lent you. If you have any power of thought, if you have any fluency of speech, praise Him. If you have any voice of song, praise Him. If you have health and strength, praise Him. Let every limb of your body praise Him: those members which were servants of sin, let them be instruments of righteousness unto God. Praise Him with your substance. Let your gold and silver, aye, and your bronze, praise Him. Praise Him with all that you have, and with all that you are, and with all that you hope to be. Lay your all upon the altar. Make a whole burnt-offering of it. Praise Him with all the influence you have. If He has delivered you from the shadow of death, let your shadow, like that of Peter, become the instrument of God's healing power to others. Teach others to praise God. Influence them by your example. Fill your house with music from top to bottom; perfume every room with the fragrance of living devotion. Make your houses belfries, and be yourselves the bell for ever ringing out the loud praises of the Lamb of God. He bore your sins, bear you His praises. He died for you, therefore live for Him. He has heard your prayers, let Him hear your praises. Let us together sing "Hallelujah to God and the Lamb." Let us stand upon our feet, and with one voice and heart let us sing:

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

A VISIT TO CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

"Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saveth them out of their distresses. He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing."—Psalm cvii. 17–22.

IT is a very profitable thing to visit a hospital. The sight of others' sickness tends to make us grateful for our own health, and it is a great thing to be kept in a thankful frame of mind, for ingratitude is a spiritual disease, injurious to every power of the soul. A hospital inspection will also teach us compassion, and that is of great service. Anything that softens the heart is valuable. Above all things, in these days, we should strive against the petrifying influences which surround us. It is not easy for a man, who has constantly enjoyed good health and prosperity, to sympathize with the poor and the suffering. Even our great High Priest, who is full of compassion, learned it by carrying our sorrows in His own person. To see the sufferings of the afflicted, in many cases, would be enough to move a stone; and if we go to the hospital, and come back with a tenderer heart, we shall have found it a sanatorium to ourselves.

I purpose, at this time, to take you to a hospital. It shall not be one of those noble institutions so pleasingly plentiful around the Tabernacle; but we will take you to Christ's Hospital, or, as the French would call it, the *Hotel Dieu*: and we shall conduct you

through the wards for a few minutes, trusting that while you view them, if you are yourself healed, you may feel gratitude that you have been delivered from spiritual sicknesses, and an intense compassion for those who still pine and anguish. May we become like our Saviour, who wept over Jerusalem with eyes which were no strangers to compassion's floods; may we view the most guilty and impenitent with yearning hearts, and grieve with mingled hope and anxiety over those who are under the sound of the gospel, and so are more especially patients in the Hospital of God.

We will go at once with the Psalmist to the wards of spiritual sickness.

I. And, first, we have set out before us THE NAMES AND CHARACTERS OF THE PATIENTS.

You see, in this hospital, written up over the head of every couch, the name of the patient and his disease, and you are amazed to find that all the inmates belong to one family, and, singularly enough, are all called by one name, and that name is very far from being a reputable one. It is a title that nobody covets, and that many persons would be very indignant to have applied to them,—"*Fool.*" All who are sick in God's Hospital are fools, without exception, for this reason, that all sinners are fools. Often, in Scripture, when David means the wicked, he says, "the foolish"; and, in saying this, he makes no mistake, for sin is folly.

Sin is foolish, clearly, because it is a setting-up of our weakness in opposition to Omnipotence. Every wise man, if he must fight will choose a combatant against whom he may have a chance of success; but he who wars with the Most High commits as gross a folly as when the moth contends with the flame, or the dry grass of the prairie challenges the fire. There is no hope for thee, O sinful man, of becoming a victor in the struggle. How unwise thou art to take up the weapons of rebellion! And the folly is aggravated, because the One who is opposed is so infinitely good that opposition to Him is violence to everything that is just, beneficial, and commendable. God is love; shall I resist the infinitely loving One? He scatters blessings; wherefore should I be His foe? If His commandments were grievous, if His ways were ways of misery, and His paths were paths of woe, I might have some pretence of an excuse for resisting His will. But O my God, so good, so kind, so boundless in grace, 'tis folly, as well as wickedness, to be Thine enemy!

> "To all that's good, averse and blind,
> But prone to all that's ill,
> What dreadful darkness veils our mind!
> How obstinate our will!"

Besides this, the laws of God are so supremely beneficial to ourselves, that we are our own enemies when we rebel. God's laws are danger signals. As sometimes, on the ice, those who care for human life put up the warning word "*Danger*" here and there, and leave the part that is safe for all who choose to traverse it, so God has left us free to enjoy everything that is safe for us, and has only forbidden us that which is to our own hurt. If there be a law which forbids me to put my hand into the fire, it is a pity that I should need such a law, but a thousand pities more if I think that law a hardship. The commands of God do but forbid us to injure ourselves. To keep them is to keep ourselves in holy happiness; to break them is to bring evil of all kinds upon ourselves in soul and body. Why should I violate a law, which, if I were perfect, I should myself have made, or myself have kept finding it in force? Why need I rebel against that which is never exacting, never oppressive, but always conducive to my own highest welfare? The sinner is a fool, because he is told, in God's Word, that the path of evil will lead to destruction, and yet he pursues it with the secret hope that, in his case, the damage will not be very great. He has been warned that sin is like a cup frothing with a foam of sweetness, but concealing death and hell in its dregs; yet each sinner, as he takes the cup, fascinated by the first drop, believes that, to him, the poisonous draught will not be fatal. How many have fondly hoped that God would lie unto men, and would not fulfil His threatenings! Yet, be assured, every sin shall have its recompense of reward; God is just, and will by no means spare the guilty. Even in this life many are feeling in their bones the consequences of their youthful lusts; they will carry to their graves the scars of their transgressions. In hell, alas! there are millions who will for ever prove that sin is an awful and an undying evil, an infinite curse which has destroyed them for ever and ever.

The sinner is a fool, because, while he doubts the truthfulness of God as to the punishment of sin, he has the conceit to imagine that transgression will ever yield him pleasure. God saith it shall be bitterness; the sinner denies the bitterness, and affirms that it shall be sweetness. O fool, to seek pleasure in sin! Go rake the charnel-house to find an immortal soul; go walk into the secret springs of the sea to find the source of the flame. It is not there, and thou canst never find bliss in rebellion. Hundreds of thousands before thee have gone upon this search, and have all been disappointed; he is indeed a fool who must needs rush headlong in this useless chase, and perish as the result. The sinner is a fool—a great fool—to remain as he is in danger of the wrath of God. To abide at ease in imminent peril, and scorn the way of escape; to love the world, and loathe the Saviour; to set the present fleeting life above the eternal future; to choose the sand of the desert, and forego the jewels of heaven;—all this is folly, in the highest conceivable degree.

Though all sinners are fools, yet there are fools of all sorts. Some are learned fools. Unconverted men, whatever they know, are only educated fools. Between the ignorant man who cannot read a letter, and the learned man who is apt in all knowledge, there is small difference if they are both ignorant of Christ; indeed, the scholar's folly is in this case the greater of the two. The learned fool generally proves himself the worst of fools, for he invents theories which would be ridiculed if they could be understood, and he brings forth speculations which, if they were judged by common-sense, and men were not turned into idiotic worshippers of imaginary authority, would be scouted from the universe with a hiss of derision. There are fools in colleges and fools in cottages.

There are also reckless fools and reckoning fools. Some sin with both hands greedily. "A short life, and a merry one," is their motto; while the so-called "prudent" fools live more slowly, but still live not for God. These last, with hungry greed for wealth, will often hoard up gold as if it were true treasure, and as if anything worth the retaining were to be found beneath the moon. Your "prudent, respectable" sinner will find himself just as much lost as your reckless prodigal. They must all alike seek and find the

Saviour, or be guilty of gross folly. So, alas! there are old fools as well as young ones. There are those who, after an experience of sin, burn their fingers at it still. The burnt child dreads the fire, but the burnt sinner lovingly plays with his sin again. Hoar hairs ought to be a crown of glory, but too often they are fool's caps. There are young sinners who waste the prime of life when the dew is on their spirit, and neglect to give their strength to God, and so miss the early joy of religion, which is the sweetest, and makes all the rest of life the sweeter: these are fools. But what is he who hath one foot hanging over the mouth of hell, and yet continues without God and without Christ, a trifler with eternity?

I have spoken thus upon the name of those who enter God's Hospital; permit me to add that all who go there, and are cured, agree that this name is correct. Saved souls are made to feel that they are naturally fools; and, indeed, it is one stage in the cure when men are able to spell their own name, and when they are willing to write it in capital letters, and say, "That is mine! If there is no other man in this world who is a fool, I am. I have played the fool before the living God." This confession is true, for what madness it is to play the fool before the Eternal One, with your own soul as the subject of the foolery! When men make sport, they generally do it with trifling things. A man who plays the fool, and puts on a cap and bells, is wise in comparison with him who sports with his God, his soul, heaven, and eternity. This is folly beyond all folly. Yet the sinner, when he is taken into God's Hospital, will be made to feel that he has been such a fool, and that his solly is folly with emphasis. He will confess that Christ must be made unto him wisdom, for he himself by nature was born a fool, has lived a fool, and will die a fool, unless the infinite mercy of God shall interpose.

II. Now, for a minute or two, let us notice THE CAUSE OF THEIR PAINS AND AFFLICTIONS. "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted."

The physician usually tries to find out the root and cause of the disease he has to deal with. Now, those souls that are brought into grief for sin, those who are smarting through the providential dealings of God, through the strikings of conscience, or the smitings of the Holy Spirit, are here taught that *the source of their sorrow is their sin.* These sins are mentioned in the text in the plural: "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities." How many have our sins been? Who shall count them? Let him tell the hairs of his head first. Sins are various, and are therefore called "transgressions and iniquities." We do not all sin alike, nor does any one man sin alike at all times. We commit sins of word, thought, deed, against God, against men, against our bodies, against our souls, against the gospel, against the law, against the week-day duties, against the Sabbath privileges—sins of all sorts, and these all lie at the root of our sorrows. Our sins also are aggravated; not content with transgression, we have added iniquities to it. No one is more greedy than a sinner, but he is greedy after his own destruction. He is never content with revolting; he must needs rebel yet more and more. As when a stone is rolled downhill, its pace is accelerated the further it goes, so is it with the sinner, he goes from bad to worse.

Perhaps I speak to some who have lately come into God's Hospital. I will suppose a case. You are poor, very poor, but your poverty is the fruit of your profligate habits. Poverty is often directly traceable to drunkenness, laziness, or dishonesty. All poverty does not come from these sources. Blessed be God, there are thousands of the poor who are the excellent of the earth, and a great many of them are serving God right nobly; but I am now speaking of certain cases, and probably you know of such yourselves, where, because of their transgression and iniquities, men are brought to want. There will come to me, sometimes, a person who was in good circumstances a few years ago, who is now without anything but the clothes he tries to stand upright in, and his wretchedness is entirely owing to his playing the prodigal. He is one of those whom I trust God may yet take into His Hospital.

At times, the disease breaks out in another sort of misery. Some sins bring into the flesh itself pains which are anticipatory of hell; yet even these persons may be taken into the Hospital of God, though they are afflicted, to their shame, through gross transgression. Oh, how many there are, in this great City of London, of men and women who dare not tell their condition, but whose story is a terrible one indeed, as God reads it! Oh, that He may have pity upon them, and take them into His lazar-house, and heal them yet through His abundant grace!

In more numerous cases, the misery brought by sin is mental. Many are brought by sin very low, even to despair. Conscience pricks them; fears of death and hell haunt them. I do remember well when I was in this way myself; when I, poor fool, because of my transgression and my iniquities, was sorely bowed in spirit. By day, I thought of the punishment of my sin; by night, I dreamed of it. I woke in the morning with a burden on my heart,—a burden which I could neither carry nor shake off, and sin was at the bottom of my sorrow. My sin, my sin, my sin,—this was my constant plague. I was in my youth, and in the heydey of my spirit; I had all earthly comforts, and I had friends to cheer me, but they were all as nothing. I would seek solitary places to search the Scriptures, and to read such books as *Baxter's Call to the Unconverted* and *Alleine's Alarm*, feeling my soul ploughed more and more, as though the law, with its ten great black horses, was dragging the plough up and down my soul, breaking, crushing, furrowing my heart, and all for sin. Let me tell you, though we read of the cruelties of the Inquisition, and the sufferings which the martyrs have borne from cruel men, no racks, nor firepans, nor other instruments of torture can make a man so wretched as his own conscience when he is stretched upon its rack.

Here, then, we see both the fools and the cause of their disease.

III. Now let us notice THE PROGRESS OF THE DISEASE. It is said that "their soul abhorreth all manner of meat," like persons who have lost their appetite, and can eat nothing; "and they draw near unto the gates of death," they are given over, and nearly dead.

These words may reach some whose disease of sin has developed itself in fearful sorrow, so that they are now unable to find comfort in anything. You used to enjoy the theatre; you went lately, but you were wretched there. You used to be a wit in society, and set the table on a roar with your jokes; but you cannot joke now. They say you are melancholy, but you know what they do not know, for a secret arrow

rankles in your bosom. You go to a place of worship, but you find no comfort even there. The manner of meat that is served to God's saints is not suitable to you. You cry, "Alas, I am not worthy of it!" Whenever you hear a sermon thundering against the ungodly, you feel, "Ah, that is for me!" but when it comes to "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," you conclude, "Ah, that is not for me!" Even if it be an invitation to the sinner, you say, "But I do not feel myself a sinner. I am not such an one as may come to Christ. Surely I am a castaway." Your soul abhorreth all manner of meat, even that out of God's kitchen. Not only are you dissatisfied with the world's dainties, but the marrow and fatness of Christ Himself you cannot relish. Many of us have been in this way before you.

The text adds, "They draw near unto the gates of death." The soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and feels that it cannot bear up much longer. I remember once, in the bitterness of my spirit, using those words of Job, "My soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life," for the wretchedness of a sin-burdened soul is intolerable. All do not suffer like strong convictions; but, in some, it bows the spirit almost to the grave. Perhaps, my friend, you see no hope whatever; you are ready to say, "There cannot be any hope for me. I have made a covenant with death, and a league with hell; I am past hope. There were, years ago, opportunities for me, and I was near the kingdom; but like the man who put his hand to the plough, and then looked back, I have proved myself unworthy of eternal life." Troubled heart, I am sent with a message for you: "Thus saith the Lord, your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your league with hell shall not stand. The prey shall be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive shall be delivered." You may abhor the very meat that would restore you to strength, but He who understands the human heart knows how to give you better tastes and cure these evil whims; He knows how to bring you up from the gates of death to the gates of heaven. Thus we see how terribly the mischief progresses.

> "Our beauty and our strength are fled,
> And we draw near to death,
> But Christ the Lord recalls the dead
> With His Almighty breath."

IV. And now the disease takes a turn. Our fourth point is THE INTERPOSITION OF THE PHYSICIAN: "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saveth them out of their distresses. He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."

The good Physician is the true Healer. *Observe when the Physician comes in,*—when "they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." When they cry, the Physician has come. I will not say that He has come because they cry, though that would be true; but there is deeper truth still,—they cried because He came. For, whenever a soul truly cries unto God, God has already blessed it by enabling it to cry. Thou wouldst never have begun to pray if the Lord had not taught thee. God is visiting a soul, and healing it, when it has enough faith in God to cast itself, with a cry, upon His mercy. I cannot hope that there is a work of grace in thee until I know that thou prayest. Ananias would not have believed that Paul was converted had it not been said, "Behold he prayeth!"

Note the kind of prayer here; it was not taken out of a book, and it was not a fine prayer in language, whether extempore or pre-composed; it was *a cry.* You do not need to teach your children how to cry; it is the first thing a new-born child does. It wants no schoolmaster to teach it that art. Our School Boards have a great deal to teach the children of London, but they need never have a department for instruction in crying. A spiritual cry is the call of the new-born nature expressing conscious need. "How shall I pray?" says one. Pour thy heart out, brother. Turn the vessel upside down, and let the contents run out to the last dreg, as best they can. "But I cannot pray," says one. Tell the Lord you cannot pray, and ask Him to help you to pray, and you have prayed already. "Oh, but I don't feel as I should!" Then confess to the Lord your sinful insensibility, and ask Him to make your heart tender, and you are already in a measure softened. Those who say, "We don't feel as we should," are very often those who feel the most. Whether it be so or no, cry. If thou art a sin-sick soul, thou canst do nothing towards thine own healing but this,—thou canst cry. He who hears thy cries will know what they mean. When the surgeon goes to the battlefield, after a conflict, he is guided to his compassionate work by the groans of the wounded. When he hears a soldier's cry, he does not enquire, "Was that a Frenchman or a German, and what does he mean?" A cry is good French, and excellent German too; it is part of the universal tongue. The surgeon understands it, and looks for the sick man. And, whatever language thou usest, O sinner, uncouth or refined, if it be the language of thy heart, God understands thee without an interpreter.

Note well that, as we have seen when the Physician interposed, we shall see next *what He did.* He saved them out of their distresses, healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh, the infinite mercy of God! He reveals to the heart pardon for all sin; and, by His Spirit's power, removes all our weaknesses. I tell thee, soul, though thou art at death's door this moment, God can even now gloriously deliver thee. It would be a wonder if your poor burdened spirit should, within this hour, leap for joy; and yet, if the Lord shall visit thee in mercy, thou wilt do so. I fall back upon my own recollection; my escape from despondency was instantaneous. I did but believe Jesus Christ's word, and rest upon His sacrifice, and the night of my heart was over; the darkness had passed, and the true light had shone. In some parts of the world there are not long twilights before the break of day, but the sun leaps up in a moment; the darkness flies, and the light reigns; so it is with many of the Lord's redeemed. As in a moment, their ashes are exchanged for beauty, and their spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise. Faith is the great transformer. Wilt thou cast thyself now, whether thou shalt live or die, upon the precious blood and merits of Jesus Christ the Saviour? Wilt thou come and rest thy soul upon the Son of God? As thou dost so, thou art saved; thy sins, which are many, are now forgiven thee. As of old the Egyptians were drowned in a moment in the Red Sea, and the depths had covered them so that there was not one of them left; so, the moment thou believest, thou hast lifted a mightier rod than that of Moses, and the sea of the atoning blood, in the fulness of its strength, has gone over the heads of all thine enemies; thy sins are drowned in Jesu's blood. Oh, what joy is

this when, in answer to a cry, God delivers us from our present distresses and our threatened future destructions!

But how is this effected? The Psalmist saith, "He sent His Word, and healed them." "*His Word.*" How God ennobles language when He uses it! That word "*word*" is uplifted in Scripture into the foremost place, and put on a level with the Godhead. "THE WORD." It indicates a God-like personage, for, "in the beginning was the Word"; nay, it denotes God Himself, for "the Word was God." Our hope is in the Word,—the incarnate *Logos*, the eternal Word. In some respects, our salvation comes to us entirely through the sending of that Word to be made flesh, and to dwell among us. He is our saving health, by His stripes we are healed. But here the expression is best understood of the gospel, which is the Word of God. Often, the reading of the Scriptures proves the means of healing troubled souls; or, else, that same Word is made effectual when spoken from a loving heart with a living lip. What might there is in the plain preaching of the gospel! No power in all the world can match it. They tell us, nowadays, that the nation will go over to Rome, and the gospel candle will be blown out. I am not a believer in these alarming prophecies; I neither believe in the battle of Dorking, nor in the victory of Pius the Ninth. Leave us our Bibles, our pulpits and our God, and we shall win the victory yet. Oh, if all ministers preached the gospel plainly, without aiming at rhetoric and high flights of oratory, what great triumphs would follow! How sharp would the gospel sword prove itself to be if men would pull it out of those fine ornamental, but useless scabbards! When the Lord enables His servants to put plain gospel truth into language that will strike and stick, be understood and retained, it heals sick souls, that else might have lain fainting long.

Still, the Word of God in the Bible and the Word of God preached cannot heal the soul unless God shall *send it* in the most emphatic sense; "*He sent* His Word." When the eternal Spirit brings home the Word with power, what a Word it is! Then the miracles of grace wrought within us are such as to astonish friends and confound foes. May the Lord, even now, send His Word to each sinner, and it will be his salvation. "Hear, and your soul shall live." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," and faith brings with it all that the soul requires. When we have faith, we are linked with Christ; and so our salvation is ensured.

V. That brings us to the last point,—THE CONSEQUENT CONDUCT OF THOSE WHO WERE HEALED.

First, *they praised God for His goodness.* What rare praise a soul offers when it is brought out of prison! The sweetest music ever heard on earth is found in those new songs which celebrate our recent deliverance from the horrible pit and the miry clay. Did you ever keep a linnet in a cage, and then bethink yourself that it was cruel to rob it of its liberty? Did you take it out into the garden, and open the cage door? Oh! but if you could have heard it sing when it had fairly escaped from the cage where it had been so long, you would have heard the best linnet music in all the wood. When a poor soul breaks forth from the dungeon of despair, set free by God, what songs it pours forth! God loves to hear such music. Remember that ancient word of His, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness." God loves the warm-hearted praises of newly-emancipated souls; and He will get some out of you, dear friend, if you are set free at this hour.

Notice that these healed ones praised God especially *for His goodness.* It was great goodness that such as they were should be saved. So near death's door, and yet saved! They wondered at His mercy, and sang of "His wonderful works to the children of men." It is wonderful that such as we were should be redeemed from our iniquities; but our Redeemer's name is called Wonderful, and He delights in showing forth the riches of His grace.

Observe that, in their praises, they ascribe all to God; *they praise Him for His wonderful work.* Salvation is God's work, from beginning to end. Their song is, moreover, comprehensive, and they adore the Lord for His love to others as well as to themselves; they praise Him "for His wonderful works to the children of men."

Forget not that *they added to this praise sacrifice:* "Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving." What shall be the sacrifices of a sinner delivered from going down into the pit? Shall he bring a bullock that hath horns and hoofs? Nay, let him bring his heart; let him offer himself, his time, his talents, his body, his soul, his substance. Let him exclaim, "Let my Lord take all, seeing that He hath saved my soul." Will you not lay yourselves out for Him who laid Himself out for you? If He has bought you with such a price, confess that you are altogether His. Of your substance give to His cause as He prospers you; prove that you are really His by your generosity towards His Church and His poor.

In addition to sacrifice, the healed ones began to offer songs, for it was to be a "*sacrifice of thanksgiving.*" May those of you who are pardoned sing more than is customary nowadays. May we, each one of us, who have been delivered from going down to the pit, enter into the choir of God's praising ones, vocally singing as often as we can, and in our hearts always chanting His praise!

Once more, the grateful ones were to add to their gifts and psalms *a declaration of joy* at what God had done for them: "Let them declare His works with rejoicing." Ye who are pardoned should tell the Church of the Lord's mercy to you. Let His people know that God is discovering His hidden ones. Come and tell the minister. Nothing gladdens him so much as to know that souls are brought to Jesus by his means. This is our reward. Ye are our crown of rejoicing, ye saved ones. I can truly say that I never have such joy as when I receive letters from persons, or hear from them personally the good news, "I heard you on such-and-such a night, and found peace;" or, "I read your sermon, and God blessed it to my soul." There is not a true minister of Christ but would willingly lay himself down to die if he could thereby see multitudes saved from eternal wrath. We live for this. If we miss this, our life is a failure. What is the use of a minister unless he brings souls to God? For this we would yearn over you, and draw near unto God in secret, that He would be pleased in mercy to deliver you.

But, surely, if you are converted, you should not conceal the fact. It is an unkind action for any person, who has received life from the dead, through any instrumentality, to deny the worker the consolation of hearing that he has been made useful; for the servant of God has many discouragements, and he

is himself readily cast down, and the gratitude of those who are saved is one of the appointed cordials for his heavy heart. There is no refreshment like it. May God grant you grace to declare His love, for our sake, for the Church's sake, and, indeed, for the world's sake. Let the sinner know that you have found mercy; perhaps it will induce him also to seek salvation. Many a physician has gained his practice by one patient telling others of his cure. Tell your neighbours that you have been to the Hospital of Jesus, and been restored, though you hated all manner of meat, and drew near to the gates of death; and, may be, a poor soul, just in the same condition as yourself, will say, "This is a message from God to me."

Above all, publish abroad the Lord's goodness, for Jesus' sake. He deserves your honour. Will you receive His blessing, and then, like the nine lepers, give Him no praise? Will you be like the woman in the crowd, who was healed by touching the hem of His garment, and then would fain have slipped away? If so, I pray that the Master may say, "Somebody hath touched Me," and may you be compelled to tell us all the truth, and say, "I was sore sick in soul, but I touched Thee, O my blessed Lord, and I am saved, and to the praise of the glory of Thy grace I will tell it! I will tell it, though devils should hear me; I will tell it, and make the world ring with it, according to my ability, to the praise and glory of Thy saving grace.

AN OLD-FASHIONED REMEDY

"He sent His word and healed them."—Psalm cvii. 20.

THE healing of natural sickness is not accomplished without the power of God. Vain were the skill of the most learned physician unless the God of nature co-operated with the medicine. If any of you have been restored of late from sickness, I charge you to praise God for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men. Remember your weary nights: remember your painful days: call to your mind the vows of your soul in anguish made, and take care that you play not false to God. In the day of your health be true to the promises made on your sick-bed. Let the song of gratitude go up from your heart and from your lip, and let the life which He has so graciously preserved be dedicated to His service. It ought to be so. God help you, that it may be so. However, the psalm is intended to speak of spiritual things, and so to-night we shall apply our text to the disorders of the mind—the diseases of the heart. There are some here present who have felt that worst of sicknesses—a sick heart, and many of us, blessed be God, have received that best of healing, the healing of the mind. They can praise God to-night while we speak of this precious fact. "He sent His word and healed them."

Just in a few strokes let me sketch the patient in his extremity, and then at length let me describe the cure in its simplicity. "He sent His word and healed them."

I. First, let us give the sketch of THE PATIENT IN HIS EXTREMITY. I hope he will see himself as in a glass and say, "That is myself."

The first thing about him is that *he is a fool.* Turn to the seventeenth verse. "Fools because of their transgression and because of their iniquities are afflicted." It is insulting to a man to call him a fool, but I question whether any man is saved unless he has called himself a fool. "Fool!" says the man under a conviction of sin, "you may write the word large about me, for it describes my condition." We sometimes speak of a born fool; well, that is exactly what the convicted man feels he is; he has been a born fool, his very nature is foolish, for he puts bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness, and that not now and then, but by the very force of nature he seems constantly to make a foolish choice. He has been one of those fools who has said in his heart, "No God," for he has practically lived without thinking of his God. He has been one of those fools who has chosen the transient present, and left the eternal future to be forgotten. It is a difficult thing to cure a man of his folly. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in the mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him," says Solomon. That would be rather a rough process, would it not? But it would be useless. Folly would still remain in spite of all the grinding. When a man truly sees his sickness, he feels that he is just such a fool as that—a fool with folly ingrained. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child," and in the life of a sinner.

But this man has played the fool. Besides being a fool, *he has acted like a fool,* for "fools because of their transgression and because of their iniquities are afflicted." Transgression means breaking bounds and trespassing, and he that trespasses on the fields of a God who is so just and so strong to smite, is a fool. Iniquity means want of equity, want of truth, want of rightness, want of honesty, and surely he that tries to cheat God is a fool. How shall he hope to be able to deceive the Omniscient One, or that those eyes which are like a flame of fire shall fail to detect the in-equity, the dishonesty of his doings? That he has thought for a moment that he could do it shows that he is a fool and that he has acted like a fool. Now, I am not going to say of any man present that this is true concerning him, but if any man here present feels it is the truth about himself, he is a man that God is going to bless; for when the Lord has shown you yourself, He will afterwards show you Himself, and when He has made you see that you are a fool by nature, and a fool by practice, then it is that He will take you into the school of wisdom and yet teach you the right way. The patient's disease, you will see, is a very bad one, and it is one that is very hard to cure.

You notice, according to the psalm, that *he has come into a condition in which he has lost all appetite.* It is written, "Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat." A sick man in certain diseases loses appetite for everything. It matters not how daintily cooked the delicate morsel may be, he turns against it. Ah, well do I remember my own season of suffering when I passed through this experience; I am only describing what has happened to myself, and therefore

I know that it has happened to some of you, for though in detail our experiences differ, in the main they are wonderfully alike. How we loathe everything in our sickness. Manna—that is light bread; bread—that is heavy; wine—it is too hot; water—it is too cold. It mattered not what was brought to me when I was in that spiritual condition, I could not receive it. Doubtless it is so with thee too. Of the invitations of the gospel, the soul says, "Ah, Jesus Christ could not intend to invite me." Of the promises of the Word—the heart says, "Ah, they may be true to everybody else, but they cannot be true to me." One may preach the sweetest and the softest messages of love, but when a soul is under a sense of sin it abhors all manner of meat; it turns against all consolation; it refuses to be comforted. You may try to comfort such a case as much as ever you will, but the dreary thought rises in the soul, "It cannot be for me. As for me, I shall perish in my iniquity. I have played the fool exceedingly and God has given me up to my heart's lust, and now I shall perish in the day when He judges mankind."

The Psalmist goes on to say of the sick man that *he is drawing near unto the gates of death.* I know some souls that feel as if it could not be long before they shall be utterly lost. They have not had any peace, rest, happiness, comfort, for such a great while that it seems to them a wonder that the earth does not open and swallow them up. They cannot sleep at night for terrible dreams, and cannot rest at day for terrible sounds that are in their ears. They think of an angry God, the judgment seat, and the dreadful sword of the Most High that is made bare to smite the wicked. I do not say that many of you are in that state, but if any of you are it is to you that I am sent to-night with words of mercy, for the text says, "He sent His word and healed them." These fools, these that have played the fool, these whose soul abhors all manner of meat, and these who draw nigh unto the gates of death—to these very people He sent His word and healed them. Oh, that infinite mercy might do the like with any such who are in this company!

There is one hopeful mark about this sick man, and that is, that *he has begun to pray.* "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." It would not be much of a prayer if it had been printed; you could not have read it; indeed, you could not print it, for you cannot print a cry. The reporter has not got a sign in all his stenography, I think, by which he can record a cry. A cry is the heart's own language, with which the tongue cannot interfere. Is there anybody here that does pray and yet cannot pray—who groans before God, "Oh, that I might be saved,"—whose only words are tears—whose only language is the anguish of his silent spirit? Ah, you are the man—the man that can cry. Cry then unto the Lord with all your might. It is said of such, "He sent His word and healed them."

Well, those few touches may suffice. An artist sometimes sketches a likeness with a piece of charcoal. So have I sketched my patient in words few and simple. I am now going to take a longer time to describe the healing in its wonderful simplicity. "He sent His word and healed them."

II. THE CURE IN ITS SIMPLICITY.

When a physician meets with a very bad case—a case in dire extremity—it will sometimes happen with him that he has to think awhile; perhaps to resort to his books of medicine or to his diary of former cases, or to hold a consultation with another physician before he will venture to prescribe, for something unwonted is wanted in this unusual disease. But I want you to observe that, though the case represented in the psalm was a very bad one, there was no new thing wanted to meet it. The old remedy would suffice. All that the infinite Lord had to do was to send His word and heal them. It was the old healing word that had healed many a fool before and could heal fools still; the old healing word that had brought back many from between the very gates of death, nothing more was needed in order to bring back these who were in such a dreadful condition. For the healing of the souls sick with sin, and sick of it, I have no new gospel to preach nor any new thing to say. Thank God, the old, old gospel meets every case. New developments of sin, strange out-of-the-way diseases of iniquity, keep cropping up, but the old remedy meets them all. God needs not to consult nor make new compounds; the simple thing which healed men centuries ago heals them still. "He sent His word and healed them."

The text may be understood to mean three things. First, God sent Christ the Incarnate Word; that is the essence of the remedy. Then He sent the Bible, the revealed word; that is the instrument of the remedy. He sent, thirdly, His word of power by the Holy Spirit; that is the application of the remedy. Let us speak of these three things. They are all necessary. As there is a trinity in the one God, so must there be a trinity in the one word by which men are saved.

First, let us look at *the essence of the remedy.* Dear friends, when God heals a sinner He does it by Christ, who is the Word made flesh, who dwelt among us. Almighty healing lies in the person and work and merit of Him who is called the Word of God, of whom you read, in the first chapter of John's gospel, that "the Word was God; the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made."

Now, whatever your disease may be, Jesus Christ the Word of God is able to meet it. *He can heal the guilt of sin.* However guilty a soul may be, Christ stands in the sinner's stead, bears the sin, and makes atonement for it unto God. So all sin can be put away. No matter how many your sins or how black they may be, although they be double-dyed, yet the moment Jesus Christ comes to you, and you accept Him,

> "Your sins shall vanish quite away,
> Though black as hell before;
> Shall be dissolved beneath the sea
> And shall be found no more."

There is healing for the guilt of sin.

Probably, however, your conscience is troubled about the influence of sin over your life. Christ can meet that need too. *He can cure you of sinning.* Even if you could be forgiven the past, you cannot bear the thought of going on as you have done. Dear sick one, there is healing for thy foolishness as well as for thy sin, for the iniquity of thy heart as well as for the iniquity of thy life. Jesus Christ is able to set thee all right. If the wheels of the watch are wrong, He is the great Maker, and He can put it all right again, He can rectify every cog of every wheel till He shall have sanctified thee wholly, spirit, soul, and body. Jesus Christ is made of God unto us not only justification but sanctification too. He is able to meet both the dire ills of life, the guilt and the power of sin.

Possibly you reply to me that you are suffering in your inmost soul. Well, the Great Physician speaks, and *He can heal the depression of sin.* A sense of sin has broken your bones. A sense of sin has seemed to take away all courage from you. You do not seem to be half a man now, for sin has unstrung you—has made you weak as water. My Lord Jesus Christ can heal that—can take away the depression, the despondency, aye, and the despair. Though you may have written yourself down as damned, though you have made a league with hell and "a covenant with death," yet my Lord Jesus Christ with one touch of His pierced hand can make your spirit leap for joy. It is His way to pluck us out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay, and set our feet upon the rock and put a new song into our mouths and establish our goings. You cannot tell how quickly despondency can be changed for delight when Jesus appears. He can put off your sackcloth and your ashes from you, so that you shall never wear them again; He can gird you with gladness, and put jewels in your ears and about your neck, and adorn you as a bridegroom decketh his bride with ornaments. You little know the great joy which Christ can give, in a moment, to the most desponding sinner.

If you tell me that sin has done you all sorts of mischiefs—that you feel as if sin had poisoned you all over—that your whole nature is now out of gear, and even though it should be healed, yet there are scars which you will never lose, broken bones you will carry to your tomb, I still preach to you of the power of Christ. *He can remove even the scars.* My Lord has various ointments and remedies with which He can heal even these. What He did here on earth to the bodies of men, He is prepared to do now to the souls of men. There came to Him the blind; they could not see, just as you cannot understand. You say truly that sin has darkened your judgment. What did the Master do but make clay with His spittle, anoint the eyes of the blind and say, "Go and wash," and the blind went and came back seeing. Sometimes He touched men's eyes and the scales fell, and so they saw. My Lord can give you back your calm and right judgment again. He can so overrule your spirit that it shall no more put the bitter for the sweet and the darkness for the light; He can give you back those eyes of your heart;—

> "He comes from thickest films of night
> To clear the mental ray,
> And on the eyeballs of the blind
> To pour celestial day."

Ah, but you reply, "I can see well enough, but I cannot act; I know what I ought to do, but I do not do it; I perceive the right but I do the ill; I would, but I cannot." Still I invite you to Jesus. *He can give you the strength you have lost.* When my dear Lord was here on earth, there were men with withered hands, and He bade them stretch them out and they were restored. There were some that had lain on the bed and could not stir, sick of the palsy, but He bade them walk. And there was one that had been lying for years by Bethesda's side, that could not step into the pool; he lay there as you lie at the pool of ordinances, but Christ said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," and he did so. My Lord can give you back all power that you have lost, the power to repent, the power to believe, the power to shake off sin, the power to walk in holiness. He can give you it all back, and He can do it now, even while you are sitting in this house of prayer. Was there ever a disease that came to Christ that puzzled Him? Do you remember one that He ever turned away? In the long list of human diseases reckoned to be incurable, almost all, if not quite all, came under His eye; but was there one that foiled Him? Was there one of which He said, "My power is not equal to that"? No, ye know He even raised the dead. Even though Lazarus had begun to stink, He raised him,—he had been three days dead already, and yet he came forth; when the grave clouts were unwound, there was the living man. What cannot my Master do?

If I address someone who feels himself to be full of evil till he is almost like a man with a devil within him, I point that man to Christ. *He can dispossess the devil.* Do I speak to one whose raging passion, or whose lustful desire, or whose unsatisfied thirst of drunkenness, or whose long habit of blasphemy, has made him like the demoniac? Oh, come thou hither, come thou but within range of that mighty voice and it shall say, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit, and enter no more into him." Christ can make even thee to be clean.

Wherever Jesus Christ comes He is that Word of God that makes men whole; so I say to you to-night that if any of you want to save others preach Jesus Christ, for He is the Word that heals them. And if any of you want to be saved, think much of Jesus Christ. Look to none else but Jesus Christ. Fix your mind's eye on Him and trust Him, and as surely as you trust Him you shall be made whole. In your case it shall be written. "He sent His word and healed him." There is nothing about your case that Christ cannot reach. There is in Jesus Christ something exactly adapted to the peculiarly disastrous nature of your position. He can, He will, save even you, even you, if you do but trust Him now.

I am obliged to be brief for time flies so rapidly. And now notice in the second place, *the instrument of the remedy.* "He sent His word and healed them." That is He sent this book, this revelation, which is the Word of God. Thus it is Christ that heals men, and not the Bible, the Bible is like the wrapper of the bottle in which the medicine is put, and we find the remedy by unfolding the wrapper. Remember, dear souls, if you are sick, that the medicine that is to reach your case is somewhere between these two covers. There is something in here for every sin-sick soul that seeks it.

Perhaps it is *a precept* you have been neglecting; something of that which the Lord would have you to do. I have known many a soul brought to Christ by a precept. The law has often been a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ that they might find peace in Him.

But for many more of you there is here *an invitation* such as this, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." That refers to you, does it not? Do you not thirst? And there is the sweet invitation of last Sunday night, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That has been the instrument of healing to countless numbers.

Sometimes it is not an invitation, but *a promise* or a grand encouraging statement such as, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; or such a sweet word as, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," which is used by the Great Physician as balm for the wounded soul.

Precepts, promises, invitations, gospel statements; here they are. The medicine is put into many forms because the disease assumes so many aspects, but within this sacred volume lies that living Word of God which, if it is blessed by the Spirit, will bring peace to your souls. I wish you therefore to value this book beyond all price: to read it much, to read it praying as you read, "Lord, bless it to my soul": to lay your heart open to it when it cuts you like a knife: to receive those friendly wounds as meant for your healing. Then open your heart to receive its light that you may see by it: to receive its comforts that you may rejoice through them. Open wide the great doors of your soul that every part of this word may have entrance there.

You that preach to others preach much of the word of God. O dear sirs, remember good McCheyne's experience; he says that almost always when there was a case of conversion the hearer attributed it to a text of Scripture that had been quoted in the sermon. I believe it is largely so at all times; and when McCheyne again says, "It is God's word, not our own, but God's word that is generally blessed," I am sure it is so.

If you who are hearers have a choice in the matter, frequent a ministry that is full of Scripture. You are more likely to get a blessing there than anywhere else. Read books that are full of the very word of God, and then read the Word itself. But do not think you will be saved simply by reading it. That is impossible, for you are only saved by Christ, and He said to the people of His time, "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." But though you will not be saved by reading, you may be saved through reading, and through reading the Scriptures; while you are reading and hearing God's precious word He may send home some of the light and the truth and the life which lie concealed within the sacred page. "He sent His word and healed them." My learned doctor, we do not want your new gospel. We want the old Word of God. My friend of the fine poetical speech, you of the grand rhetoric, you of the golden mouth, we want neither you nor your mouth unless you give us the Word of God—just what is revealed in Scripture. There were great preachers before Luther and Calvin, before Wickcliffe and Huss and Jerome; they went about preaching and preaching to great crowds too, but they did not save souls. That was not because they could not speak and were not attractive, but because they had not this story to tell—the story that is in that book, the story of Him who did hang upon the cross. We must preach the Word. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season," for still it stands true, "He sent His word and healed them."

Now again time checks me, and I must therefore notice that there is a third sense in which we may view this text. Let us speak then of *the application of the remedy*. Jesus Christ on the Cross does not save men while they reject and refuse Him, and that book does not save anybody until the Holy Ghost with power speaks to the soul. When that happens, then it is the Word of God in another sense. Just as of old He spake and it was done, as He said, "Let there be light," and there was light, there seems to be needed a distinct call from God to men or they will not come to Him; the living word must leap from the mouth of the living God or else the Bible will be but a dead letter; even from Christ men will turn away as if it was nothing to them that Jesus died, unless the Spirit reveal the truth in power. Beloved, you that have been healed, do you not ascribe your healing to the secret mysterious power of the Holy Ghost? You know you give Him the glory. Hence when you wish to bring men to Christ always honour the Holy Spirit. Do not forget to adore Him, to lean entirely upon Him for all the power with which the healing of a soul is to be accomplished. There is no faith in the world that will save except the faith which is of the operation of the Spirit of God. There is no true glance of the eye toward Christ on the cross but such as the Spirit of God has given.

Now I want to speak just two or three words about this. Some of you will say, "Ah, me! would God that the Spirit of God would speak to me." Be not deceived, He is speaking to you now. The Word, when it is faithfully preached with prayerful spirit, has the Spirit of God going with it. Men may resist it, but they add to their sin in so doing. As said the man of God of old, "Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did so do ye."

Let us explain what the Spirit of God does not do. Since you can only be saved by hearing about Christ, He will not bring you a new way of salvation or reveal another Saviour. And if you are not saved by reading the Word of God and hearing it, He will not be likely to use any other means. The Spirit is of the same mind as father Abraham, who said about the five brothers of the man at whose gate Lazarus lay begging. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." You must not sit still, and say, "I expect to see signs and wonders, or else I will not believe." You shall have no sign and no wonder except the sign of a dying Saviour, and a Saviour risen from the dead; and the added sign of this great wonder that you refuse to believe in Him and put your trust in Him.

Now this know, that when men are led to Christ by the Spirit of God, they do not know at the time that it is the Spirit of God that is leading them. They have no idea of it. They think, they meditate, they judge, they decide, and they believe. They are free agents, and they act as such. It is afterwards that they discover that the Spirit of God has been leading them through it all. Now if you wait till you feel the Spirit of God and know it to be the Spirit of God while you are yet unbelieving, you will wait for ever, for such an experience will never be granted unto you. No man ever knows the Spirit of God so as consciously to be aware that the Spirit is at work with him until he knows Jesus Christ. As no man comes to the Father but through the Son, so no man comes to realise and to be aware of the work of the Spirit on his soul till he knows Jesus Christ.

What is the Spirit of God then to do for you? What I hope in many cases He is now doing, namely, to make you willing, as I trust you are; to make you conscious of your danger, as I trust you are; to make you understand the remedy, as I think you do? and to lead you sweetly and gently to accept what God provides, as I hope you will.

"Is that all?" says one. Ah, beloved! but it is a very great "all." I know I cannot do that work, and all the ministers in the world put together could not do that which you think to be so little. I am certain if I were sent to you to proclaim that you could all be saved if you would go barefoot from here to John 'o Groats, and start to-night, that the great northern road would be thronged by people going.

People would do anything of that sort to be saved. They would not want to be persuaded. But if we tell them that they are to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is so simple, it is so easy, that God has to work a miracle before He can bring their proud hearts to consent to be saved in that way. He has to give men new life and new light before they will come to it. Oh! have you come to it? Have you come to it now? Do you feel that, at this instant, you can say, "I do trust Jesus?" Well, dear brother, it is the Spirit of God that has brought you to it. He is within you. You need not raise any question about it. He has sent the word and healed you. If He has brought you there, keep saying,—

"While I view Thee wounded, grieving,
Breathless on the cursed tree,
Fain I'd feel my heart believing
That Thou suffer'dst thus for me."

Do you trust yourself now, whether you sink or swim? Do you trust yourself to Him that bled on the tree? That is the work of the Spirit of God; none but He could have done it.

"It seems so little," says one. "It looks as if I might have done it myself." Ah, but that little thing is the great thing here. When Elisha said, "Wash in Jordan and be clean," that was the hard thing. "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?" said his servants. But it was really a great thing the prophet had commanded. If our gospel were hard it would be easy, but because it is easy it is hard. It wants a strong hand to bring us down to this, and I am praying while I am preaching to you that the Lord Jesus Christ would now send forth the ever-blessed Spirit—His own word of power—to bring you to Himself. Look and live.

Oh, are you sore sick? Christ is a physician on purpose for the sick. Are you crying? Christ is one who always comes at the cry of sick souls. Are you willing to be saved in God's way? Will you let Him do what He wills with you? Do you surrender at discretion? Do you say, "Anyhow, anyhow, so that I may be but saved from the wrath to come?" Will you open wide your hearts now to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord? Then the Spirit of God is present healing you. He is at work with you. He has healed you, I trust, already. Only trust the bleeding Lamb of God, only trust Him. It is done. All glory to the Lamb of God. It is done. All glory to the divine Spirit who has brought us into this state of salvation. Amen and Amen.

THEIR DESIRED HAVEN

"So He bringeth them to their desired haven."—Psalm cvii. 30.

TAKEN strictly, according to its original connection, the text plainly and powerfully reminds us, that our providential mercies ought never to be forgotten; and more especially these remarkable mercies, which concern the safety of our life in times of great peril.

If there are any of you who have been exposed to storms at sea, or who have in any other way been brought near death's door, and have then been strikingly rescued, should you not devote your life to Him who has spared and prolonged it? Do you think it was without a design that God brought you into the peril, and is it without a purpose that He has lengthened out your span of life? Oh! I pray you, if you have hitherto been ungrateful, let this tenderness of His in sparing your useless life—(for it has been useless to Him, remember)—excite in you a hundred-fold tenderness; a tenderness of repentance for the past, and of holy desire for the future. In such an assembly as this I have surely some who have either been restored from a bed of sickness when they were almost given over, or who have been preserved from accidents on land, or have had hair-breadth escapes at sea. Oh! praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works toward you, and at the foot of the cross of Calvary, do you dedicate your few remaining days to the service of the Preserver of men.

But this evening, whilst remembering these important truths, we intend to use the text with yet another object. This natural voyage on the sea may be a very excellent type and picture of the spiritual voyage which all men undertake in their soul's life, and we should first interpret the text, *as it concerns the seeking sinner on the sea of soul-trouble, brought at length by the gracious Pilot to his desired haven of peace through believing*; and then we shall very briefly construe the text with reference *to the saint, brought through all the troubles of life to the desired haven of the New Jerusalem, where he shall rest* for ever free from all future storms and perils.

First, then, let us look at I. THE SEEKING SINNER AS A SOUL-VOYAGER.

Our first thought suggested here is, that with regard to the sinner, *there is a haven.* The soul of the man or woman is far out at sea, liable to be wrecked, and in such a storm he or she must be wrecked, for no craft can live it out, unless it makes all speed for the haven. But there is a haven for storm-tossed, ship-wrecked souls, there is a harbour of refuge for tempest-driven sinners. That haven is Christ Jesus, received by faith into the soul. I compare Him to a haven because of *the peace which those enjoy who once shelter in Him.* It is wild, and black, and fierce out there sinner, where you are: but there is peace, "the peace of God that passeth all understanding," where the true believer is. It is not because his ship is different from yours. If he were where you are, as once he was, he would still be in the same peril and suffer the same damage as you. But he is now "in Christ" and you are not; he has changed the hurricane for the haven, the danger for the calm confidence of safety. Oh! if you only knew the peace which faith brings, you would not be long before you cried unto God in your trouble and He would bring you to His dear Son and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I call Him a haven too, because of *the safety that there is to every soul that is in Him.* Ships are wrecked and broken to pieces out there, on the shoal, on the quicksand, or on the iron-bound coast, but they escape wreck in the haven. There let the storm-king rage his worst and angriest abroad; they are in perfect peace. Sometimes, not a ripple disturbs the vessel

that is in the harbour. My hearer, you are in great danger to-night; you may soon be in hell, and even now the wrath of God abideth on you, for you are "without God" and consequently "without hope in the world." But the Christian is in no such danger. Sin, which is the source of all soul-danger, has been fully forgiven him. He will not need even to fear death, for to him death is but the gate of life. He need have no fears of temporal trouble, for he has left his burdens with the great Burden-bearer, and may cast all his care on Him who careth for him. He has a peace which is founded upon immutable truth. It is not a false peace which expects that there will never come a storm, but a true solid peace which knows that though the storm will come, he needs not to dread it because his vessel is safe in the haven.

I call Christ a haven, again, because *when we get into Him* we do very much what ships do in the haven, *we begin unloading.* Oh! what a cargo of black sins had we! Oh! what a store of griefs and fears, follies and doubts! But when we come to Jesus Christ we unload them all. We cast overboard even what we once thought precious, counting it but dross and dung that we may win Christ and be found in Him. What a blessed riddance to be free of such foul rubbish as once threatened to founder our souls! Says the hymn—

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us,
From the accursed load."

That is what faith is helped to do. It casts all its sins and doubts and fears and cares upon Jesus Christ, the great sin-bearer, and so is made free.

I call Him a haven, too, because when a ship gets to the haven, *it begins to load again.* The haven is as frequently the starting-place for a new voyage, as the goal of the previous one. And emphatically is that so in the soul's experience.

What fine store does the trustful soul take on board when it comes to Jesus Christ! Of joy, of love, privilege, holiness, delight and fellowship; for we have inexhaustible riches of grace and blessing in Him. When we come to Him, these unbounded treasures are all ours. God all-sufficient is revealed to us in the person of the man Christ Jesus. Like the haven of Araby, where the ships take on board their gold and their perfume, so the soul receives its most precious and priceless gifts from the all-bountiful Redeemer Lord. O! you who are still out on the restless, wild sea of sin and dissatisfaction, of storm and dread, will you not long to reach the haven that you may be peaceful and safe, happy and secure because you lose your sins, and in their stead may receive of His fulness grace for grace?

Mariner! methinks I hear thee say, "I would fain come to the port, but what about it, sir? What are the dues there?" Sinner, *it is a free port*; there is nought to pay. Of all the keels that ever floated into that haven there was never one that had anything to bring that was ever worth receiving. There has been much taken out, but nought has been brought in that was worth the acceptance. Christ will charge thee no custom's dues; so run for the port, for it is freely open to every sinner that desires to cast anchor there. *There is room for thee, too.* There are many vessels; there is a great fleet, a blessedly peaceful fleet, within, but there is room for thee. Do you tell me that there was once a bar before the harbour? Yes, but it has been blasted clean away, and is now altogether removed. There is sea-room for the heaviest craft. Though thy sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow. Thou sayest that thy heavy-laden bark will draw many a foot of mercy's water. Ah! but there's many a foot here. There is room even though thy ship is burdened up to the bulwarks. There is no fear of thy touching the bottom of God's bottomless grace, wisdom, and love. There is always room for you to come. Some ports are only open at certain states of the tide; and so when the tide is out and low, the bark that makes for the haven may run upon the rocks, or the Black Middens somewhere, but of this there is no fear for you.

"The blessed gates of gospel grace
Stand open night and day."

Some souls have run for the haven at the very last, and by His mercy they have got in; whilst others have run for it, blessed be God! while yet quite young. Oh! may it be your happy lot at the very commencement of life's voyage, young men and women, to run for this blessed haven, and find yourselves strong and secure and serene.

At any rate, let me say to you, however despairing you may be, if God gives you the will to run for this harbour you may do so and find without doubt that it will be open to receive even you. Christ Jesus, then, is a true haven for the soul, and they who trust in Him are made perfectly secure.

We must not stop longer on this point however, fair and attractive as it is, but note that the text speaks of "*a desired haven.*" Now I wonder whether to all of us Christ Jesus is a desired haven. He *is* a haven, but is He a desired haven to you? Put your hand now upon your heart, and see if you can find a deep desire after Christ there. O! I should have hope in preaching to such a congregation, even though none of you knew Christ, if you did but truly desire Him. You would then be like tinder to my spark, and be like prepared ground. I should only have to sow the seed, and you would be that fruitful soil which receives it, and yields a harvest a hundredfold. Christ is not desired by some of you, and why not? But I think I can easily find out those who desire the haven. They are just these. The sailor desires the haven *when he has an unfavourable breeze.* Do you feel as if Providence were blowing in your teeth, and are temptations setting in very strong, and does the recollection of your past sin come blowing a hard gale against you? But a little while ago you sailed, and were very comfortable; for 'twas all smooth water with you; the sea was like a mill-pond; but now the waves roll and break mountains high, and the wind is in your teeth. I hope you will come to desire the Saviour now. Sick of the world and all its turbulence, may you now be anxious after Him and His peace. The sailor desires to get into harbour, too, *when he finds he is in weather which he is not likely to ride out.* "Would God," says the boatswain, "that we could see the light." "Oh! that we were in the haven now," says the master, "for there are threatening angry breakers ahead." Do you not see the breakers ahead, sinner? Are you not afraid of dying, and more afraid of living? Do not the storms and trials of life drive you to desire something better than the vain world can give you? And does not the prospect of the after-life alarm you! Then I hope that to your belaboured soul Christ is the desired haven.

But even more the haven is desired, *by the sailor*

whose ship is leaky. "She will soon go down," says he; "we have kept the pumps going, but the water gains upon us." Do you feel your spirit to be such an unseaworthy craft that you are afraid to go out into, or keep out in, the depths of the sea with her? Do you begin to feel, or fear, she is sinking? If so, then my Lord Jesus Christ will be to you a "desired haven" indeed! Ah! no sinner prizes salvation like the sinner who knows he is lost. May our God give you to know that you are!

"The sinner is a sacred thing,
The Holy Ghost hath made him so."

That is, a really awakened sinner; for his ship he will not take to harbour unless he feels that she must sink unless he does. I pray God that you may get into such a sinking state that you may be compelled to go to Him. *And when the sailor himself is sick,* it is then *he wants the haven.* When he feels as if he must die, then he says, "I wish I were safe on shore!" Do you feel sick at heart? Does your very soul turn within you till you reel and stagger like a drunken man? Then you will desire the haven, and I bless God you will have it. There is many a sailor who has desired the haven who has yet never reached it but gone down into the depths; but there has never been one upon the sea of life who has desired Christ, with a really intense longing and a loving and anxious heart, but he has found Him ere long. O! sinner, I have hope for thee, for if thou desirest Christ, Christ even more desires thee.

We cannot stop, however, even here, for next we have to talk about the Pilot. How do they get into the haven? HE *brings them there.* The text is speaking of God. "So *He* bringeth them to their desired haven." We know nothing of the navigation of the sea of salvation. To get into the harbour is never effected by human skill nor wisdom. "I am a Christian" said a young woman once. Said the minister, "When did you become a Christian?" "I am sure I don't know, sir," was the reply, "but I suppose it was when I was christened." A great many people have the same notion. Ah! but "*so*" He does not bring any to the desired haven, but in quite an altogether different way. It is by the personally coming on board of the soul, of the Great Pilot, the Holy Spirit, that the heart is steered into the safe haven. But she will rot or wreck outside, or founder, to the bottom, unless God Himself shall bring her into the quiet harbour of His glorious redemption. "So, *He* bringeth them." Dear hearer, dost thou say, "There is a haven, and I desire to make for the land; but the wind is contrary. I would tack and tack about, but the more I try the farther off from the haven do I seem to be?" Yes, but He who is the haven is also the Pilot to bring thee to the haven. Thou hast no repentance, thou sayest. He gives it; ask Him for it. Thou hast no faith; He gives it, seek it at His hands. Oh! that thou hadst grace to trust Him as much as to bring thee to Himself, as to bring thee to heaven! Thou mayest not get at Him, thou toiling bark, thou canst not reach Christ who is on the land, but He comes walking on the water to meet thee. "It is I," saith He, "be not afraid."

Despair not, doubt not, you who desire! Put up the signals of distress, fire the guns of prayer again and again, and He will come, the Pilot who has weathered and rescued from many a storm before, and will bring you into the harbour. He is a Pilot who knows the sea well.

"He knows what strong temptations mean,
For He has felt the same."

He has steered many a vessel into port that was in quite as bad a condition as you are now. He is well-skilled; He has got a divine certificate from the Trinity House. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; He hath anointed Me to do this very work of bringing poor shipwrecked mariners to the port of peace." Commit thyself to His hand. Let Him board thy vessel, and He will make thy ship tack about, and bring thee soon into the still and quiet waters of the desired haven.

But I come now to the point I want specially to drive at, and that is *the passage to the haven.* They are brought to the haven they desire, and they are brought there by the Pilot, but how are they brought? The text says: "*So* He bringeth them to their desired haven." The way into the haven is not always a smooth one. Some are brought to Christ as if they had never known a storm. Do not, of course, desire and seek a storm; but so long as you get safely into the haven it matters not how you get there. If you trust Christ, do not trouble yourselves, because you never went through the Slough of Despond. Read the life of John Bunyan, and you will find him much troubled and tumbled up and down for years. You may have felt little of this, perhaps, yet if your trust in Christ is sincere and real it matters not. If the ship reaches the haven, and is safely sheltered there, whether she had a stormy passage or a smooth one is of little importance. The great thing is to be "Safe home, safe home in port." Still, it often happens that we come into the port of Christ's salvation through a storm. Read the passage and you will see how frequently this occurs. "They mount up to heaven, they go down again into the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man. They cry unto the Lord in their trouble and He bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm to be a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet: *So* He bringeth them to their desired haven." They are greatly troubled, but it drives them to prayer, prayer gets its answer, and so they get Christ. I do thank God that so I was brought into peace by believing. It was many and many a day before I found Christ. It is a strange thing, but as I was talking this afternoon with a dear friend in Christ about spiritual things, we remarked to one another that the most of the men who had been made useful in winning souls had a hard time of it when they first came to Christ. For the most part a deep and painful experience seems to be absolutely necessary to enable a minister to get a hold and a grip upon the doctrines of grace. Still, let us never forget that the tossing is not the haven and the storm is not the port. A sense of sin does not save, and terrors of conscience do not justify. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That is the great message to us all. Trust in Jesus: this it is that brings you into port. May God bring you there! and we will then sing together, and, "praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men."

I hope to meet full many of you in that other port above: meanwhile, what a blessing and privilege it is that there are so many of us in the port of Christ here and now, on this sin-afflicted earth! Let us hang out the flags to-night, everyone of them as we try to bless and magnify the King who is Himself the

Pilot, who made the haven, who Himself bears the storm upon His own bosom, that we may be saved from it; and be hidden from all the rolling billows, and find a secure resting-place in Him.

And now for only a few minutes let us apply the text to believers and see—II. THE SINCERE SAINT AS A SOUL-VOYAGER. We are accustomed to speak of heaven as our home, and I think we should not strain the point to-night if we speak of it as our haven. The Church in the olden times was often pictured in symbols by a ship, and perhaps no better type of the Church could be found. The ship is out at sea. We are on our journey home. The prow is towards the Promised Land. We hope to reach the Isles of the Happy in the land of the hereafter, where the waters are still eternally, and the billows roll no more. In yonder haven of our soul there is a peace transcending even the peace which we have learned upon earth, though *it* passeth all understanding; a peace that no storm can by any possibility even break,—no storm within, no tempest without. There shall be no panics there, no losses of money there, no sickening wife, no dying child, no tortured brain, no anguish in the heart, but there we shall be free from all the storms that tossed us on the sea of life.

That port is one from which the ship shall never make another voyage; she is home for good: not to be broken up, but to be re-filled after a better fashion; no longer mortal, for this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption must put on incorruption. She shall make voyages, but still be in the haven, for the eternal haven is wide as infinity, and we may sail on and on for ever, but it shall always be upon a sea where not a wave of trouble, a breaker of sin or sorrow shall beat on our serene soul. There shall be no more leakage there, no more complaint that the vessel is out of trim. The sin that has pierced us through and through like some of these sea-worms which eat through the staunchest timbers, shall be for ever done with, yea, for ever and ever.

I love to think often and deeply of that haven, dear friends! If not to you, I am sure it is to me a "desired haven." If you ask me why it is desired, I can only answer that when I see the perils of the way, the storms we have had to face and outride, and how little our poor vessel is able to overcome them, we may well long to be for ever where such trials, and indeed all trials, shall never come. I desire to be in that haven, I think, as much as anything, that I may *meet there my many comrades who have gone before.*

It has been my lot to serve under the great Captain now for some few years. There are names that are on the roll of my Master in heaven which I venerate, and men whom I long to see. Rowland Hill once took a journey, we are told, from Cambridge, some ten or twelve miles, to see an old dying saint, and he said to her, "Now, you will be in heaven before me, but do you tell them that poor old Rowland is on the road, and when you get there give my love to the three Johns,—John who leant on the Saviour's bosom, John Calvin, and John Bunyan." Well, we may well wish to see them and the many that shall be there, for we shall have near and intimate communion with them. Let us drink to-night the cup of fellowship and pledge the friends that are ahead. We have been long enough out from shore, I think, almost to forget those behind, and begin to recollect those that are ahead. We are homeward bound, and we long to be at home for the sake of the friends that have gone before. Some dear to us in ties of flesh are there, those who were to us as father, mother, wife or child. Your little ones are beckoning some of you to the celestial shore. How much desired a haven it should be to you! I have many spiritual children on the other side of life's Jordan. Multitudes are now there who learned the Saviour's name from my stammering words, and came to see His transcendent beauties as He was being set forth, lifted up, and exhibited here in the midst of the great congregation. I know they will welcome me, their spiritual father, and I long to be with them.

But best of all it is a desired haven, *because He is there*, who though He was of a human mother born, is yet truly divine, He, whom though,

> "We have not seen His face,
> Unceasing we adore."
>
> "The Man of Sorrows at the Father's side,
> The Man of Love, the Crucified!"

Blow, blow ye winds, let the sails go to ribbons if they must; let the vessel rush and fly before the gale, if only she does but get safely into "the desired haven." We may think even the storm blest that drives her the more quickly there; for it is, indeed, a desired haven.

Are you now desiring it, my dear brethren and sisters? It is not always that we do. We get a trick of loitering along the road or merely cruising on the ocean. What a strange thing that anything here should beguile us!

> "What is there that I should wait,
> My hope's alone in Thee;
> When wilt Thou open glory's gate,
> And take me up to Thee?"

Is there anything here that ought to make us stop a moment if there be that prospect beyond of the Saviour's face, and the vision of His glory? I think we can say, some of us, that at times—

> "Our thirsty spirit faints
> To reach the land we love,
> The bright inheritance of saints,
> Jerusalem above!"

You see I am running over the same heads as we had in the first part,—a haven a desired haven, and *then the Pilot.* Shall I ever get to the desired haven? I would despair of it in going through so tortuous a channel so thickly set with difficulties and perils, but my Pilot knows the course. My Pilot found the way to Heaven himself, and if I trust Him absolutely, giving the vessel entirely to His charge, He will find the way for me, too. Besides this, He has this advantage, that He is Master of the winds and waves, and so I may confidently—

> "Leave to His sovereign will
> To choose and to command."

For He will certainly bring me safely home.

But the passage to the haven needs, too, your thought. My Christian brothers and sisters, you are now being tossed on the sea. You came here to-night wondering what God was doing with you. You old sailors ought not to be astonished or alarmed at a storm. Did you imagine the sea had turned to dry land? Did you expect to reach yonder distant shore without feeling the heave of the waves? Why the youngsters and novices may expect such things if they will! But you who are seasoned mariners, and are getting grey, ought to know better. Has it been smooth all the way until now? Why expect it to be sunny and serene now? Master John Bunyan's ditty has it—

" A Christian man is seldom long at ease,
When one trouble's gone, another doth him seize."

Do you not expect it? If you do not, I would alter my reckoning if I were you. Just turn to the log-book of your memory; how many days together have you generally been in smooth water? Not many, I will warrant you. You ancient mariners who have lived at sea these many years, and have got your sea-legs now, and can stand where others fall, I ask you whether you have not been more accustomed to rolling billows than you have been to the ocean smooth as a mill-pond, and do you expect to see it alter for you now? Between you and Canaan there are a few more storms. Between here and the everlasting rest there are turmoils yet to encounter; but " so He bringeth them to their desired haven." Perhaps if it were always smooth they would never get there; but the treacherous stream of earthly ease would bear them on to the cataract of everlasting destruction. Perhaps without the wind and without the storm, aye, and without the clouds, and the tempest, and the thunder, and the lightning, the bark might never reach the haven. The barks upon earth's seas may reach their haven without the aid of storms, but not so with us, for, again to repeat the words of Cowper, here if not in the other case,—

" The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

And now my last word that I would venture to say is this: " So He bringeth *them* to their desired haven." That does not mean you, young man, for Christ is not on board your heart and life; you do not desire the haven and you will never be brought there directly against your will. Who are they, then, that are brought there? The text and its context tells us. They are those who " cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saveth them out of their distresses." Are you a crying soul? Pleading, entreating His rescue and deliverance? That word " cry " is a very appropriate and suggestive one. That is the true way to pray. As God inspires to cry to Him. A girl who had been converted was asked what was the difference between her prayers now, and before she was converted. She answered, " Sir, first I prayed as my mother taught me, but now I pray as God prompts and teaches me." That is a blessed and vital difference. You have seen and heard your children cry. Well, how is it done? Some of them seem to cry all over. When they want something very badly they not only cry with their throats, but they cry also with their legs and hands and eyes, and indeed they cry with all their nature. And that, too, is the right way to pray. You cannot get it out, perhaps; well then, feel it within, for God can see the inward feeling. " *He heareth the desire of the humble.*" A man once in great trouble, a poor Hottentot, went to his Dutch master, and said he felt a great weight, and he wanted to pray; would he tell him how. The Dutchman did not know, and could not tell him. But when the Hottentot went to the place at Cape Town where he heard the Bible read, he listened to the story of the Pharisee, and as he heard it he said, " Dat man a good man; I can't pray like him. Dat prayer not suit me; I can't pray dat." Presently the preacher went on reading the publican's prayer, " God be merciful to me a sinner." The man said, " Dat man a bad man; God not hear dat prayer." But when he came to " That man went down to his house justified rather than the other," he said, " Den I'll pray dat bad man's prayer; God hear him, God hear me," and not long after he was heard to say, " Rocks, hills, rivers, trees, tell God my soul so happy, for He has heard my prayer, and put my sins away."

Now, you who want to cry to God but do not know how, I recommend to you the publican's prayer, " God be merciful to me a sinner." Breathe that out before the throne, and you shall one day be among the company of whom it is said, " So He bringeth them to their desired haven," and you shall rest in Jesus,

" For ever with the Lord."

" GOD HATH SPOKEN!—REJOICE!"

" God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth."—Psalm cviii. 7.

THERE is an old promise, concerning God's people, which says, " Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." This text is one of the instances in which the Lord has dealt with His saints upon the lines of that promise. Read the preceding verse. David there prays, " Save with Thy right hand, and *answer* me "; and while he is waiting for God to answer him, he remembers that God has already spoken. In effect, he says to himself, " I am waiting for an answer, but God has given it to me." Very often, the response to a believer's petition has been practically received before he presents his request, and he only needs that God should open his eyes for him to see that, before he called, God had answered his supplication. Indeed, brethren and sisters in Christ, in one sense, all your prayers—that is, your prayers that ought to be answered,—are already answered; for whatsoever there may be that you may rightly ask of God, you really have it, since, in giving us Christ, He has already given us all things. An important part of the duty of faith is to believe that you have what you ask in prayer, and then you shall have it. This is blessed philosophy; may we all learn it! Oftentimes, when we are crying to God, and waiting for an answer to our petition, if we did but look around us, and if we had more acute powers of observation,—if our spiritual faculties were keener and quicker, we should perceive that we already have the very thing for which we are asking. Some of you have, perhaps, been saying, " Oh, that we were indeed the Lord's people, who have their prayers answered even before they offer them!" Well, then, turn to the Book, and you will find that the Lord has there told you that you are His if, indeed, you are believing in His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God has given you, by that most sure word of testimony, the clearest possible evidence of your personal interest in Christ already. If you are asking for some further kind assuring word, to soothe your fears to

rest, turn to the Bible, for there is in it the very word you need. So, seek it out, for I may truly say of God's revelation in this blessed Book,—

> "What more can He say than to you He hath said,
> You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"

This leads me to the practical remark that, possibly, the very thing that you have been praying for so long, you may already have obtained; and God may not intend you to pray any longer about it but may say to you, as He did to Moses, "'Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.' Believe that you have the blessing for which you are asking, and go forward in that belief. The time for praying about it has passed; this is the time for grasping the blessing by faith, and using it to My praise and glory." So it seems to me, in our text, that David had prayed, and then suddenly recollected that he had already received the very thing for which he had asked. So he shakes himself from the dust, and cries, confidently and jubilantly, "God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth."

I. Three things are clear in the text; and the first is, that GOD'S WORD IS THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH: "God hath spoken in His holiness." That is the solid basis on which faith builds.

To me, this is a very precious truth, even for the very childhood of Christian life: "*God hath spoken.*" He has not merely put before us His works, which are like hieroglyphs, difficult to read at times; but He has actually broken what else had been the eternal silence, and spoken to us in words that even a child can comprehend. Unbelieving men still say, as they did of old, "'Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' If there is a God at all, there is a great gulf fixed between Him and men; how can we know anything about Him?" Ah, sirs! that great gulf will always be between you and your God if you do not believe in the revelation that He has given you in His inspired Word. Until that terrible day comes, when He shall speak in thunder-tones of wrath, and summon His guilty creatures to appear at His judgment bar, you will not hear His voice, except as it speaks to you in His Word.

But "God hath spoken in His holiness"; and we ought to be thankful that we have not to serve a God who is dumb. He spake in the garden of Eden, when our first parents sinned against Him. To the serpent He said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." It was a message of hope to the world when God spake that great promise concerning His Son. Since then, "at sundry times and in divers manners," God hath spoken unto men by His servants, and "by His Son," of which we have the record in this blessed Book; and, since it is a message of mercy and love to us, we ought at once to rejoice that "God hath spoken." Sinner, you are pleading with God for mercy; and He might well refuse to answer you even a word; but "God *hath* spoken" already, and the answer to your petition is already recorded in His Word. If, when Adam sinned, He had turned away from our rebellious race, and said, "Henceforward, I will hold no communication with you until that day when, with fire and sword, I punish you for your many transgressions"; we should have had no cause for complaining against Him; certainly, we could not have impeached His justice, or found fault with His severity. But "God *hath* spoken"; He hath broken the silence which would have been death to us; and, blessed be His name, He hath divinely spoken to us by Him who is THE WORD OF GOD,—by God's great *logos*,—the only voice by which He could fully speak out His whole soul that men might be able to comprehend Him; and it is upon what God hath spoken unto us, by His Son, that we have to place our faith; so that, had He not spoken, we should not have had any foundation for our faith; but this is our joy, that "God hath spoken."

Many of us are, I trust, at least somewhat acquainted with what God hath spoken; though I wish that we were all more perfectly acquainted with His Word, and that our confidence more fully rested upon what the Lord has therein revealed to us.

Why is it that you are able to confide in God's Word? Surely, it is because you know that, *for God to speak, is for Him to do as He hath said.* By His Word, He made the heavens and the earth; and it is by His Word that the heavens and the earth continue as they are to this day. When He shall "once more" speak, as Paul says in his Epistle to the Hebrews, then shall He unmake what He made, and cast away the worn-out vesture, for, as the Old Hundredth Psalm reminds us,—

> "He can create and He destroy."

God's speaking is very different from man's. Very often, man talks about something that he says he will do, but when he has talked about it, there is an end of the matter so far as he is concerned. Man hath spoken; oh, yes! but you can never be sure that, with the talking tongue will go the working hand. He who is quick to promise is not always so prompt to perform. We have many proverbs which remind us that men set light by one another's promises, and well they may; but we must never set light by the promises of God. "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." So, beloved brother, if there is a promise of God to help you in a time of trouble, or to preserve you in the hour of temptation, or to deliver you out of trial, or to give you grace according to your day, that promise is as good as if it had been already performed, since God's Word shall certainly be followed by the fulfilment of it in due season. I beseech you, then, as you read the promise, to say to yourself, "It is done as God hath said." If any man of means, with whom you do business, gives you his cheque for the amount he owes you, do you not say that he has paid you? Yet he has not handed to you even a penny in cash; no notes or gold and silver coins have passed between you; but you rightly say that he has paid you because his signature on the cheque is as good as money; and is not God's Word as good as man's? Aye, that it is, and far better! Then, so regard it; oh, for faith to do so at this very moment!

Further, *what God hath spoken shall never be reversed.* "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent." What He hath spoken in public, He does not reverse in private. His own declaration is, "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain." Whatever there may be in the sealed scroll that records God's purposes in predestination, there cannot be anything there to contradict what is written on the

open scroll of divine revelation. As to the doctrine of election, which often terrifies seeking souls, it never should do so, since there can be nothing in the secret counsels of God, contrary to the plain promises of God recorded in His Word. He has not said "Yea" in one place, and "Nay" in another; and if He saith "Yea" to-day, He will not say "Nay" to-morrow. He Himself said, long ago, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Once let any message go forth out of His mouth, and it shall stand fast for ever.

Oh, then, what a firm foundation for faith this is! First, "God hath spoken"; and that is as good as if He had already done as He hath said; and, secondly, "God hath spoken," and that which He hath said can never be reversed. If there is a promise in the Bible made to a penitent sinner, and thou art a penitent sinner, that promise must be kept to thee. If there is a blessing promised to a believing soul, and thou art a believing soul, that blessing is sure to thee. If God hath promised to sustain thee when thou dost cast thy burden upon Him, and to bring thee through the furnace, with thy hair unsinged, He will do it, for He never yet has been false to His promise, and He never will be. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of His Word shall ever fail. It stands, as an immutable decree, that Jehovah's will shall be done; and this is Jehovah's will,—that, of all that He hath promised to the sons and daughters of men, not one syllable shall ever fail. Oh, how blessedly faith ought to rest on such a foundation as this!

Our text saith, "God hath spoken *in His holiness.*" Now, it sometimes happens that our greatest difficulty in believing a promise of God lies in His holiness. There is, for instance a promise of pardon to the soul that believeth in Jesus. We think of stern justice, with her majestic yet severe look. In our heart of hearts we reverence her, and we ask, "How can God be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly?" We have, at times, had some idea of the perfect purity of God,—the purity of Him in whose sight the heavens are not clean, and who charges His angels with folly. We have trembled, sometimes, as though we were dissolved into nothingness, when we have thought of His spotless purity, and we have said, "Can this holy God really mean to receive such sinners as we are, whose very clothes as Job says, do abhor us? Can He purpose to bring us to His own right hand in glory that we may be among the courtiers in His heavenly kingdom?" Yes, He does mean to do even that; yet the thought of His purity makes us wonder how it can be done. Now, the joy of David was that, when God spoke concerning that glorious—

"Stem of Jesse's rod,"—

He spoke it "in His holiness," that is, in His wholeness, with His whole perfectly pure nature. He knew all that David then was, and all that David would be; yet He saw it to be consistent with His infinite perfections to make, even with such a man, "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure"; and, beloved brethren, when the Lord entered into covenant with Christ concerning those whom He gave to Him to be His portion for ever, and when, in that covenant, He wrote down blessings exceedingly great and precious, and made promises so vast that we cannot at present form any estimate of their full value, He knew quite well what He was doing, and He did it, knowing all about your doubts and fears concerning your sinfulness and His own holiness. And now, without in the least marring His perfect purity, and inflexible justice, "God hath spoken in His holiness" to poor lost sinners, and said that He will save all of them who trust in Jesus Christ, His Son; and He has also "spoken in His holiness" to His poor imperfect children, and said that He will bless them, and that He will not turn away from them to do them good. This is the covenant that He hath made with His people: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them. . . . And ye shall be My people, and I will be your God." All this, which "God hath spoken in His holiness," He will do without obscuring that wondrous attribute, or marring the glory of His adorable perfections.

II. Now, in the second place, let us notice THE JOY OF FAITH: "God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice."

Are any of you heavy of heart just now? If so, I hope you will catch the spirit of David when he uttered these words. You ought to be glad that "God hath spoken in His holiness," and you must be glad if you feel and know that He has spoken to you. "God hath spoken: I will rejoice."

Observe that this joy, which faith has, is *a joy in the very fact that God hath spoken.* Though nothing may yet have been done for us, God hath spoken, and therefore our heart rejoices. Every divine promise, if it be rightly viewed by faith, will make the heart leap for joy. Suppose you do not need that particular promise just now, rejoice all the same, for you will need it by-and-by. If the promise is not made specially to you, yet it is made to somebody; therefore, rejoice that "God hath spoken" so as to meet the needs of somebody else's case. What if the blessing be too high for you to reach at present? Nevertheless, rejoice that there are mercies stored up for future and more advanced stages of your spiritual growth. And suppose the mercy is one that you long ago enjoyed; still be glad that you did enjoy it in years past, and so rejoice that "God hath spoken." Oh, what hymns of praise there are in this blessed Book, if this be the theme of our song, "God hath spoken!" Then, the very first pages of Genesis ought to make us rejoice, and we will rejoice because we know how He made the worlds. Pass along through every page, and feast your eyes upon every line of every page, and say, all the while, "'God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice.' This shall be the subject of my joy all the day long; and, in the night watches, will I rejoice in His Word."

You perceive, as I have said, that *this joy comes to the believer even before the promise is literally fulfilled to him.* It is the joy of faith. You have not yet had the promise fulfilled to your sight; but, seeing that it is fulfilled to your faith, begin to be glad about it. Praise the Lord for all the good things He has laid up in store for you; take upon your lips the words of that sweet singer who wrote,—

"And a 'new song is in my mouth,
To long-loved music set;
'*Glory to Thee for all the grace*
I have not tasted yet.'"

When you are ill, bless God for the health you will

enjoy when you get well. When you are downhearted, bless God for the joy that you will have when He shall again lift up the light of His countenance upon you. When you go to the grave of a Christian friend, bless God because you will meet that friend again. Though you cannot yet see the joys that await you inside the gates of pearl, begin to bless the Lord for all He has prepared for them that love Him. Borrow from the eternal future; you may, for there is plenty of it. There is an infinity of joy; therefore, antedate it a little while. Send your messengers across the Jordan to bring you some of the Eshcol clusters. You may do so, for they are yours, and you may have some of them, even now, as foretastes of the bliss that is yet to be revealed. "God hath spoken" to His servants of the great things that He will do for them for many years to come, and throughout eternity. He hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He hath said, "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." Therefore, as "God hath spoken," though as yet My soul abideth in the land of darkness, and drought, and barrenness, yet, because He will fulfil His promise, my heart shall rejoice. David says, in the eleventh verse of this Psalm, "O God, who hast cast us off"; yet here, though he is one of the cast-offs, he says, "God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice."

Perhaps I am addressing a minister, whose public labours are apparently unsuccessful. My brother, you have been exceedingly grieved because your people have been like the children of Ephraim, who, "being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." Well now, you must not give way to discouragement, or fall into a dull and sad state of mind, but you must say, "'God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice.' Though I have not, as yet, seen any success attending my efforts, He has said, 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,' and I believe I shall do so, for I have often sowed in tears, and sowed the good seed of the kingdom with many tears and many prayers. Therefore, though I seem, at present, like one of the cast-offs, and little good has come of all that I have done, yet 'God hath spoken in His holiness'; and therein 'I will rejoice.'"

I may be speaking to a brother who is tried in another way. You, dear friend, have not enjoyed the means of grace as you used to do. You blame yourself for the change, and it is right and proper that you should do so. You have not now those happy experiences that you once had; neither do you enjoy such blessed visits from your Lord as you had a year or so ago. You know that the fault lies with you; still, remember that faith is never dependent upon feeling, and our confidence is never to rest upon our inward condition. Otherwise, it rests on the shifting sand; but, if this is the case with you, now is the time for you to exercise faith, and to say, "Though I am, as it were, a cast-off, and the Word of the Lord is not just now solacing my heart, yet 'God hath spoken,' and, sinner as I am, if I be not a saint, I trust to what God has said to believing sinners, and 'I will rejoice,' even though I seem to be only a cast-off."

Once more, notice that David, at the time he wrote this Psalm, had discovered *the vanity of human confidence*. He says, in the twelfth verse, "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man." "My best friend has proved to be a traitor; he that ate bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me. Those, who said that they would never leave me, and who never did leave me while there was anything to be got out of me, are all gone. I said in my haste, 'All men are liars,' but 'God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice.'" It is grand faith that can rejoice in God when friends go as the swallows fly away in the autumn, or drop off as leaves fade when the summer comes to an end. That was the kind of faith that Habakkuk had when he sang, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." This is a good crutch for Mr. Ready-to-halt; nay, better than that, surely this will take Ready-to-halt's crutches away, and enable him to run without weariness in the ways of the Lord. Why, brethren, here are the wings of eagles for you, if you only know how to use them: "God hath spoken." What a mighty power your soul will have in prayer if you go to God and say, "Do as Thou hast said." What a sword this is to flash in the face of the foe: "God hath spoken." "*It is written*" is that which makes old Rome to tremble, and her seven hills to quake for fear. Get you a rejoicing grip of this great truth, and the dwarf shall become a giant, the feeblest among us shall be as David, and the house of David shall be like the angel of the Lord.

III. The latter part of the text shows us THE ACTIVITY OF FAITH: "God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth."

That is, David says, "As God has given me these places to be parts of my kingdom, I will go, and take possession of them." Some people's so-called faith is of this order,—"God has promised a great blessing; let us go,—and sleep." Their philosophy is,—"God's promise will be sure to be fulfilled; therefore let us eat and drink, and not trouble at all about the matter. The Lord will have His own people, and He will carry out His own purposes and decrees. They stand fast for ever, so the best thing for us is to do nothing at all. God says that there shall be a harvest; so there is no need for our sowing, and we can lie abed as late as we like." That is the kind of fatalism that many carry even into their Christianity; they make the eternal purposes and blessed promises of God to become reasons for inaction; but it is not so with any sane child of God. He girds up his loins, and says, "God hath spoken in His holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth."

Whenever you look into the Word of God, and read what "God hath spoken" to you, *see that you appropriate it.* Suppose that He has promised you comfort, do not rest satisfied without that comfort. Suppose He has promised you joy and peace in believing; never rest till you have that joy and peace. Suppose He has promised you complete sanctification, full deliverance from the power of evil, do not be satisfied till you are delivered from it all. Never say, "Ah, that is a constitutional sin; that is the result of my temperament." No, brother, if the Lord hath promised you the victory over your enemies, be not satisfied till you have planted your foot on their necks, and they are in subjection to you. Some Christian people are living, spiritually, on a penny a week, when their income might be ten thousand a day. You might live like kings, yet you are starving like paupers. Your faith might lay hold on God's exceeding great and precious promises, and so fill her mouth with good things; but, instead of doing so, you are

quivering with the palsy of unbelief, and so not grasping what God has put within your reach. There lies Succoth, but you do not mete it out. There lies Shechem, but you do not divide it. Yet they are both of them yours by divine donation. Oh, if our faith did but really grip the promises, and believe in the promise-keeping God, she would never rest till she possessed all the blessings that are really hers! I think that every young Christian should say, when he joins the church, "Now, I do not want to be merely an average Christian. I am nothing, and less than nothing, in myself; but, if there is any blessing to be had from God, I will have it. If I can have a closer walk with God than others have, I will have it. If there is more of Christ's likeness to be had than others possess, I will have it. By God's grace, 'I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth.' If God has given me permission to take anything, why should I not have it?" If you have leave given you to go to Windsor Castle, or Buckingham Palace, as often as you like, and to take whatever you please that is there, and to be treated as a prince, I warrant that you would not need anyone to remind you that you had not been to either place for weeks. If you had such privileges accorded to you, you would be sure to avail yourselves of them; yet here are the gates of the palace of prayer always open to you, and the doors of communion never shut against you, and Jesus, the great King of kings, not only inviting you to come unto Him, but even urging you to abide in Him, and never to depart from Him,—yet, alas! you do not have fellowship with Christ by the month together. Be no longer like the starveling professors that, now and then, taste a little of the heavenly manna; but, generally, live on the leeks, and the garlic, and the onions of Egypt.

So, if we have faith in God, we ought to take possession of all that is ours, and, further, *we ought to know what we really do possess.* It is delightful to see David here mentioning his various possessions: "I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver; Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph. Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom?" Perhaps you say, "That is very uninteresting; I do not understand it." No, but David did. He had seen Shechem, and he knew that it was a place worth possessing; and Gilead, and Manasseh, and all the other places interested him, if they do not interest you. And when a child of God looks over his spiritual treasures, and mentions them one by one, he takes an interest even in the very mention of them. The Bible is a dull book to a person who has no part or lot in it. There is no drier reading, in all the world, than the reading of a will in which one has no interest; but there is nothing that would interest you more than listening to the will of your old uncle, in which he had left you a large fortune. You would lean forward, and you would put your hand to your ear lest you should lose any of it, and you would think that you had never heard a more eloquent discourse than that; and when a man gets to know what "God hath spoken," what He hath written for Him in this blessed Book, which contains His will, every word is music to him, and he is ready to pick out some of the choicest words, and say, "Regeneration is mine; justification is mine; adoption is mine; sanctification is mine; union to Christ is mine; resurrection is mine; eternal life is mine; yea, all things are mine"; and he would dwell upon each one with a holy unction, at least to his own soul.

Then, if you know what God has given you, *mind that you use it all.* What does David say? "Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe." As an Oriental, who is weary, throws his sandals to one servant, and then puts his foot out, that another servant may lave it with flowing water, so David says, "I will use Moab and Edom as my servitors." Now, Christian man, if you have true faith, and mean to do real business with God, and for Him, say to yourself, "I have this, and that, and the other blessing, and I am going to use them all for His glory. I have been adopted by God; I am His child; so I will plead with Him, and will get all I can from my Father to use in His service. I am justified, I have peace with God; so I will go forth, and, in the power of that peace, I will let others see what bliss Christians know. Then I also have sanctification given me in Christ; so I will use that, and seek to be a true saint, that my life may be a blameless, holy, gracious, Christlike life. By God's grace, I will not have even one unused privilege."

Once more. David, being in the spirit of full faith in God, now *manifests the spirit of enterprise,* for he says, "God has given me Edom; then I will have it. There is that strong city of Petra, the rock city. It is like an eagle's nest upon a crag; who is the bold man that can capture it, and take the spoil? The fierce sons of Edom, in the defile, will be sure to slay the first men who dare to march into that rocky chasm." "Who will bring me into the strong city?" says he; "who will lead me into Edom?" The spirit of enterprise and of conquest is in his soul; and then he adds, "Wilt not Thou, O God, go forth with our hosts?" "Since Thou hast spoken as Thou hast done, Thou wilt surely lead us to victory." In like manner, every man, who has faith in God's Word, ought to be a man of enterprise. I wonder, brothers and sisters, how many of you have any enterprise for God in view just now,—storming some rocky sin, some Petra-like evil in your soul, that seems almost impregnable. You know that your Saviour's name is "Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Then, in the strength of that name, go up, and smite your bosom sin, and your constitutional sin; and never rest till you have driven your dagger through every evil that lurks within your soul.

Then think what room for enterprise you have among your fellow-men. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof"; yet vast multitudes of mankind still sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death. Have any of you enterprise enough to go up against the strong cities that are still in rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ? Can any of you go, and look after those who walk the streets, and seek to bring them to Christ? That would be conquering Edom itself. Have any of you enterprise enough to go down into the slums and dens of London, to seek out the poorest and the vilest of the people? Have you confidence enough to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ can give you that Petra-like city, that dark spot where thieves congregate, where blasphemy is the current language, and where profanity seems even to pollute the very air? Have you "pluck" enough to undertake such an enterprise as that? Is there manliness enough in any one of you to attempt it? Then, having asked the question, "Who will

lead me into Edom?" do not forget to pray, "Wilt not Thou, O God? Thou hast spoken; wilt Thou not also act, through Thy people, so that all flesh may see the salvation of God?" Let each child of God say, "O my Father, I believe that, weak and feeble as I am, my weakness and feebleness need be no hindrance to me if I go to Thy service in Thy strength! 'Thou hast spoken in Thy holiness; I will rejoice'; and, in Thy name, I will conquer the foe, and gather the spoil for Thee." "Through God," says David, in the thirteenth verse, "we shall do valiantly: for He it is that shall tread down our enemies." Therefore, if ye believe in God, haste to the spoil of His enemies; quit you like men; be strong! If you really are linked with omnipotence, prove it. Do not talk about it, but let your deeds show that the Lord of Hosts is with you, and that the God of Jacob is your refuge. If, indeed, the Lord's arm be with you, smite as the Lord would smite. If, indeed, He speaks through you, speak as He would speak. Be strong, and very courageous, and press forward; in the name of God, set up your banners; and who knoweth whether even this feeble message of mine, in rousing you to action upon the basis of confidence in the Word of God, may not cast down some stronghold of the enemy, and make the walls of some mighty Jericho to fall flat to the ground? The Lord grant it, for His name's sake! Amen.

A WILLING PEOPLE AND AN IMMUTABLE LEADER

"Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: Thou hast the dew of Thy youth."—Psalm cx. 3.

NEVER verse in the Scripture has puzzled me more than this to find out its meaning and its connection. In reading it over hastily, at first sight, it may appear very easy; but if you search into it very carefully you will find you can only with difficulty string the words together, or give them any intelligible meaning. I have taken down all the commentators I have in my possession; I find they all give a meaning to the words, but not a soul of them—not even Dr. Gill—gives a connected meaning to the whole sentence. After looking at the old translations, and employing every means in my power to discover the meaning, I found myself as far off as when I began. Matthew Henry, one of the wisest commentators, certainly the best for family reading, makes the passage read as if it were like this: "Thy people shall come willingly in the day of Thy power in the beauties of holiness. In the womb of the morning Thou hast the dew of Thy youth." That is how he explains it, though he does not say that is the proper translation. He explains the last sentence, "Thou hast the dew of thy youth," as meaning that in early life, from the womb of the morning, young people would give themselves to Jesus Christ. But it is no such thing. There is a colon at the word "morning," dividing the sentence. Besides, it does not say, the "people shall be willing; thou hast the dew of *their* youth," as it would read if it were as the expositors understand it; but it says to Christ "Thou hast the dew of *Thy* youth." It was not until we had thoroughly looked at the connection of the verse, and tried to catch the scope of the Psalm, that we thought we had hit upon its meaning; and even now we shall leave it with your judgment to decide whether or not we have gained the mind of the Spirit, as we hope we have.

The Psalm is a kind of coronation psalm. Christ is bidden to take His throne; "Sit Thou at My right hand." The sceptre is put into His hand. "The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion." And then the question is asked, "Where are His people?" For a king would be no king without subjects. The highest title of kingship is but an empty one that hath no subjects to make up its fulness. Where, then, shall Christ find that which shall be the fulness of Him that filleth all in all? The great anxiety we have is not whether Christ is King or not—we know He is; He is the Lord of creation and of providence; our anxiety is about His subjects. Oft-times do we ask, "O Lord, where shall we find Thy subjects?" When we have preached to hard hearts, and prophesied to dry bones, our unbelief at times says, "Where shall we find children for Christ? Where shall we find people who will constitute the subjects of His empire?" Our fears are all put to rest by this passage: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning"; and by the second promise, "Thou hast the dew of Thy youth." These thoughts are placed here to allay the anxieties of God's believing people, and to let them see how Christ shall indeed be King, and never lack a multitude of subjects.

First, here is *a promise concerning His people*; and secondly, here is *a promise concerning Christ Himself*, that He shall always be as strong, as fresh, as new, and as mighty a Christ as ever.

I. First, we shall look at THE PROMISE MADE TO CHRIST'S PEOPLE. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning." Here is a promise of *time*; "in the day of Thy power." Here is a promise of *people*; "Thy people." Here is a promise of *disposition*; "Thy people shall be willing." Here is a promise of *character*: "Thy people shall be willing in the beauties of holiness." And here is a *majestic figure* to show the manner in which they shall be brought forth. By a very bold metaphor, they are said to come out as mysteriously as the dew drops from the womb of the morning. We know not how, but they are produced by God. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness." In the womb of the morning they shall come.

1. First, here is a promise concerning *time*. Christ is not to gather in His people every day, but on one special day, the day of *His* power. It is not the day when man feels himself to be the most mighty, that souls are gathered; for alas! God's servants sometimes preach until their self-complacency tells them they have been exceedingly eloquent and mighty, and that, therefore, men must

be saved; but there is no promise that in the day of *our* power we shall ever see men gathered to Christ. There are times too when the people seem to have a great power of seeking after God, and when they have the power of hearing, but there is no promise that just when an excitement reigns, and when there appears to be power in the creature, that such a day shall be the day of God's ingathering. It is "the day of *Thy* power"—not of the minister's power, nor of the hearers'.

The day of God's power—when is it? We take it, it is *the day when God pours out His own power upon the minister*, so that God's children are gathered in by his preaching.

There are times, beloved, when the ordained servant of the living God will have nothing to do in preaching, but just to open his mouth and allow the words to flow. He will scarcely need stay to think, but the thoughts will be injected into his mind, and while he preaches he will feel there is a power accompanying his word. His hearers too will discern it. Some of them will feel as if they were sitting under a sledge hammer, beating on their hearts. Others will feel as if truth were stealing into their hearts and slaying all their unbelief, in such a way that they could not resist the blessed power. It will often happen that God's children will find an influence and a might irresistible going with the Word. They have heard that minister before, they were delighted with him, they trusted that they had been edified and profited, but on that day there was a special striking home, every word fell on good soil, every blow hit the mark, there was no arrow shot which did not go into the centre of the soul—there was not a syllable uttered which was not like the word of Jehovah Himself, speaking either from Sinai, or Calvary. Have you never known such times? Have you not felt them when you have been standing or sitting in the house of God? Ah! those are times when God, by the manifestation of Himself, is pleased to enlighten His children, to gather in His people, and to make poor sinners willing. There is also a day of power *in every sinner's heart*; for, alas! the general day of power which occurs to our congregation omits many—many over whom we have to weep—while hundreds shed tears of penitence, other hundreds sit stolid and unmoved. While some hearts leap for very joy, others are bound in the fetters of ignorance, and are sleeping the sleep of death. While God is pouring out His Spirit till some hearts are full to the very brim, ready to burst, there are some dry, without a drop of the heavenly moisture. But the day of God's power is a day of personal power in our souls, like that day of Zaccheus when the Lord said, "Make haste, and come down." It is a day not of argument of man, but a day of omnipotent power—God working in the heart. It is not a day of intellectual enlightenment, a day of instruction merely, but a day when God shall enter into the heart, and with a mighty hand shall wrench the will and turn it as He would—shall make the judgment judge righteously, the imagination think as it ought, and shall guide the whole soul to Himself. Did you never think what power that was which God exerts in every individual heart? There is no power like it. Should a man command the mighty waterfalls to congeal and stand in heaps? If they should obey him, he would not have worked a miracle half so mighty as that which God works in the heart when He bids the flood of sin to cease flowing. Could I command Etna with its flames and smoke to cease its ebullitions, and should it at once be still, I had not worked a deed so mighty as when God speaks to a boiling spirit sending forth fire and smoke, and bids it stay. The everlasting God exhibits more power in turning a sinner from the error of his ways, than in the creation of a world or the sustentation of a universe. In the day of God's power, God's people shall be willing. Beloved, we also look for *a day of power in the coming period of the reign of Jesus Christ.* I take it there is a time coming when the feeblest among us shall be as David, and when David shall be as the angel of the Lord. The time is approaching when every poor ignorant minister shall preach with power, and when every child of God shall be filled with the knowledge of God. We hope for a happy day when Christ shall come and shall cause the knowledge of the Lord to be spread so rapidly that it shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. We often cheer ourselves with this subject—well, if we do labour in vain and spend our strength for nought now, it will not be so always; the day will come when the fresh wind of the Spirit will fill the sails of the Church, and she shall go swiftly along; when the feeble hand of the minister shall be as mighty as the hand of the boldest Christian warrior who ever wielded the sword of the Spirit, when every word of Christ shall be as ointment poured forth, spreading perfume over a sinful world; when we shall never preach a sermon without effect; when, as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, it not only shall not return void, but shall water the earth, so that having already brought forth and budded, it shall bring forth fruit to the glory of God—that fruit, the destruction of idols, and the casting down of all false religions. Happy day, that day of power! Christians! why do you not pray for it? Why do ye not ask that God would give His people might, and that Christ may speedily come and find His people willing?

There is, however, another translation to these words. Calvin translates them, "at the time of the assembling of their army," "*au jour des montres*," "in the day of the review." You sometimes say, "Oh! if a great struggle were to occur, where would be found the men to fight for Christ?" We have heard timid believers say, "Oh, I am afraid if persecution should set in, we should find very few valiant for truth—few ministers would come forward boldly to uphold the gospel of Christ." No such thing, believer! Christ's people will be willing in the day of God's armies. God never had a battle to fight yet when He could say, "I have no soldiers in reserve." God never had an arduous campaign in which His armies were insufficient. Once the prophet said (Zechariah i. 18–21), "Then I lifted up mine eyes and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the Lord showed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And He spoke saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it." God had enough men to cut off the horns, and to build His house, there were four; and He had the right sort of men ready to do His work; for "car-

penters" were ready. Whenever a struggle is approaching God will find His men. Whenever a battle is to commence, God will find the men valiant for truth. Never be afraid that God will not take care of His Church. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of God's battle." Are you undertaking some noble enterprise? Are you saying, "Here is a grand endeavour to evangelize the world, where shall we find people?" The answer is, "God's people shall be willing in the day of His armies." Some Sunday-school teachers are complaining, that in their church they cannot find enough to canvass the district. Why not? Because they have not enough of God's people, for God's people are willing in the day of His armies. We have complained that we cannot get ministers to evangelize. Why not? Because they are not thoroughly imbued with the Master's Spirit, for His people would be willing in the day of God's armies when they are wanted. They always have willing hearts to be ready for the battle. They do not say, "I must consult flesh and blood." No, there is the standard; up go God's soldiers! There is the battle; out go their swords! They are ready for the fight at once. They are always ready in the day of God's armies. Beloved, fear no struggle; dread no enterprise; neither think that the silver and the gold will be withholden from us—"The silver and the gold are Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." Think not, however grand your ideas, that you shall fail therein. God's people will come forward willingly when He requires their aid. We believe that truth firmly; but we must wait for God's day; we must pray for God's day; we must hope for it; we must labour for it, and when it comes, God shall find His people willing, as they ought to be.

2. Next, we have here the promise of *a people*, "*Thy people* shall be willing in the day of Thy power" —nobody else. Here is a promise that Christ shall always have a people. In the darkest ages Christ has always had a Church; and if darker times shall come, He will have His Church still. O! Elijah, thy unbelief is foolish. Thou sayest, "I, only I, am left alone, and they seek my life." Nay, Elijah, in those caves of the earth God has His prophets, hidden by seventies. Thou too, poor unbelieving Christian, at times thou sayest, "I, even I, am left." Oh! if thou hadst eyes to see, if thou couldst travel a little, thy heart would be glad to find that God does not lack a people. It cheers my heart to find that God has a family everywhere. We do not go anywhere, but we find really earnest hearts—men full of prayer. I bless God that I can say, concerning the church wherever I have been, though they are not many, there are a few who sigh and groan over the sorrows of Israel. There are chosen bands in every church, thoroughly earnest men who are looking out for, and are ready to receive their Master, who cry to God that He would send them times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Do not be too sad; God has a people, and they are willing now; and when the day of God's power shall come, there is no fear about the people. Religion may be at a low ebb, but it never was at such a low ebb that God's ship was stranded. It may be ever so low, but the devil shall never be able to cross the river of Christ's Church dry shod. He shall always find abundance of water running in the channel thereof. God grant us grace to look out for His people, believing that there are some everywhere, for the promise is, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power."

3. We next come to *disposition*. God's people are a willing people. Adam Clarke says,—"This verse has been woefully perverted. It has been supposed to point out the irresistible operation of the grace of God on the souls of the elect, thereby making them willing to receive Christ as their Saviour." A doctrine which he utterly discards. Well, my dear Adam Clarke, we are extremely obliged to you for your remark, but at the same time we think that the text has not been "woefully perverted." We believe that the text has been very properly used to show that God makes men willing. For if we read our Bibles rightly, we understand that men, by nature, are not willing, for there is a text you are extremely fond of which we do not think belongs to you, and which says, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." And there is another text we should like to put you and your brethren in mind of, "No man can come unto Me except the Father which has sent Me, draw him." If you would remember *that*, we think, even though the text does not teach it, you might at least have some respect for the doctrine; but it says, God's people *shall* be willing in the day of God's power; and if we read it as plain English people, we look upon it as a promise that God will produce a people who shall be willing enough in the day of His power, and from the fact that no man is willing by nature, we infer from this text that there must be a work of His grace making men willing in the day of God's power. We do not know whether you think that fair logic. We think it is. We have been accused of having no logic, and we are not particularly sorry about that, for we would rather have what men call dogmatism than logic. It is Christ's to prove; it is ours to preach. We leave argument to Christ: for us, we have only to affirm what we see in God's Word. God's people are to be a willing people. We can tell who are the children by the fact that they are willing. I preach to many of you times without number. I tell you of hell; I bid you flee from it; I tell you of Christ; I bid you look to Him, but you are unwilling to do so. What do I conclude from that? Either that the day of God's power has not yet come, or that you are not God's people. When I preach with power, and the word is dispensed with unction, if I see you unmoved and unsettled, unwilling to cast yourselves on Jesus Christ, what say I? Why, I fear those are not God's people, for God's people are willing in the day of His power, willing to submit to sovereign grace, to give themselves up into the hands of the Mediator, to hang simply on His cross for salvation. I ask again what has made them willing? Must it not have been something in grace which has turned their will? If the will of man be purely free to do right or wrong, I conjure you, my friends, to answer this: if it be so, why do you not turn to God this very moment without divine assistance? It is because you are not willing, and it needed a promise that God's people should be willing in the day of His power.

I think this word applies not only to their being willing to be saved, but willing to work after they are saved. Did you ever know a minister who preached on the Sunday, but who at the prayer-meeting on the Monday night seemed as if he would much rather be at home? And if there was a lecture on Thursday, did not he, poor man, come up as if he were about to perform some enormously hard duty? What do you think of him? Why, you

think he is not one of the people of God, else he would be willing. Some persons come to the house of God, but they come just as the negro would to his whipping place, they do not like it, and they are glad to get away again. But what do we say of God's people,—

"Up to her courts with joys unknown,
The sacred tribes repair."

They are a willing people. There is a collection. The Church of God requires some assistance. One man doles out as small a trifle as ever he can to keep up his respectability. You do not think he exhibits the spirit of a Christian because he is not willing; but Christ's people are willing; all that they do, they do willingly, for they are constrained by no compulsion, but by grace alone. I am sure we all can do a thing far better when we are willing than when we are forced. God loves His people's services, because they do them voluntarily. Voluntaryism is the essence of the gospel. Willing people are those whom God delights to have as His servants. He would not have slaves to grace His throne, but free men, who, with gladness and joy, should be willing in the day of His power.

4. We shall scarcely have time for a discussion of the whole text, but we must briefly notice the *character* of these people as well as their dispositions. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power." "They shall be willing in the beauties of holiness." This is how they shall be clothed—not merely in holiness, but in the beauties of holiness, for holiness hath its beauties, its gems, its pearls; and what are these? They shall be clothed in the beauties of the holiness of imputed righteousness and of imparted grace. God's people are, in themselves a deformed people, hence their comeliness must be given them. The standard of beauty is saintship. If an angel should descend from heaven, and carry up to God the most beautiful creature he could find, he would not cull earth's roses, he would not gather her lilies, but he would take up to heaven the fair character of a child of God. Where he found a self-denying hero, where he discovered a disinterested Christian—an ardent disciple, the angel would take him up, exclaiming, "Great God, here is beauty; take it, this is *Thy* beauty." We walk along and admire statues and such-like things, and we say, "Here is beauty," but the Christian has on him the true beauty—the beauties of holiness. O! ye young, ye gay, ye proud, ye ask for beauty, but do you know that all the beauties of this earth can do you no good, for you must die and wear a shroud?

"Time will rob you of your bloom,
Death will drag you to the tomb."

But if you have the beauties of holiness, they shall increase and become fairer and fairer, and amongst the fair angels, you, as fair as they, shall stand decked in your Saviour's righteousness. "Thy people shall be willing" to come forward, and they shall be the right sort of people; they will be a holy people, arrayed in all "the beauties of holiness."

5. Now there is a bold metaphor here which we must explain in the last place. The text says, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power in the beauties of holiness." Now you understand that, but what do the next words mean, "From the womb of the morning?" "Why, from the earliest periods of their lives," say the commentators, "God's people shall be willing." No, it does not mean that, there is a bold and brilliant figure here. It is asked, where are they to come from? how are God's people to be brought? what means are to be employed? how is it to be done? The simple answer is this. Did you never see the dew-drops glistening on the earth? and did you never ask, "Whence came these? how came they here so infinite in number, so lavishly scattered everywhere, so pure and brilliant." Nature whispered the answer, "They came from the womb of the morning." So God's people will come forth as noiselessly, as mysteriously, as divinely, as if they came "from the womb of the morning," like the dew-drops. Philosophy has laboured to discover the origin of dew, and perhaps has guessed it, but to the Eastern, one of the greatest riddles was, out of whose womb came the dew? Who is the mother of those pearly drops? Now, so will God's people come *mysteriously*. It will be said by the bystander, "There was nothing in that man's preaching; I thought I should hear an orator; this man has been made the means of salvation to thousands, and I thought I should hear an eloquent man, but I have heard a great many preachers far more intelligent and intellectual than he; how were these souls converted?" "Why, they have come from the womb of the morning," mysteriously. Again, the dew drops—who made them? Do kings and princes rise up and hold their sceptres, and bid the clouds shed tears, or affright them to weeping by the beating of the drum? Do armies march to the battle to force the sky to give up its treasure, and scatter its diamonds lavishly? No; God speaks; He whispers in the ears of nature, and it weeps for joy at the glad news that the morning is coming. God does it; there is no apparent agency employed, no thunder, no lightning; God has done it. That is how God's people shall be saved; they come forth from the "womb of the morning" *divinely* called, divinely brought, divinely blessed, divinely numbered, divinely scattered over the entire surface of the globe, divinely refreshing to the world, they proceed from the "womb of the morning." You may have noticed in the morning what a *multitude* of dew-drops there are, and you may have inquired, "Whence comes so great a multitude?" We answer, the womb of nature is capable of ten thousand births at once. So, "from the womb of the morning" God's children shall come. No struggle, no pang, no shriek, no agony is heard, all is secret; but they shall come fresh "from the womb of the morning." The figure is so beautiful that words cannot explain it. You have only to stand early one morning when the sun is beginning to shoot his rays of light up to the sky, and look at the fields all glistening with dew, and say, "Whence came all these?" The answer is, they came "from the womb of the morning." So when you find that multitudes are saved, and you see them coming so mysteriously, so gently, so divinely, and yet so numerously, you can only compare them to the dew of the morning. You say, "Whence came these?" And the answer is, they have come "from the womb of the morning."

II. Now the second part of the text is the sweetest, and we must have a little time upon that. There was a promise made to Christ concerning His people, and that sets our fears at rest concerning the Church. Now here is ANOTHER PROMISE MADE TO CHRIST: "Thou hast the dew of Thy youth." Ah! believer, this is the great source of gospel success, that Christ has the dew of His youth. Jesus Christ, *personally*, has the dew of His youth. Certain leaders

in their young days have led their troops to battle, and by the loudness of their voice, and the strength of their bodies, they have inspired their men with courage; but the old warrior hath his hair sown with grey; he begins to be decrepit, and no longer can lead men to battle. It is not so with Jesus Christ. He has still the dew of His youth. The same Christ who led His troops to battle in His early youth leads them now. The arm which smote the sinner with His word smites now; it is as unpalsied as it was before. The eye which looked upon His friends with gladness, and upon His foemen with a glance most stern and high—that same eye is regarding us now, undimmed, like that of Moses. He has the dew of His youth. Oh! it does delight us to think that Christ was "God over all, blessed for ever," in His youth, filled with Almighty power, and He is just the same now. He is not an old Christ—a worn-out Christ, but our leader still. He is as young as ever. The same dew, the same freshness, is about Him. You hear it said of a minister, "In his younger days there was a deal of freshness about him, but he is getting old and begins to repeat himself." It is never so with Christ; He always has the dew of His youth. He who "spake as never man spake," once, when He shall come to speak again, will speak just as He did before. He has the dew of His youth personally.

So also *doctrinally*, Christ hath the dew of His youth. Usually, when a religion starts it is very rampant, but it afterwards decays. Look at the religion of Mahommed. For one hundred years or more it threatened to subvert kingdoms, and overturn the whole world, but where are the blades that flashed then? Where are now the willing hands that smote down the foes of Mahommed? Why, his religion has become an old worn-out thing; no one cares about it; and the Turk, sitting on his divan, with his legs crossed, smoking his pipe, is the best image of the Mahommedan religion—old, infirm, effete. But the Christian religion,—ah! it is as fresh as when it started from its cradle at Jerusalem; it is as hale, and hearty, and mighty, as when Paul preached it at Athens, or Peter at Jerusalem. It is not an old religion. Not one particle of it hath waxed old, though hundreds of years have passed away. How many religions have died since Christ's began! How many have risen up, like mushrooms in a night! But is not Christ's as new as it ever was? I ask you, ye old grey heads, you have known your Master in your youth, and you thought His religion sweet and precious; do you find it useless now? Do you find now that Christ has not the dew of youth upon Him? No; you can say, "Sweet Jesus, the day I first touched Thine hand, the day of mine espousals, I thought Thee altogether lovely; and Thou art not like an earthly friend: Thou hast not waxed old; Thou art as young as ever. Thy brow hath no furrows on it; Thine eyes are not dim. Thine hair is still black as the raven, not white with age; Thou art still unmoved, unaltered, notwithstanding all the years that I have known Thee." Well, beloved, do you see what encouragement this is to us in the propagation of our Master's kingdom, that we are not preaching an old thing that is out of date, but a religion which has the dew of its youth upon it. The same religion which could save three thousand at Pentecost, can save three thousand now. I preach old doctrine, but it is as new as when it first came from heaven's mint. The image and the superscription is as clear, and the metal is as bright and undimmed as ever. I have an old sword, but it is not a rusty one; though it hath hacked and cuf many a Rahab, yet it has not a single mark ot weakness upon itself—it is as new as when it was first forged upon the anvil of wisdom. The gospel has the same spirit attending it now, that it had when it was a young gospel. As Peter stood up to preach then, so may Peters now, and God shall give them the same unction. As Paul preached then, so shall Pauls now. As Timothy upheld the Lord's word, so may Timothys now, and the same Holy Spirit shall attend it. I am afraid Christ's people do not believe this sentence—that Christ has the dew of His youth. They have a notion that the times of great revivals are gone by. And the fathers, they ask, where are they? We are apt to cry, "The horses of Israel, and the chariots thereof." No one will ever wear Elijah's mantle again; we shall never see great and wondrous deeds again. Oh foolish unbelief! Christ has still the dew of His youth. He has as much of the Holy Spirit now as He had at first, for He has it without measure. And though He has dispensed it unto thousands, He will dispense it still. But the question is asked, "How is it that people in these times begin to get tired of the gospel, if it has the dew of its youth?" Why, beloved, it is because the gospel does not come to them in the form of dew at all. Do we not frequently hear a gospel all dry and marrowless, like a lot of bones out of which the marrow has been boiled? Very nice these bones are for your philosophical divines, who like to study antiquities, and discover to what unclean animal this or that bone belongs, but of no service at all to God's children, for there is no food on the bones. We want a gospel covered with unction, full of savour, and when God's people have that, they are never tired of it, they find a dew and a freshness about it which are lasting.

Now, if Christ has the dew of His youth about Him, how earnestly ought those of us who are His ministers to proclaim His word. There is nothing like strong faith to make a man preach mightily. If I think I preach a tottering old gospel, I cannot proclaim it with zeal; but if I think I am preaching a strong stalwart gospel, whose frame has not been shaken, and whose might is just as great as ever, how strongly ought I to preach it? Ah! blessed be God, there are a few hearts as hot as ever, a few souls as firm in their Master's cause as ever were the hearts of the Apostles. There are yet a few men and true, who rally round the cross. Like David's men in the cave Adullam, there are some mighties who rally round the standard. He is not left without His witnesses, He has the dew of His youth yet, and the day may come when those now hidden in darkness, shall, as dew before the sunshine, come out, glistening on every bush, adorning every tree, enlightening every village, cheering every pasture, making the little hills sing for joy. Go, Christian, and put this into the form of prayer. Pray to Christ that His people may be willing in the day of His power, and that He would always retain the dew of His youth.

> "Ride forth, sweet Prince, triumphantly,
> And bid the world obey."

Go on, and prove Thyself to be the same as ever, the blessed God, "God over all, blessed for evermore." Up, Christian up! fight for your young Monarch! Up with ye, warriors! Let your swords flash from their scabbards! Fight for your King!

Up! up! for the old banner is a new banner too. Christ is still fresh and still young. Let the enthusiasm of your youth gird you! Once again, start up, ye aged Christians, and let your young days come again, for if Christ has the dew of His youth about Him, it behoves you to serve Him with youthful vigour. Up! starting now from your sleep, give to Him a new youth, and strive to be as earnest and as zealous for His cause as if it were the first day you ever knew Him. Oh! may God make many sinners willing! May He bring many to His feet, for He has promised that they shall be willing in the day of His power.

THE DEW OF CHRIST'S YOUTH

"Thou hast the dew of Thy youth."—Psalm cx. 3.

WHEN you have walked in the garden, early in the morning, you must have remarked the singular freshness and beauty which a summer's morning always seems to give to the earth; the dewdrops, like tears standing in the eyes of the flowers, as if they wept for joy to see the sun again after the long night of darkness, sparkle in the sun; the greenness of vegetation has about it a more than emerald hue, and every "thing of beauty" looks more beautiful in the morning than at any other season. You have gone out again, perhaps, at noon, and you have noticed how dry and dusty everything appears; for the sun has risen, and by his burning heat he has exhaled the dew, and the freshness of the morning has departed in the drought of noon. Now, this is just a picture of all things here below; aye, and a picture of oursèlves also. When we first behold many things, they have the dew upon them, and they sparkle; but in a little while, all their brightness is gone, and their brilliance scattered. Some of you have entered into pleasure, and you have found it a delusion; you have intermeddled with all kinds of knowledge, and you have found that, in the making and reading of books, there was much pleasure; but, ere long, you have discovered that, in reading many books, and in making them, there was no end, and much study was a weariness to the flesh.

Everything terrestrial has its dew in the morning, but its burning heat at noon; and we too, beloved,—I mean those of us who have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit,—is not this too much the case even with us? When we were first converted, what a sparkling dew there was upon our leaf! We could not sing God's praises loudly enough; we could not sufficiently leap for joy before the ark of the Lord. All the exultations of those who came before seemed utterly insufficient for us. There was, to us, such unction and savour in the Word, that we could feast upon it every day,—yea, and all night long, and yet never be weary. We ran in the way of God's commandments without weariness, and we mounted aloft as on the wings of eagles, and never thought that we could ascend too high. But, alas! beloved, is it not the case with many of us, that much of that early freshness of the morning of our youth is scattered, and some, at least, of our excellence hath proved to be like the early cloud and the morning dew! Though in some things we trust that we have grown, yet we are compelled to confess that, in some other things, we have diminished; while in the depths of self-knowledge we feel that we have made progress, yet in the heights of joy in Christ, in the sublimities of a full devotion to Him, we sometimes fear that we have gone backward, and that we have not the bliss of our youth, the dew of the morning.

Our text, speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, says He has the dew of His youth. We are certain that it is Jesus Christ who is spoken of in this Psalm, for, in arguing with the Pharisees, He quoted the first verse, and applied it to Himself: "The Lord said unto My Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." So that no doubt this third verse also alludes to Him: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning; Thou hast the dew of Thy youth." Having, therefore, set ourselves and all terrestrial matters in contrast with Him, it only remains for me now to enter, as fully as God may help me, into the sweet doctrine of this text,—that Jesus Christ ever has had, and ever will have, the early dew, freshness, and brilliance of His youth. First, permit me *to state the fact*; secondly, *to show the reasons for it*; and, thirdly, *to deduce the lessons from it.*

I. First of all, let me STATE THE FACT, THAT CHRIST HAS THE DEW OF HIS YOUTH.

Let me first speak of *Christ personally*; has He not all the freshness, all the vigour, all the strength of ancient times? His goings forth were of old, even from eternity; and behold He still goeth forth, every day, in the preaching of His Word, and in the ministrations of His Spirit. In the chariots of salvation still rideth He forth, and among the golden candlesticks He walketh still. Have we ever imagined that He has lost the strength of His youth? Do His steps falter? Has His arm begun to feel the palsying influence of old age? Is there any sign of decrepitude or of wasting away upon His majestic brow? When John saw Him, in Patmos, "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow," for He is the Eternal of Ages; yet, as saith the spouse in the Canticles, "His locks are bushy, and black as a raven," for He has the strength of a youth, while He has the ages of eternity upon Him. Well might He now rise up before us, and ask concerning Himself personally, "Is Mine ear heavy that I cannot hear? Is Mine arm shortened that I cannot save? Am I not to-day what I was yesterday? Was I the Creator of the world? Did I speak it out of nothingness; and am I not still its Sustainer? Was I the Redeemer of the Church? Did I purchase her with Mine own blood; and do I not still sustain with power those whom I redeemed with blood? Did I not on earth, with cries and groans, offer up My prayer before My Father; and do I not now plead, not with less vigour but with greater strength, when with authority I advocate My people's cause before His throne?"

Nor is this freshness confined to Christ in His person; it is the same if you *think of Him as revealed in His doctrine.* We have Christ among us now, not incarnate in flesh, but incarnate in doctrine. The doctrines of grace are in a certain sense the body of

Christ. We speak sometimes of a Body of Divinity; but if any man would know what the true Body of Divinity is, let him learn that it is neither Calvin's *Institutes*, nor Dwight's *Theology*, nor Gill's *Body of Divinity*,—it is Christ who is *the* Body of Divinity. His was the only body Divinity ever did take when it became incarnate; but taking Divinity, in another sense, to mean Divine doctrine, what Christ said, and what He did,—that is, the gospel—is the only body which Divinity ever will take. The gospel is always fresh. There are many subjects beloved, that get exhausted after a while; but who ever heard of the gospel being exhausted? You have, some of you, come up to the house of God these thirty or forty years; did you ever feel that you wanted anything newer than the gospel? Did you ever say, as you went out, after you had heard a gospel sermon, "I should like to have some improvements made upon it"? No; if you have heard God's truth proclaimed, have you not said, "That was the food of my childhood in grace, it is my food now that, by reason of years, I am able to discern between that which is good and that which is evil, and it shall be my food all through the wilderness, and until I eat of the corn of the kingdom on the other side of Jordan?"

It is a wonderful thing, I have often thought, that any man should be able, day after day, and week after week, to attract thousands of people to hear him talk. I do not believe any man could do it with any other subject except the gospel. I have the most intense respect for that great man and mighty orator, Mr. Gough; but, with all his ability, if he were to deliver a teototal lecture, twice every Sabbath day, in any pulpit in England, he could not command a congregation for twenty-one years at a stretch; but the Christian minister, with only one subject,—Christ crucified,—may not only keep on for twenty-one years, but if he should live as long as Methuselah, he might still keep on preaching Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, and he would still find that the people of God would come to hear him, and never crave for a fresh subject. Let any great historian open, if he please, a lecture-room, and attempt to deliver two lectures upon history every week, and let him see whether he does not find the congregation, which might at first gather around him, speedily diminished. We have had an instance, in London, of one who has delivered an amusing lecture a thousand times, always to great multitudes; but then they were different persons every time. No one thought of going to hear him lecture upon the same subject the whole thousand times; it would have become a most intolerable penance even to have heard Albert Smith delivering his lecture upon Mont Blanc so often, however interesting it might have been once or twice; it would certainly pall upon the mind if we heard it so many times; but the Christian minister may keep on, and on, and on with the same theme,—Christ Jesus, Christ Jesus; the same cross, the same crown of thorns, the same bleeding wounds,—from the first time that he enters his pulpit to the last when he lays down his charge; and the people may always say, and he can always feel, that the gospel has the dew of its youth upon it, and is always fresh and ever new.

Our text is also *specially true of Christ as revealed in the Bible.* There are many other valuable books that have been written; but, as a rule, however valuable they may be, when you have read them half-a-dozen times, you may be quite satisfied that you need not read them any more. Next to the Bible, the book that I value most is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and I imagine I may have read that through perhaps a hundred times; it is a book of which I never seem to tire, but then the secret of that is, that John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is the Bible in another shape. It is the same heavenly water taken out of this same well of the gospel; yet you would tire even of that book at last. You would say, "I know all that this volume contains, and I want something more. Here is the experience of the Christian pilgrim; I know it is true, and I delight in it, but I want to go somewhat further." The mind would crave for something else. But read the Bible; and, strange to say, the more you read it, the more satisfied you will be with it. When you begin to read the Bible, perhaps you want fifty other books in order that you may become a thorough Bible student; but your library will gradually diminish until, at last, the more you understand the Bible, the fewer books you will need, and you will come to say, "If I might have all my days over again, this should be the only book that I would study, and I would concentrate all my powers upon the understanding of this one volume." You can get to the bottom of all other books; you dive into them, and at first they seem to be very deep; but every time you plunge, they appear to get shallower and shallower, until at last you can see the bottom at a glance. But in God's Word, every time you dive, the depths grow deeper. The first time you read a text, in your ignorant conceit you fancy you have learned the full meaning of it; but you look at it again, and you find that, though you had the meaning in one sense, yet you had not the full meaning; and you dive again, and again, and again, and you find, each time you dive, that the meaning is still far beyond your reach, and that the Bible is altogether above your comprehension. It expands, it grows, it continually increases in interest. There is such a charm about the Bible, that he who reads it but little can never feel the full force of it. It is something like the maelstrom you have heard of, only in a different and more excellent sense. The maelstrom is a great whirlpool on the coast of Norway. A ship, at a long distance from it, will feel something of its attractive influence—a very little, yet enough to make it veer from its course; but the nearer it gets to the whirlpool, the stronger becomes the current, and the more forcibly is the vessel carried along by it, until, at last, the ship is drawn near, whirled round at a tremendous rate, and then engulfed in its depths. In a higher and better sense, the like is true of the Bible. The nearer you go to it, the more closely you study it, the more voraciously you devour its contents, the more rapidly do you revolve in its circles, until at last you are swallowed up in its glory, and seem to long for nothing else than to prove the heights and depths of this bliss unfathomable,—the love of God in Christ Jesus as revealed to us in His sacred Word. Truly, we may say to the Bible, "Thou hast the dew of thy youth."

Again, I may add, *everything that has to do with Christ is always young.* The beds of spices where He lieth are always green; the trees planted by Him will never wither, their fruits will always come to perfection. Everything lives where He is; for He is life, and in Him there is no death at all; and because He is life, He is always full of freshness, and

therefore doth He scatter living force wheresoever He goeth. All this we shall best know when we shall follow Him to the living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

II. Now let us turn to the second point, and enquire, WHAT IS THE REASON FOR THIS FRESHNESS? What is the reason why Christ Jesus, and His gospel, and His word, and all things about Him, are always so fresh? Why have we always an abiding dew upon these holy things?

I answer, first, no man, who understands what it is to have Christ in his heart, *will ever get tired of Him through want of variety.* The reason why we get tired of a thing is generally because, as we say, there is a sameness about it. There are many men who have a weighty message to deliver, consisting of very good matter; but, dear me! it is a pain to sit and listen to them, because they deliver all their words in a monotone; they always speak as if they were striking a bell, and word follows word, with no difference of tone. Now, the human ear loves variety; it cannot bear monotony. And so is it with the whole of our manhood; nothing monotonous will long retain its freshness. However sweet the music might be, if we always heard the same notes, we should most assuredly be as disgusted with even the music of an archangel, if we were compelled to hear it all day and all night long, as we are with the cackling of a goose. Everything is apt to lose its interest when it is repeated over and over again; but there is no fear of any monotony or tautology in Christ. You may look at Christ a thousand times, and you shall have, if you please, a thousand different aspects of His beauty.

If you turn to the Old Testament, you can see Him in a vast variety of forms. You can see Him as the paschal lamb, and as the scapegoat; you can see Him at one time as the bullock, strong to labour, and at another time as the lamb, patient to endure; you can see Him as the dove, full of innocence; you can see Him in the blood sprinkled, in the incense burning, in the laver filled with water, in Aaron's rod that budded, in the golden pot that was full of manna; in the ark, you can see Him having the law within His heart; and over the ark, you can see the golden light of the Shekinah above the mercy-seat, and say, "Christ is here," In every type, you may see Christ, and in so many different shapes, too, that you can say, "Turn this whichever way I like, there is always something fresh in it." Christ, if I may compare so glorious a Person to so humble a thing, is like the kaleidoscope. As often as you look through it, you see a fresh arrangement of colours, and a new design, and, in like manner, as often as you look at the Lord Jesus Christ, you always discover some new beauty in Him.

When you have done with looking at Him typically, look at Him officially. You have not time to consider all His glories as a Priest,—you have hardly passed your eyes over His flowing vesture, and His glittering breastplate, and listened to the ringing of the bells, and marked the beauty of the pomegranates, before you see Him come forth as a King; and you can scarcely stop to look at the many crowns on His head before He comes forth as a Prophet; and you have hardly time to admire Him as a Prophet before He comes forth as Mediator, as Shepherd, as Captain of our salvation, as Head of the Church, as the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. If you go further, and look at His person, you will see what a wonderful variety there is in Him. You see Him as the Child born, the Son given; when He comes into this world, you know Him to be God, and you are lost in admiration of His Deity; you also know Him to be man, and you still stand astonished when you regard Him in that aspect as bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. The reason why everything else loses its freshness to us is because of its want of variety. You may go to any exhibition that has ever been opened to attract attention and awaken interest; but you will find that, after a certain time, there is a want of variety in it; but with Christ there never is such a lack, and therefore to the mind's eye He always has the dew of His youth.

There is also another reason; Christ has the dew of His youth *because of His excellence.* To-day, stepping in to see a gentleman, I observed a table which had upon it a great variety of objects. I wondered what they were, and took the liberty of asking him. He told me that he had some beautiful stereoscopic views there, which had been taken at an immense expense in Egypt, in the Holy Land, and in all parts of the world; and he showed me one or two Scriptural subjects which very much interested me. They were certainly pre-eminently excellent as works of art. He said, "There, sir, I never get tired of looking at these slides! I could examine them constantly, and never be weary of them." "Well," I said, "I can quite understand that; they are so excellent; for, really, there is half-an-hour's study in this one picture; and then one might begin again, it is so full of beauty, and it seems so true to the original." But I thought to myself, "Excellent as they are, I think, if I call to see my friend in a year's time, he will tell me that he has had to buy a fresh set of views, for he has been looking at these others so often that he has become altogether tired of them." They would not have any freshness to him, because he had seen them so many times. But mark, the reason why he could look at them so often was because they were so excellent. If they had been poor pictures, if there had not been great skill and art bestowed upon them, he would soon have become weary of looking at them. There are some views in nature which a man might gaze upon a hundred times, and yet always wonder at them; but the reason is, because they are so beautiful. There are other things that might strike one at first, but which, when they were looked into more closely would lose their freshness, because there would be no real ground for admiration, no excellence in them. But Christ Jesus will always have the dew of His youth, because, He is always so excellent.

Ah, brethren! you thought Christ was sweet when first you tasted Him; but you will know Him to be sweeter still when you know more of Him, and taste and see that He is good; but you can never know all His sweetness, for you can eat, and eat, and eat to the full, and yet not discover it all; possibly, scarcely in heaven itself will you know all the sweetness of Christ. You imagine, perhaps, that you know how great is His love to you; but remember, it passeth knowledge. You think that you have fully proved His faithfulness; but you have not proved it as you will yet do. All the tests to which you have ever put the Saviour, it may be, are but little compared with those that are to come after. You have proved Him with the footmen, you shall soon prove Him with the horsemen; you have proved

Him in the land of peace, you shall soon prove Him in the swellings of Jordan. But the more you test and try Him, the more shall you discover that He is excellent, and worth the proving; and because His excellence shall become more and more manifest, the more you look at Him; you shall say to Him continually, "Thou hast the dew of Thy youth. I find Thee better and better. Fairest of the sons of men, Thou growest fairer every day! Bread of heaven, Thou becomest sweeter to my taste every hour! Thou wast once like wafers made with honey; Thou art sweeter than angels' food now. Water of life, Thou growest more cooling to my tongue, and more refreshing to my thirst continually! I loved Thee as soon as I knew Thee; but I love Thee more now; I delighted in Thee once, but I delight in Thee more fully now."

Still, I do not know but that the most excellent thing you and I have ever seen would, in time, lose its freshness to us, because we should discover all its excellence; but Christ will never lose His freshness to us, *because He is divine.* Whatever is not divine, in due time must lose its freshness. Suppose the Lord should give to us, to engross our attention and to interest us, the whole fields of space. Suppose, in eternity, the Lord should say, "Now I will give to you the works of my creation to be for ever the objects of your attention." My dear friends, there is enough in a single flower, the botanist tells us, to occupy a man's wonder and admiration for a number of years. There is so much skill and wisdom in but a single flower of the field, that a man might look and wonder as long as that. Well, just put together all the flowers and all the creatures of this world, and all the mighty rocks that are full of such marvellous secrets, and imagine that these are to be the objects of our eternal study and interest. I can suppose that a man would exhaust all the knowledge of this world in due time; it might take him thousands upon thousands of years, yet I can imagine that he might so fully examine everything that is noble and grand in this world, that at last he could sit down, and say, "I know every secret of nature here upon the earth; I have made every rock tell out its story; I have dived into every mine of truth, and I have ransacked all its secret treasures; but there are the stars for me yet to look at." So picture the man going from star to star, and discovering all the wonders of God in the seemingly boundless universe. Here is a great conception for you. Imagine that all these stars were inhabited, and all full of fresh wonders; yet I can understand that, after myriads and myriads of years, all these marvels might be exhausted. Some stupendous mind, growing by that upon which it fed, might at last say, of all the secrets of God's works, "I know them all. I have found out every wonder, and all the storehouses of God's wisdom have I ransacked"; but, beloved, Jesus Christ is such a boundless field of knowledge, in Him there is such a gathering up of all the secrets of God, that the whole of eternity must be exhausted before we could learn them all. He will have, He must have for ever, the dew of His youth, because He is divine. The wing of knowledge, though it had all the fields of space to fly in, must at last reach a boundary. The ship of wisdom, though it should sail across the sea that seems without a shore,—the as yet unnavigated sea of ether,—must at last reach a haven; but give a man Christ to be the subject of study, the object to awaken his interest and excite his wonder, and then you have indeed shot an arrow which shall never reach its mark; it shall fly on, on, on, and shall never stay. You have bidden the man plunge into a bottomless ocean. You have launched him, like Noah's ark, upon a sea without a shore. He may go on, and on, and on, but he can never reach the end of that voyage. Christ must for ever be full of interest to him, because He is divine, and, therefore, inexhaustible.

Another reason why Christ will always have the dew of His youth is, *because He meets all the cravings of our nature.* Suppose I am introduced into a place full of the wonderful works of man. I look, and I look on; but why is it that I get tired of them, however interesting they may be? Because they only appeal to my eye. But suppose that there is the sweetest music at the same time, then I have something for my ear. Why is it that, even then, I get tired? Because I have another craving,—I hunger and I thirst. But suppose I have the richest dainties set before me; and I sit and feast, and look, and hear sweet sounds all the time, why is it that, even then, I should, after a time, however excellent might be the entertainment, grow tired? Why, because I have other propensities that are not brought into play, and other desires which have not their fair room for exercise. But suppose me to become like Solomon, so that I have all which the eye, or the ear, or the passions can delight in; should I, after all, be tired? Yes; Solomon tried it, and he said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Why? Because there were other cravings in Solomon which all these things did not satisfy; his mind was hungering after knowledge; and when Solomon satisfied that, for he spake of all things, from the hyssop on the wall up to the cedar of Lebanon, there was one thing that was still not satisfied, that was his soul. His immortal spirit was longing for communion with his God; there was a hunger and thirst after something higher than mere mental food. His mind could not be contented with wine to drink and meat to eat, for it wanted knowledge; and his spirit could not be satisfied with mere knowledge, for it needed something higher than that,—the ethereal and celestial ambrosia of the glorified. His spirit was panting for communion with God, and therefore Solomon felt that all here was vanity, because it could not satisfy that craving.

Give me Christ, and I have no desire for anything beyond Him, for Christ is all. Whatever of good we may wish for, it is all in Christ; it is impossible for the mind that is filled with Christ to imagine anything else; and in the day when we shall get to heaven,—we talk a great deal about golden harps, and golden crowns, and golden streets,—I imagine we shall find that all those harps and crowns and streets are contained in that one word "Christ." When we really have Christ, we feel that we have nothing else that we can wish for. He that drinketh desireth to eat, but he that drinketh Christ drinketh food. He that eats desires to be clothed, but he that feedeth on Christ is clothed at the same time. He that is clothed needeth something wherewithal to adorn himself, but he that is clothed in the righteousness of Christ is robed in the court dress of heaven, and hath all the jewels of Divinity upon him. He that is adorned yet needeth something wherewithal to wash himself and keep himself beauteous, but he that is clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and adorned with God's grace, is washed, and is clean every

whit. He that is clean needs to be kept clean; but he that has Christ shall be kept clean. Dear friends, there is nothing that a sinner can want, there is nothing that a saint can want, that is not in Christ. There are many things that we think we want that are not in Him, but nothing we really need that is not in Him, for "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and the fulness of the Godhead must be more than sufficient fulness for manhood. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell"; and if all fulness cannot meet our wants, what can? Therefore, shall we never be weary of Christ, because every craving of the heart is satisfied in Him.

I will mention only one other reason why Christ will always have the dew of His youth. We shall never be tired of Christ, *because the need that we have of Christ can never cease.* While I am on earth, I shall never cease sinning; therefore I shall never cease to need the fountain filled with blood where I can wash away all my guilty stains. So long as I am here, my conscience will never leave off accusing me; therefore I shall ever need an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous. While I am here, I shall never be free from trouble; therefore I shall always need Him who is the Consolation of Israel. While I am here, I shall never get rid of weakness; therefore I can never bear to be without Him who is my strength. While I am here, I shall never, I fear, cease from backsliding in some measure; therefore can I never cease to love Him who restoreth my soul, and leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

You have heard, perhaps, the story of a party of travellers who were crossing the desert; they had exhausted all their supply of water, and they knew not where they should find any. But, at last, after some days' march, they came near a turbid stream of the most filthy water, and in dashed the camels, and defiled it still worse. Yet the poor travellers, who had come across the arid desert, were so thirsty that they drank what was more earth than water, and thought it sweeter than any wine they had ever tasted. But after they had satisfied their thirst, did they still think so? Did they then say the water was sweet? No; they understood then what it was they had been drinking; and after their thirst was once quenched, you could not have compelled them to drink there again until the thirst returned in all its force. But so long as the Christian is here, he will always have the pangs of hunger, he will always have all the sufferings of spiritual thirst if Christ be removed from him, and, therefore, that longing will always make Christ sweet to him. Our Lord must ever have the dew of His youth upon Him, because we shall always have an appetite for Him as long as we are here; or if we lose it for a little while,—for fools will abhor all manner of meat sometimes,—yet that appetite must and shall return, and we shall again fly to those living waters as with the wings of a dove, and hasten again to those cooling streams with all the speed of the panting hart that longs after the water-brook, for it must drink or die. Therefore, beloved, you see yet again that, because we shall always need Christ, therefore will He always be fresh to us.

"But," says one, "we shall not need Him in heaven." Who told you that? Whoever told you so, has certainly misled you. Not need Christ in heaven! Why, beloved, if you could take Christ away from heaven, you would take heaven away altogether, and leave every saint in hell. They do not "want" Christ in heaven, in one sense of the word, because they have Him; therefore they do not "want" Him as the Scotch use the word "want." But they still need to have Christ with them every hour, for He is the sum and substance of heaven. If I shall not need Christ to cleanse me in heaven, yet I shall want Christ to commune with Him. If I shall not need His blood to wash me, yet I shall need the offering of praise wherewith to bless and honour God. If I shall not need to pray to Him, I shall want to praise Him. If I shall not need Him to forgive me, yet I shall want Him to embrace me. If I shall not need Him as a Shepherd, I shall need Him as a Husband, as a Priest, as a King, that I may for ever serve Him with joy and gladness.

III. WHAT ARE THE LESSONS WE SHOULD LEARN FROM THIS TRUTH?

The first is for the pulpit, *a lesson of admonition.* Dear brethren, we who occupy the pulpit must take care that we never, for a moment, entertain the idea that the gospel has become worn out. It still has the dew of its youth. There is a good deal of nonsense talked about a gospel adapted to the times. People say that the way Whitefield preached, and the way that John Berridge and Rowland Hill preached, was all wrong. True, many sinners were converted under their ministry; but, you know, sinners then were different from the sinners of these days, who do not need the same sort of preaching. Some say that the devil himself is improved, but I find him worse if anything,—improved the wrong way. They say that sinners are improved, and do not need to be addressed with the same fiery, burning words as of old; they say that they do not need the same simple preaching of Christ. The nineteenth century has become so learned that it has advanced beyond the simple knowledge of Christ crucified, it has become so erudite, that the simplicity of the gospel is far behind it, it has marched on so far ahead that it has left the cross miles in the rear.

Do not believe them for a moment, my dear brethren; if you want to wake up the people of England, preach the old-fashioned gospel; if you want to crowd your halls, and gather thousands round you, it is the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, that you must preach. As for the manner and style of your preaching, you may leave that to the occasion; and stick to your subject, the simple gospel in all its fulness and glory. Pentecostal youth shall be seen in the gospel again when it is preached in all its freshness and purity. I know why some preachers like to be obscure; it is because it gives a man a peculiar kind of popularity. I believe some people like to hear a man whom they cannot understand; and some, when they hear a man they can only just comprehend, are very flattered, because the minister seems to say to them, "Now, you know that you are all very clever people, I must therefore preach you a very clever sermon"; and then they feel pleased that the minister should have such a good opinion of them, and should think them so clever. But when you go to hear some plain blunt man, who just simply tells out the gospel, and who believes that, to try to be eloquent when he is preaching would be just as stupid as to paint the rose or to whitewash the lily, then you say, "Well,

now, he did not compliment me; why! he talked to me and all of us as if we had been a common lot of clod-hoppers and crossing-sweepers. He told us just the simple story of the cross, and there is nothing flattering in that." Aye! and, by the grace of God, I trust that from our pulpits there will never be anything taught that is flattering to you. I hope each one of us will be able to say, with the apostle Paul, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Be you assured that there will be more unction resting upon the enunciation of the simple truths of the gospel, there will be more freshness to the hearers, than there will be upon the most polished oratory garnished with almost seraphic eloquence, and elaborated until it grows far beyond the comprehension of ordinary intellects. That lesson is for the pulpit.

The second lesson is a caution, *a lesson of self-examination* to each one here present. Do you, dear friend, take less interest in the gospel than you used to do? Do you find that it has become dull to you, and that even Christ Himself has lost His freshness to you? Christ has not really lost His freshness, though you may have lost yours. What you should ask yourself is, "Have I found the right Christ? If the Christ I have found has lost His freshness, is it not very likely that I have found a wrong christ, one of my own making, one of my own conception? For the real Christ is always fresh, always interesting, always new. Have I not either laid hold of the wrong truth, or held it in the wrong way?" I said, "the wrong truth"; have I contradicted myself? Yet that is the palpable contradiction of this age. One man says, "Yes," and another man says, "No." I am told that it is uncharitable to say that another man is wrong if I am right; but I cannot make it out how both are to be right, or how "yea" and "nay" are to be made to agree together. He is a clever man who is able to tie the tails of "yes" and "no" together, and make them run in the same row. The fact is, if you have lost your interest in the gospel, it is not the right one that you have received, or else you never really accepted it; if you have lost your interest in Christ, it is because it is not the Christ of God in whom you were interested. It is very probable that, if your former zeal and your former delight in Christ have departed, you have made a mistake; and it is well that you should question yourselves very solemnly, lest you should be found building upon the sand when you thought you were building upon the Rock of Ages.

I have just another word to add, and that is, *a word of aspiration*. If Christ has the dew of His youth upon Him, let us, my dear friends who serve the Lord Jesus Christ, aspire to show the world that we do so. In the olden time, the dew of Christ's youth made His people love Him so much that they were ready to die for Him; they gave all their substance to Him; they lived a life of shame, and they were prepared to die a death of pain. Now let us prove to the world that Christianity has not lost its ancient vigour, that there is a godly seed yet left in the earth, and that the arm of the Church is not withered. Let us prove to the world that, as Christ made His people holy in olden time, He makes His people holy now; and that, as the religion of Christ made men disinterested, and devoted to Him, zealous for His cause, prepared them to live, and helped them to die, it can do so now. It is for you and for me to prove to the world that our religion has not lost its force by letting them see its influence in our daily life. Emulate the noble army of martyrs, the glorious host of confessors; seek to live like the goodly fellowship of the prophets, and like that noble company of the apostles; and when you shall live the holy and devoted lives they did, then shall all the world say, "These men have been with Christ, for they have the dew of the youth of Christianity upon them. They are like the early Christians, and therefore the old religion has not grown old, so as to be likely to depart and pass away."

REMEMBERING GOD'S WORKS

"He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He hath given meat unto them that fear Him: He will ever be mindful of His covenant."—Psalm cxi. 4, 5.

GOD'S works are, of course, wonderful because they are His works, but they are not "a nine days' wonder. They are not intended to be admired for a little while, and then to be forgotten. The Psalmist says, "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered." I fear that we too often fail to keep in our memory the recollection of God's exceeding goodness, and that we suffer the works of the Lord, as well as His mercies, to lie "forgotten in unthankfulness." If it has been so, in the past, with any of us, let us, at the outset of our meditation, begin to chide ourselves for our forgetfulness, and ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen our memories that we may remember the wonderful works of the Lord more than we have done.

Our subject is twofold; first, *it is God's design that His wonderful works should be remembered*; and, secondly, *it is our wisdom constantly to have those wonderful works in remembrance.*

I. First, then, I learn, from our text, that IT IS GOD'S DESIGN THAT HIS WONDERFUL WORKS SHOULD BE REMEMBERED.

He has ensured the carrying out of this design, for, first, *the very greatness of His works prevents them from being forgotten.* When God has come forth, out of His secret places, to work redemption for His people with a high hand and an outstretched arm, He has wrought such mighty marvels that all history had been made to ring with the tidings of them. Is it possible that Israel could ever forget what the Lord did in Egypt when He smote the hosts of their oppressors, and brought forth His people with a great deliverance? Could they ever forget the wondrous scene at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh and all his army sank like lead in the surging waters that had stood upright, like massive walls, to make a way for the ransomed hosts to escape? There were other events, in the conquest of Canaan, and in the life of David,

which must have been, through their extraordinary character, for ever burned into the recollection of God's ancient people; and, truly, you and I can say of many of God's works on our behalf, that they have been so great that it would be quite impossible for us to forget them. Do you remember your conversion, beloved friend? Peradventure, you were a great and open sinner, and the change in you was so remarkable that you can easily recollect the time when it occurred, and it would not be possible for Satan himself to make you doubt that such a change did happen to you. You remember, my brother, when the load of your guilt was removed from your burdened heart. I can imagine that I could forget my own name, and that I could forget my own sons, but I think I never could, under any circumstances, forget the day when I began to sing to my dear Lord and Saviour,—

> "I will praise Thee every day,
> Now Thine anger's turned away."

It was such a marvellous thing—so wonderful a thing in itself—so altogether extraordinary that it could never, never, never be forgotten. "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered" because they are so wonderful. Study deeply what sovereign grace has done for you, that you may see the greatness of the mercy, and admire it, for, very much in proportion as you appraise the mercy of God at its power value, will you be sure to have it fixed upon your memory all your life.

God made His wonderful works to be remembered, in the next place, *because of the persons upon whom those works were wrought.* There is many a man, who would soon forget all he hears about the favour of God, because he is not conscious of his own need of it; but when a person is, spiritually, in an exceedingly anxious state of mind and heart, and God's great mercy comes to him, he is sure to recollect it. You remember that the Israelites were in Egypt as a nation of slaves, so that, when God fetched them out,—the serfs of the brick-kiln,—the men who were driven to their daily tasks by the oppressors' whips,—the poor slaves who were denied even the straw with which to make the bricks,—well, when they were divinely delivered, at the very time when Pharaoh's tyranny had become utterly unbearable, they could not possibly forget how they had been delivered. That day of their emancipation became the beginning of months to them, and they numbered their years from it, for, to poor oppressed Israel, it was like life from the dead. At the present time, in a spiritual sense, God, in His mercy, interposes on behalf of those who are in a similar condition to that of Israel in Egypt. You remember how Hannah sang, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." That dunghill would help the beggar's memory; he would say, "How can I forget that I was thrown away there like a worthless thing? In my own estimation, I was a rotten, worthless, useless thing, fit only to be thrown among the rubbish of creation; but the Lord suddenly appeared to me, and lifted me up, and set me among the princes of His people. Can I ever forget that? Let the bride forget her ornaments and let my right hand forget her cunning, but never can my soul forget how the Lord brought me up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." Some of us were mere wrecks of humanity; yawning chasms gaped beneath us, and we thought that we should be speedily swallowed up; but we cried unto the Lord in our trouble, and He brought us unto a quiet haven. Can we ever forget His wonderful works? We were sore sick; our soul abhorred all manner of meat, and we drew near to the gates of the grave; but the Good Physician came, and restored us from all our sicknesses just when death stared us in the face. Beloved brothers and sisters, I feel certain that I can appeal to many of you, and say that you were in such a plight as this when the Lord revealed Himself to you. Such was your distress, and the abject condition in which you were, that, for you to forget what the Lord did for you would be such base ingratitude that I cannot believe that it is possible. Surely, you feel that you *must* remember Him, and that sooner might a woman forget her sucking child than that you should forget the wonderful works which the Lord your God hath wrought for you.

Besides this, the Lord took care that His wonderful works should be remembered *by putting them on record in the Scriptures.* The five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch, are the divinely-inspired record of the wonderful works which God did for His people in the very early times of the world's history. The pen of inspiration was carefully employed in order that what God had done might be written down for all future generations to read. This blessed Book has made the wonderful works of God to be remembered for all time; it was written for that very purpose. It tells the unique story of the eternal love of God to us; it also tells us the wonderful story of love incarnate in the Christ of Bethlehem, and further tells us how He died, and how He rose again, and how He lives in heaven to plead for us as our great Intercessor before the throne. Let us bless Him more and more for these sacred pages in which He makes His wonderful works to be remembered; and I venture to suggest to you, beloved, that it is well, when God performs any work of mercy for you, that you should cause it to be remembered in a similar way. Much of God's praise is never made known on this earth for want of a ready pen to record the gracious experiences of His people. The keeping of a diary is very apt to lead to a stilted form of piety. If a man feels that he must put something down every day, he is very liable to put down that which is not true. He may think it is true even when it is really false. But the recording of the many special mercies that we receive from God appears to me to be a duty which we owe to our age, and also to our successors. If some of the wonderful deliverances, which are recorded in the biographies of the saints, had not been jotted down at the time, we should have been great losers; and if we have anything worth recording,—and I think we have—even if we do not care to write it down to be seen by the public eye, yet, at least, let us record it for the sake of the little circle in which we live and move, that, peradventure, some of our descendants, or some of our friends, may gather comfort from our personal experience of God's mercy. "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered." Let us act in harmony with this grand design, and preserve the memory of the Lord's great goodness to us.

Moreover, in order to preserve the memory of His wonderful works, *God was pleased to command His people to teach their children to remember what He had done for them.* In addition to the inspired records, He told them to make their children's memories into

books of remembrance. Jewish fathers were commanded to call their children together, and tell them how the Lord brought them out of Egypt, how He led them through the wilderness, and how he gave them the land of Canaan to be their own possession. They were to teach their children, and their children's children, the wonderful story of the Lord's dealings with them; and we ought to be concerned to hand down, from father to son, the memory of God's great goodness to us. Tell your own children, if you cannot tell anyone else, what God has done for their father. Sitting around the fire in the evening, your children might often be, not merely interested, but instructed and impressed by the narrative of God's providential dealings with you. Possibly, the story might not read well in print; but never mind that, for there will be an interest about it to your own household; so, be sure that you tell it. My memory recalls, at this very moment, many a pleasing incident from what my grandsire told me concerning his early struggles in the ministry, and the providential interpositions of God on his behalf. Perhaps he might as well have written them down, but he did not; I think that, possibly, he knew that he had a living book within his grandchild's brain, and that the boy might, in after days, tell out to others what his grandsire had told to him. At any rate, I do earnestly exhort all Christians to make God's wonderful works to be remembered wherever they can, and do it specially by telling to your children what you have experienced of His goodness. Do not die, O ye greyheads,—ye who have passed your threescore years and ten,—do not pass away from this earth with all those pleasant memories of God's loving-kindness to be buried with you in your coffin; but let your children, and your children's children know what the everlasting God did for you.

Once more, in order to make His wonderful works to be remembered, *the Lord was pleased to institute certain ordinances to keep them in the minds of His people.* To preserve the memory of the deliverance out of Egypt, there was the significant rite of the passover. On that night when God brought His people out of the house of bondage, it was the blood of the paschal lamb that protected each house that was sprinkled with it, and so Israel ever afterwards kept the passover in memory of that night when God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." And you know how our blessed Redeemer has given us the institution of the Lord's supper, saying, "This do in remembrance of Me,"—that the atonement, that great master-fact of the Christian religion, might always be fresh upon our memories, and Christ be set forth visibly crucified among us as though it were but yesterday; for, if anything may be forgotten, it must not be Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Calvary. Beloved, take care that you attend carefully to that sacred memorial. If I am addressing any true believers in Christ, who, nevertheless, have hitherto been disobedient to their Lord's command, "This do in remembrance of Me," I would solemnly ask them to be disobedient no longer. I am sure, beloved, you miss a great privilege, and I am equally sure that you are omitting a very sacred duty by not obeying your Lord's command. If it is right for you, as a believer in Christ, to stay away from your Master's table, it is also right for me, and right for all God's servants; if we all did so, there would be no celebration of the Lord's supper anywhere; and, so, that which our Saviour, in His divine wisdom, instituted for a memorial, would cease to be. Perhaps you say that you are not a church-member; if so, I reply that, if you are a Christian, you ought to be a member of Christ's visible church on earth; for, if you have a right not to be a member, I have a right not to be one, and so have all the people of God; and, so, the Church of God, as an organization in the world, would cease to exist. Who is to maintain the ministry of the Word? Who is to keep up the ordinances of God's house if all His people break up into separate grains of sand instead of being living stones built up into His spiritual temple? "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered"; so, join with Him in that sacred purpose, and, in observing the ordinances instituted by your Lord, set forth, in your baptism, your death, burial, and resurrection with Him; and, in the memorial supper, show forth His death until He come.

Thus I have shown you how God has made His wonderful works to be remembered, and I press it upon the heart and conscience of all the Lord's people to see that their memory be happily burdened with the recollection of God's mercy. Study diligently, in the Biblical record, what He did in the olden time. Learn, from Church History, what He has done from the days of Christ's sojourn upon the earth until now. But especially recollect what He has done for you, and often say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." Abundantly utter the memory of God's great goodness. The Lord's children should not be dumb. Worldlings are noisy enough in praising their false gods; often, they make night hideous, and startle us from our sleep as they sing the songs of Bacchus, or Mars, or other heathen deities. Then, shall the children of God be silent, and allow His mercies to lie forgotten in unthankfulness? Nay, nay; but write the record of them upon your doors, let it be seen upon the walls of your houses, publish the glad news wherever you go, tell it even to unwilling ears, and say, again and again, "The Lord is good, and His mercy endureth for ever; I can speak with confidence upon this matter, for in my experience I have proved it to be so." Facts like these are among the best arguments to silence infidel doubts and Satanic temptations. Tell the sceptics what God has done for you, and ask them whether unbelief can work such wonders for them. You, poor widow, with your seven little children, tell them how you took your troubles to the Lord, and He helped you, so that you know that there is a God, for you rested, and your family rested, upon Him, in your great sorrow, and He upheld and delivered you. Tell them—you who have been sick, and in poverty, and who cried unto God, and He helped you,—tell them that you know that there is a God that heareth prayer. Tell them—you who are rejoicing in God with joy unspeakable, and who often feel so happy that you scarcely can bear the great delight,—tell them that God still lifts up the light of His countenance upon His people; and if they sneer at you, tell them that you are as honest as they are, and that they have as much reason to believe your word as you have to believe theirs. Pit your experience against their arguments; lay your facts over against their fallacies; and, in this way, you shall become valiant soldiers for the truth as it is in Jesus.

II. Now, secondly, IT IS WISDOM ON OUR PART TO REMEMBER THESE WONDERFUL WORKS OF THE

LORD, for the effect upon our minds will be useful in many ways.

First, *it will assure us of the Lord's mercy and compassion.* Read the next sentence of the text: "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion"—gracious, that is, to the sinful; full of compassion, that is, to the weak and to the sorrowful. If we keep in remembrance the wonderful works of God, our experience will prove the truth of the text. How gracious the Lord was to sinful Israel! When they rebelled against Him, and murmured at Him, He still wrought great wonders for them; He fed them with manna from heaven; and brought them flesh to eat, and guided them by His fiery-cloudy pillar. He would not let their sin turn away His grace, but He still loved them. Does not your life, beloved, prove to you that God is very gracious to you, forgiving your sin, overlooking your infirmities, and bearing long with you? I want you to notice that it has been so in your own life; because, then, when you meet with a poor trembling sinner, you can say to him, or to her, "I know that God is very gracious, for He has been gracious to me"; you can tell the man with a troubled conscience that Christ can ease it, for He has eased yours. You can tell how your great sin was taken away by Christ's great atonement; and you can comfort those who are burdened, and bowed down, by saying, "He did all this for me; and though, to my shame, I have to confess that I have often grieved Him, He has never left me, nor forsaken me. Even when I have lost the light of His countenance, through my own fault, yet, when I have mourned over my guilt, He has beamed upon me again. In great mercy has He dealt with me, and He has been wonderfully gracious to me." Such testimony as that will be a great encouragement to others; as they hear what the Lord has done for you, they will be led by the Spirit of God to turn to Him that the like favour may be displayed towards them.

Recollect also the great compassion of the Lord. I hope your own life has shown you how very tender He is towards those who trust Him, even as the Psalmist says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." I can recollect how, in a time of terrible depression of spirit and of intense anguish of pain, I cast myself upon my God with that text in my mouth. I said to Him, "O Lord, I am Thy child; and if any child of mine were pained as I am, and I could take away his pain, I would do so. Thou art my Father; prove Thy fatherliness by easing me, or else by strengthening my frail spirit to endure all this agony." I can even now recall the wonderful relief that came over both body and mind when I had pleaded like that before God; and I, therefore, speak with confidence of His fulness of compassion, for I have tried it, and proved it for myself, and I invite all who are bowed down to do as I did. Some of you may be in great distress of mind,—a distress out of which no fellow-creature can deliver you,—you poor nervous people at whom others often laugh. I can assure you that God will not laugh at you; He knows all about that sad complaint of yours, so I urge you to go to Him, for the experience of many of us has taught us that "the Lord is gracious and full of compassion." As a mother comforteth her children, so will He comfort you. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; so go to Him in all the weakness of your deep contrition, and you shall find a mother's heart in the bosom of Jesus, something more tender than a man's heart could ever be. Flee away to your God this very hour; our own experience leads us to urge you to do so, does it not, brothers and sisters in Christ? If this were the time and place, and we could turn this service into an experience meeting, would not many of you rise, and say, "It is even so," as you remembered God's wonderful works to you? Would you not say, "Yes, truly He is the God of grace, gracious and full of compassion"?

The next effect that this remembrance will have on our mind is this. *It will make us consider and acknowledge the divine bounty to us throughout all our lives.* Observe what the Psalmist says next: "He hath given meat unto them that fear Him." Now, as we recollect that,—as the Israelites might have recollected how they had abundance of food even in the wilderness,—we shall be led to think of what poor creatures we must be to be so dependent upon our God. We should not have been alive if He had not fed us. How poor we all are in our natural condition! I heard one say of another, who had grown to be a rich man,—and it was said in a wicked, envious spirit,—"I recollect the time when he had not two shirts to his back"; and I said to him, "And your mother recollects the time when you had not one." There is not much for the richest man to boast of; men glory in their possessions, and they talk of others, who are poor, as though they were to be despised. There is not a man alive who has not had to be indebted to God for the breath in his nostrils. We owe everything to Him; and, in looking back upon our spiritual career, we have to say, "He hath given meat unto them that fear Him." We have had to receive from the Lord the daily food that our souls have required; in temporal things and in spiritual, we have been pensioners at His gate,—beggars wholly dependent upon His bounty. We have not been able to provide for ourselves one morsel of the bread of heaven. The Lord has had to give us all that we have had all through our whole life, both physically and spiritually. He has not only given meat to His people once or twice, but all their lives. The bread you eat to nourish your body, and the spiritual food whereon your soul has been fed, have been continually given to you. Have you ever counted how many meals you have eaten from the first day until now? Have you ever thought of the great store of spiritual food that you have received from the Lord? The Queen of Sheba was astonished at the provision that Solomon made for his household for a single day; but oh, what wonderful provision Christ has made for you! He has given you, spiritually, His flesh to eat, and His blood to drink. He has given you, even in superabundance, the riches of His grace, and He will, in due time, give you the riches of His glory. Do not fail to recollect His wonderful works, in order that, while you realise your absolute dependence upon Him, you may also see how He has continually supplied all your needs, so that you have lacked nothing from the first day even until now. He has prepared a table before you in the presence of your enemies, and He has made you to lie down in green pastures, and led you beside the still waters.

Recollect, too, *the circumstances under which some of you have been fed.* It was a great wonder when God furnished a table in the wilderness; and it has been a wonder, to some of you, where your daily bread

has come from, has it not? I can look back upon the past history of some of you, and note how [illegible] your circumstances have been; yet all your real needs have been supplied. You often woke up in the morning, feeling very much like the little birds that do not know where their breakfast is to be found; but I hope that you, like the little birds, began to sing even before you found your breakfast, for you did find it. I love, in the winter, to see the robins sit on the bare boughs, and yet sing. It is easy enough to sing in springtime when all the birds are singing; but it is not so easy to sit on the bare boughs, and still praise the Lord; still, you should do even that, for you have been fed up till now, have you not? You know that ancient promise, "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure"; and that promise has been fulfilled in your experience. Sometimes, perhaps, you have attended a ministry where your soul has been well-nigh starved, and you have not known where to look for the spiritual meat that you needed to make you grow. Yet, you are still alive, for the Lord Jesus has Himself fed you. "Not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," has your soul been nourished; so, bless Him, and praise His holy name, this very hour, and let not the memory of His great goodness ever be forgotten by you.

Then recollect, dear brethren, *the variety of supplies that you have had.* "He hath given meat to them that fear Him;"—all sorts of spiritual meat has He given to you. When you were a child, you fed upon the simple doctrines of the Word; but, since then, your Lord has given you strong meat that you may become a man in Christ Jesus. In all conditions, you have had food convenient for you. At some stages of your spiritual history, it was not every ministry that could meet your wants. You could not listen with profit to this man or that; but the Lord Himself fed you with His Word, and many a choice morsel you had while you were reading your morning chapter, and it seemed as if every verse in that chapter had been written specially for you, or as if the ink were still wet upon the page, and that the love-letter came to you fresh from your dear Father's hand. Thus has He, many a time, given meat to you who fear Him. Blessed be His holy name, not one good thing has failed of all that He has promised. Have ye ever lacked anything? Has your Lord been a wilderness unto you,—a land of barrenness? No; you have dwelt in a land flowing with milk and honey, and you have been fed to the full. Do not forget this, but tell the story of it to others. Tell it to your poorer neighbours; tell it to poor saints when they are in low water; tell it to the poor distressed children of God who cannot feed upon the Word; tell them that their Heavenly Father will never let them die of starvation, for God, who feeds the ravens and the sparrows, will surely not allow His own children to starve.

There is another thing to be learnt from the memory of God's goodness. *It is intended to certify us of His faithfulness.* "He will ever be mindful of his covenant," is the last clause of our text. The Lord never forgot the covenant He made with Abraham. Often, when He might, otherwise, have destroyed Israel, He recollected that covenant, and He turned aside His wrath; and do you think He will ever forget the covenant which He has made with His only-begotten Son,—a covenant signed, and sealed, and ratified, "in all things ordered well,"—a covenant confirmed by the sacrifice of His well-beloved Son,—a covenant which He signed with His own blood, and which is to stand fast for ever and ever? No, He cannot be false to His oath; He cannot lie; He must perform what He hath promised. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it?" All the past history of our lives goes to show that God is faithful, and will be faithful even to the end. I have never met with a child of God, whose experience did not go to conform the fidelity of God. "Ye are My witnesses," saith the Lord; and if He were to call me into the witness-box, and I may say that, if He were to call many of you, your witness would be very straightforward,—very plain,—very clear,—very definite. You would say, "He keeps His covenant for ever and ever." He is not forgetful of the pledge which He gave to David, and to David's Lord; therefore, go forward with unwavering confidence in Him; doubt not, nor be discouraged, but rejoice in Him, and trust Him evermore.

The last thing that this memory of God's wonderful works ought to do for us is to *make us praise Him.* This Psalm begins with, "Praise ye the Lord," and finishes up with "His praise endureth for ever." Well, beloved, the memory of His great goodness is intended to make us praise Him for ever and ever, so let us begin to do it at once. Do not go out of this place sorrowful; let your recollection of God's goodness move you to praise Him. If you have no present cause for joy, so far as you can see, think of the past mercies that you have received. If everything looks gloomy on ahead, recollect how the Lord has helped you in all the steps you have already trodden. Give Him a grateful song this very hour. Smooth those wrinkles from your brow. Let your eyelids no longer hang down with heaviness, but say in your soul, "The Lord hath dealt well with His servants, according to His Word; therefore will we praise Him with our whole heart in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation." I frequently exhort you to praise the Lord because I feel how needful it is, and because we shall soon be in heaven; and, therefore, it is well to be holding frequent rehearsals here of that which is to be our everlasting song.

Now I turn to the unconverted, and say,—Dear friends, from our own experience, we can tell you that, to serve God is a blessed thing. He is a grand Master; there is none like Him. He makes His servants blessed for ever. He never leaves them, nor forsakes them; therefore, come, and put your trust in Him. Hide yourself under the shadow of His wings; and, then, you too shall be able to say, even as we do, "He is faithful; His mercy endureth for ever." God bless you, for Christ's sake! Amen.